

FINAL REPORT TO
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH

TITLE: Detente and Confrontation:
American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to
Reagan

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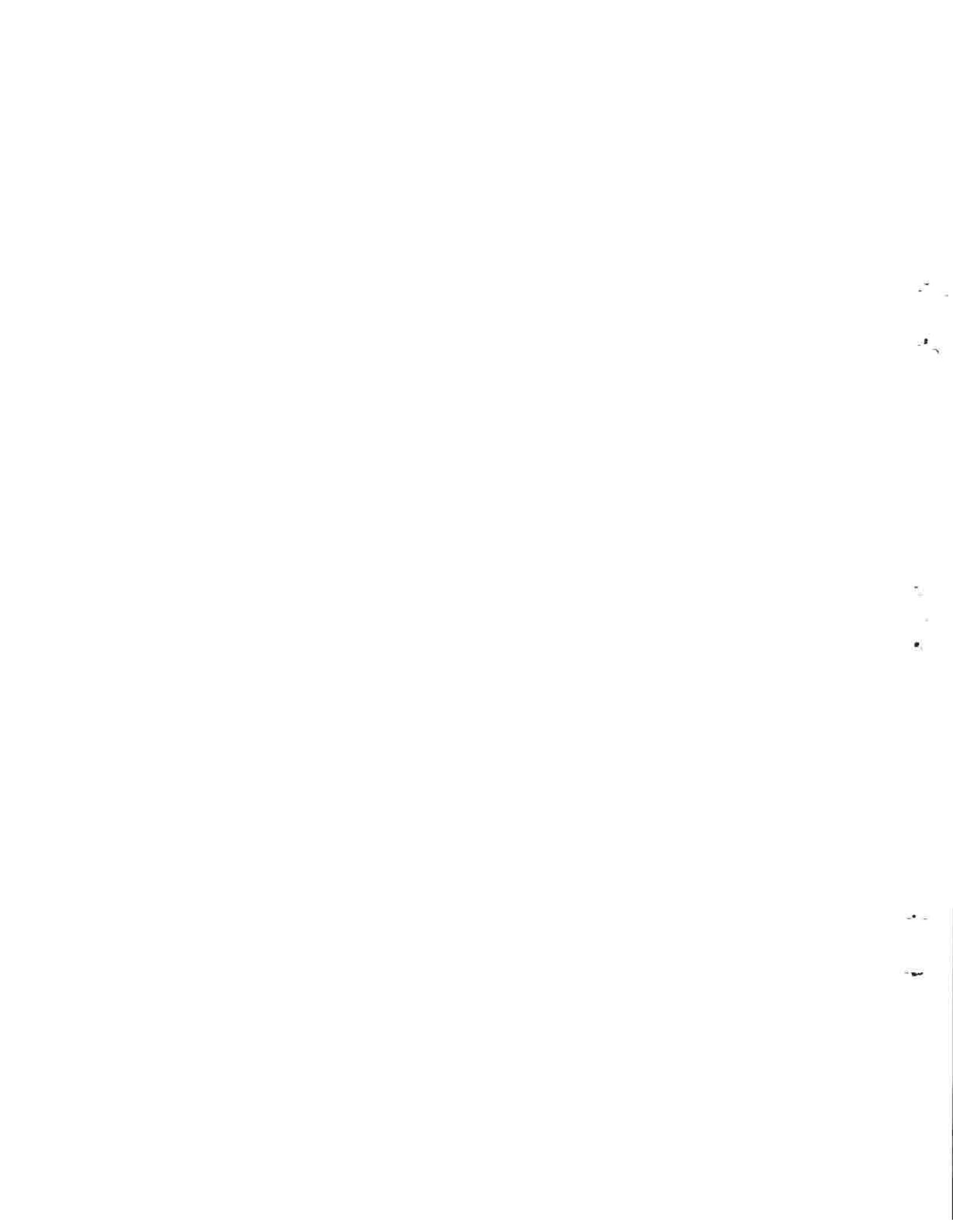
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COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 625-4

DATE: December 22, 1982

The work leading to this report was supported in whole or in part from funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research.



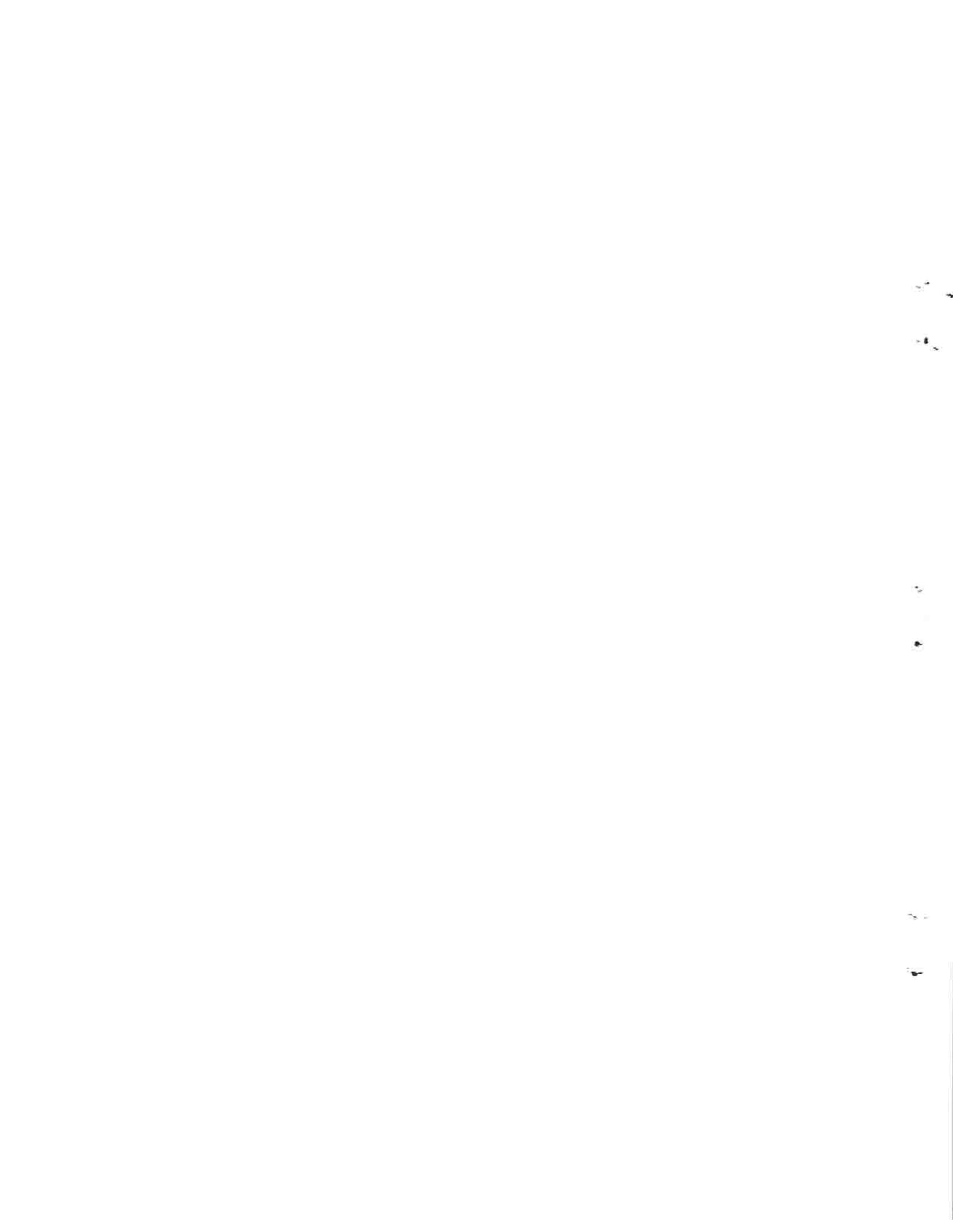
Detente and Confrontation:
American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan

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Note:

This Report presents some findings and conclusions relevant to American policy from an extensive study being prepared for publication by the Brookings Institution. The author and The Brookings Institution are grateful for the support provided by the National Council on Soviet and East European Research.



Executive Summary

The experience of a "detente" in American-Soviet relations in the 1970s ultimately failed for a number of reasons, including an underlying difference in conceptions of detente: The American leaders saw it (in Kissinger's words) as a way of "managing the emergence of Soviet power" into world politics in an age of nuclear parity; the Soviet leaders, for their part, envisaged it as a way of managing the transition of the United States from its former superiority into a more modest role in world politics in an age of nuclear parity. Thus each saw itself as "manager" of a policy transition for the other. Moreover, while the advent of "parity" meant a decrease in the global managing ability of the United States, this fact was not sufficiently appreciated in Washington. And while it meant a relatively more important role for the Soviet Union, it did not mean that the Soviet Union would now acquire the kind of power that the United States had wielded. Finally, both had diverging images of the world order, and although that fact was well enough understood, its implications were not. Thus, underlying the attempts by each of the two powers to "manage" the adjustment of the other to a changing "correlation of forces" in the world were even more basic parallel attempts by both to modify the fundamental world order--in different directions.

Notwithstanding these basic differences, a policy of relaxation of tensions was not fated to fail. American-Soviet relations have gone through recurrent phases of improvement and deterioration of relations, and probably will continue to do so. The detente of the 1970s was more ambitious, and oversold to the American public. But more important, it

was "oversold" to policy-makers as well, both in Washington and in Moscow, in the sense that there was insufficient understanding of the obligations of the parties and of what they were undertaking in agreeing jointly to endorse and pursue a policy of detente involving reciprocal restraint and consultation.

The much vaunted "code of conduct" was a prominent case in point; there was no real understanding over the restraint either side would exercise in pursuing its interests in the third world, for example, or even within the respective spheres of influence of the two powers. There was a disjunction between publicly articulated "basic principles" with their laudable but overly-pious promises, such as not pursuing advantage at the expense of the other side, and the reality of continuing keen geopolitical maneuver and rivalry. This led to serious disillusionment in the idea of detente itself, at least in the United States, as well as in the credibility of the other side, when each of the powers did pursue its own advantage at what was felt to be the expense of the other. This public disenchantment was more openly voiced in the United States owing to an open polity, and had a greater political impact here. But ultimately disillusionment affected the leaderships on both sides as well, and the detente commitment was not only devalued but used as the basis for additional hostile charges against the other side.

The reality of "detente" in the 1970s was much more realistic and hard-headed than it appeared, owing to the tendency on both sides to "dress up" areas of agreement in broad noble principles, which then brought a backlash when far-reaching ideal principles were not met in

practice. The reality had always been a mix of cooperation and competition, but in this country fears arose that the United States was providing more than its share of cooperation, while the Soviet Union was devoting its energies more to competition. As our study demonstrates, that is in fact a one-sided view; both powers energetically pursued their own interests at the expense of the other throughout the period of "detente". But even this reality of vigorous competition was less damaging than the dashing of expectations aroused by the idealistic image of detente and a "structure of peace".

It is obvious that real differences of interest and objective underlie the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is much less obvious, but nonetheless true, that these "objective" sources of conflict are greatly exacerbated and compounded by reciprocal failures to recognize the perspective and perceptions of the other side. Yet such differences in perspective exert a powerful influence.

Another cause of the failure of detente was the inability of the United States, in particular, to deliver on promises. The inability of the Nixon-Ford Administration to deliver the agreed and signed economic agreements of 1972, owing to Congressional imposition of additional highly offensive stipulations as to Soviet internal policy (on Jewish emigration), were of great importance in disillusioning Soviet leaders. So, too, were the incapacities of the Ford and Carter Administrations first to conclude an agreement based on the Vladivostok SALT accord of December 1974, and then to ratify the SALT II treaty signed in June 1979. In both cases, American internal political processes prevented

Administrations from making good on their own desires and commitments. Those commitments were, of course, all clearly predicated on necessary American constitutional processes of validation through legislation or consent to ratification, but although these procedures were known to the Soviet leaders, those leaders lacked adequate comprehension of the political limitations on American presidents.

This study does not find that "detente was tried and failed", or that "detente was not really tried", or that the Soviet Union (or the United States) intentionally duped the other side and used detente to its advantage. Rather, both powers sought to have their detente cake and eat their fill. While leaders of both powers did exercise some restraint, they did not spell out even to the respective counterpart leadership (and sometimes not even to themselves), to say nothing of domestic and world publics, what the agreed restraints would be.

Even the one area of competition in which specific constraints were agreed proved vitiating to detente. Throughout the preceding two decades of cold war and cold peace, the United States had maintained a clear strategic nuclear superiority. In the latter half of the 1970s, as the Soviet Union continued to build its strategic forces despite earlier agreed strategic arms limitations, new concerns arose in the United States. Unfortunately, the actual consolidation of parity in the latter 1970s was not in synchronization with the political acceptance and public impression of parity in the early 1970s. What the Soviets saw as finally closing a gap with weapons deployment programs fully consonant with both the terms of the SALT agreement and achievement of parity, many in the United States saw as Soviet gains

and pursuit of advantages violating at least the spirit of SALT if not its letter, and threatening to go beyond parity to Soviet superiority. What really was inconsistent was the relationship between the American public expectation derived from SALT and the Soviet deployments. If the Soviet strategic deployments had occurred more nearly at the time of American deployment, and both had agreed to accept parity and stop at the same time (not merely at the same level), the public perception would have been quite different. American military programs justified as meeting the Soviet buildup were, in turn, seen in the Soviet Union as designed to restore the United States to a position of superiority. Consequently, what was intended and should have been a reassuring development reinforcing detente--agreed constraints on strategic arms competition--became instead a cause of renewed suspicion and tension.

The common tendency to blame the failure of detente on actions the other side--for which, on each side, much evidence can be advanced--is based on insufficient awareness of the record, buttressed by powerful psychological propensities to want to see blame on the other side. This negative legacy of detente is in fact a new obstacle to better understanding of the real difficulties, and real possibilities, for future clarification of differences and improvement of relations. But a careful study of the experience of recent years helps to provide a more realistic basis for constraining our continuing political competition and restoring some elements of cooperation.

Introduction

The United States and the Soviet Union are virtually foreordained to a continuing rivalry--but also, short of mutual destruction, to continuing coexistence. In addition to a number of conflicting interests and objectives, the two powers ineluctably share some other interests and aims--of which survival is paramount. Through the harshest tensions and crises of the Cold War, and through the occasional periods of some relaxation of tension, these parameters of competition and coexistence have remained, and they will continue for the foreseeable future.

The study on which this Report is based seeks to investigate the experience of the period from 1969 through 1982 (a time-frame chosen for reasons soon to be noted), a period marked first by a relaxation of tensions or "detente", which prevailed during most of the 1970s, and then by a renewal of tensions and confrontations with which that decade ended and the present one has begun. Our principal purpose in undertaking the full study, and in this Report, is to learn from that experience as we look to the future.

"Detente" is the term which has come to characterize American-Soviet relations in the period from 1972 through 1979 (although increasingly weakened, especially after 1975). Today, most Americans probably see detente as a failed or even a discredited policy. Yet confrontation, while it may under some circumstances be accepted as a necessity, is not widely favored as an alternative. One purpose of this study has been to see whether the experience of the rise and fall

of "the decade of detente" in American-Soviet relations in the 1970s was a test of the viability of a policy of detente, or simply a unique turn of the wheel of history. Peace, like war, comes in many different forms and qualities.

Our interest is not, however, in some abstraction called "detente". Our focus is on American-Soviet relations, zeroing in on the fourteen years beginning with the onset of the presidency of Richard Nixon and his call for replacement of a period of confrontation by "an era of negotiation" in pursuit of "a structure of peace", to the midterm of Ronald Reagan's repudiation of detente and avowal again of a strategy of "direct confrontation". On the Soviet side, it happens to span the period of Leonid Brezhnev's leadership. (While Brezhnev had succeeded Khrushchev as Party chief in 1964, it was not until the period 1969-1972, coincident with the development of a policy of detente, that Brezhnev consolidated a dominant position in the Soviet leadership.)

Indeed, the mix of cooperative and competitive aspects of American-Soviet relations even makes it difficult to define precisely the period of "detente". While an era of negotiation was called for by President Nixon in January 1969, a series of confrontations occurred in the ensuing three and a half years during which progress was but slowly made toward what suddenly emerged in mid-1972 at the first Nixon-Brezhnev summit as "detente". During the next few years, a relaxation of tensions ensued, and a flood of cooperative ventures were inaugurated culminating symbolically in a joint space rendezvous in 1975, with a great deal of rhetoric about peaceful coexistence and

partnership in building a structure of peace.

Cooperation developed, particularly from 1972 to 1975, but it never supplanted continuing competition nor offered sufficient guarantee against renewed confrontation. The decline of detente, from the American perspective, for some dated from the October War of 1973, for more from the Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola late in 1975, and from growing American concerns over the strategic balance from 1976 on. From the Soviet perspective, the American Administration had conducted a vigorous policy of containing and curtailing Soviet influence, especially in the Middle East, from the very start of detente. Moreover, the anticipated economic benefits promised and even granted by the Administration had been conditioned by the Congress on unacceptable and publicly humiliating demands concerning Soviet internal affairs--specifically, escalating demands on Jewish emigration. Finally, the Soviet leaders from their vantage point perceived a growing American attempt to regain strategic superiority in the period from 1977 on.

Was "detente" a potential solution to the risks and costs of confrontation, a solution undercut by Soviet--or American--actions (or by actions of both)? Or did it in fact exacerbate the problem by providing only a disarming illusion of an alternative? Was it a Soviet snare to lull American sensitivity to growing Soviet military power and political-military expansion? Did detente fail, or was "detente" ever really tested? Did the United States and the Soviet Union ever have a common understanding of detente--or were differing conceptions incompatible from the start?

Many Americans may believe the answers to such questions to be so clear that they need not even be raised. In fact, on the contrary, the questions (to say nothing at this point of the answers) are far more complex than usually imagined.

A careful and close study of American-Soviet relations from 1969 through 1982, in the contexts of global events and internal American and Soviet politics, is needed to provide a basis for addressing and answering such questions. Inquiry into the underlying nature of the American-Soviet relationship in this period requires complex and detailed analysis. It is, first of all, an interaction, and has dynamics of its own. It also involves not only the aims and purposes of the two powers, but also the policies and actions they each employ to serve those purposes. It necessarily involves the perceptions each has of the world, of its own role, and of the role (and aims and capabilities) of the other. Definitions of national interest (and, if one wishes to identify ideology separately, conceptions of ideology) have long been recognized as subjective political judgments rather than objective "givens" of national decision-makers. Domestic political interests and factional political maneuver, the cybernetic and institutional roles of constituencies and interest groups, and the political needs of policy-makers, all may be as important as ideological, geopolitical, world-order, economic, or other foreign policy interests and objectives of those decision-makers in shaping actual policy and action in world politics.

In this study, the author has sought to delve into Soviet, as well as American, interests, objectives, perceptions, politics and actions, as well as interactions between the two sides.

Complex as is the making (or the historical reconstruction) of any one nation's foreign policy toward its principal rival, doubled by inquiry into both sides of the equation, there is more. Even such "superpowers" as the United States and the Soviet Union cannot frame and carry out their policies toward one another without being heavily influenced by other developments in the world. Such developments provide independent distractions or attractions, threats or opportunities, as well as new arenas (whether sought or not) for engaging or competing with the principal adversary. Some such considerations are thus part of the calculus of effects in policy vis-a-vis the rival superpower. But many world developments which powerfully affect the situation are partly or totally beyond control and even predictability on the part of the two powers.

In the present instance, for example, relations of both the Soviet Union and the United States with China importantly affected the world scene and their own bilateral relations. So, too, did developments in Europe, parts of which are intimately associated with each superpower, but which is comprised of a number of more or less independent actors on the world scene. In particular, the fact that a "detente" in East-West relations centered in Europe began before the American-Soviet detente, and has lasted on after it, has had an important influence. Finally, many different kinds of actions with Allies and lesser adversaries around the world, and the varying involvement of the

superpowers in third world conflicts, played a role in stimulating, and a more significant part in later undermining, the American-Soviet detente of the 1970s.

Generalizations of this order, or even once or twice more detailed into specificity, do not suffice. One can, of course, note that such events as, say, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan undercut (or, some would say, "violated" or "exposed") detente, but whether that is so, and whether it should have been so, are examples of questions which require much deeper analysis of what the two sides thought that detente meant, and of the context of the decisions of both sides relative to the Afghanistan situation.

Particularly in addressing the question of the perceptions and purposes of the leaders of the two powers it is essential to recreate the contexts of decision and influences on decisions, and this requires very detailed reconstruction of events and analysis. There is, of course, also the problem of access to information--both to reconstruct accurately the facts and factors known at the time, and to learn retrospectively what actually occurred and why. Hazards of study of the very recent past are evident. One disadvantage in seeking to deal with contemporary history is that people think they know and understand events through which they have lived, although contemporary information and understanding is often deficient and remembrance is both selective and influenced by later perceptions. Experienced recent history is therefore often deceptively and imperfectly understood. As we face the challenge of the 1980s, a better understanding of what actually occurred in the 1970s, as well as of why it happened and what it means,

are highly important. While it would obviously be premature to expect a definitive history at this early remove, there is a very great deal of information available for analysis.*

Readers of this Report should bear in mind that the conclusions presented here are based on an extensive study. For the presentation and analysis of the detailed data supporting the conclusions, the reader must await the publication of the full study.

* Perhaps at this point the author should note that throughout most of the period under study, until the end of 1979, he was concluding thirty years official service in the field of Soviet and American-Soviet relations. This experience provided both first-hand exposure and participation in many of the areas covered, and has facilitated access to others through interviews with other active or former officials and declassification of some official documents, in addition to the spate of memoirs by such active participants as former Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and a number of less centrally placed participants and observers. In addition, he has made extensive use of Soviet published materials and interviewed some Soviet officials.

Causes of the Failure of the American-Soviet Detente of the 1970s

The detente of the 1970s did not succeed, in the view of most Americans, because of Soviet actions which contravened what we understood detente to mean--either the Soviet leaders abused detente, or if they did act in accordance with it, detente itself was flawed. Both the Soviet Union and "detente" itself were thus seen as sharing the blame for a mounting series of disquieting developments.

In the Soviet view, the joint detente effort of the 1970s (the drive for which they attribute to themselves) has been willfully abandoned by the United States. The leaders of the United States since the late 1970s are seen as having preferred to seek advantages from a policy of confrontation, as having launched a renewed American quest for military superiority, and as unwilling to accept strategic and political parity. In the avowed Soviet view, however, "detente" remains an objective, continues to be Soviet policy, and can be a common policy again, if and when the United States will "return" to such a policy.

This difference in perspective--like so many differences in American and Soviet perspective and perception--even makes it difficult to conduct parallel American and Soviet assessments of the common detente effort of the 1970s in order to diagnose the causes of its failure. Indeed, such assessments are scarcely deemed necessary in either Washington or Moscow. On each side, the actions of the other are virtually taken for granted as having been responsible for the breakdown of detente. Finally, the present climate of mutual hostility

and suspicion does not encourage detached and dispassionate consideration.

There is a misleading, even dangerous, tendency both by advocates and opponents of efforts to improve relations to consider "detente" an entity in its own right, and to assume there is a single policy of "detente". This leads to judgments that "Detente was tried and failed", or that "Detente was betrayed", or alternatively that "Detente was never really tried". Such oversimplified approaches only mislead. What we are dealing with is the concrete historical experience of a common American-Soviet effort from 1969 through 1975, and more tenuously through 1979, to increase the range of cooperation and negotiation of differences, while regulating competition and reducing instances and intensities of confrontation.

American fears have been that the United States was providing more than its share of cooperation, while the Soviet Union was more vigorously devoting itself to prosecuting competition. This is, as our study has shown, a one-sided view. So, on the other hand, is the Soviet belief that American leaders have consciously chosen to abandon detente for confrontation, and that American disenchantment with detente was unmoved by Soviet actions.

In this discussion we shall seek from a detached perspective to identify the main causes of the failure of the cooperative effort in the particular American-Soviet "detente" experience of the 1970s.

Differences in Basic Conceptions

Foremost among the causes of the ultimate failure of the American-Soviet detente of the 1970s was a fatal difference in conception of the basic role of this detente: the American leaders saw it (in Kissinger's words) as a way of "managing the emergence of Soviet power" into world politics in an age of nuclear parity; the Soviet leaders, for their part, envisaged it as a way of managing the transition of the United States from its former superiority into a more modest role in world politics in an age of nuclear parity. Thus each saw itself as "manager" of a policy transition for the other. Moreover, while the advent of "parity" ineluctably meant a decrease in the global managing ability of the United States, this fact was not sufficiently appreciated in Washington. And while it meant a relatively more important role for the Soviet Union, it did not mean that the Soviet Union would now acquire the kind of power that the United States had wielded. Finally, both had diverging images of the world order, and although that fact was well enough understood, its implications were not. Thus, underlying the attempts by each of the two powers to "manage" the adjustment of the other to a changing "correlation of forces" in the world were even more basic parallel attempts by both to modify the fundamental world order--in different directions.

The Soviet leaders, conditioned by their Marxist-Leninist ideology, believe in a certain historical movement which will ultimately lead to the replacement of capitalism (imperialism) in the world by socialism (communism). But this transition must now occur in a world made incalculably more dangerous by massive nuclear weapons

arsenals. "Peaceful coexistence" and detente is seen as offering a path to neutralize this danger by ruling out war between states, permitting historical change to occur, as they believe it must, through fundamental indigenous social-economic-political processes. While Marxist-Leninists do not shun use of military force (or any other instrument of power) if it is expedient, they do not see military power as the fundamental motive power of history. On the contrary, they see it as a possible ultimate recourse of a doomed capitalist class ruling the imperialist citadels of the West. There is, therefore, no ideological barrier or reservation to pursuing a detente policy aimed at preventing nuclear war. On the contrary. Detente represents a policy aimed at providing stability for a world order of progressive historical change.

American leaders and the American people, not holding a deterministic ideology, have been much less sure of themselves and of the trend of history. Certainly insofar as there is an ideology for the global order it is one of pluralism, not assuming the whole world will choose an American-style democratic political and free-enterprise economic system. The world order is seen as one which should provide stability and at least protect that democratic option for peoples. Occasionally there have been crusades to extirpate communism in the world; a fringe represented by Norman Podhoretz today criticizes even the Reagan Administration for failing wholeheartedly to rally a new assault on communism and against the Soviet Union. But the dominant American aim has been to contain and to deter Soviet or Soviet-controlled communist expansion at the expense of a pluralistic, and in

that sense "free", world order. What has varied and periodically been at issue is the relative weight to be placed on the one hand on containment by building positions of counterposing power, and on the other on seeking common ground for cooperative efforts to reduce tension and accommodate differing interests of the two sides. There have been differing judgments, in both countries, as to whether objective circumstances permit the latter approach or require the former, and therefore as to the desirability of detente or confrontation.

When Nixon and Kissinger developed a strategy of detente to replace a strategy of confrontation, the underlying expectation was that as the Soviet Union became more and more extensively engaged in an organic network of relations with the existing world order, it would in fact gradually become reconciled to that order. Ideological expectations of global revolutionary change would become attenuated and merely theological rather than actively political. Avoidance of the risks of nuclear war was essential; hence acceptance of peaceful coexistence and efforts in strategic arms limitations and other negotiations to reduce the risks of such a war.

Common American and Soviet recognition of the need to avert war was extremely significant, but there remained radically different visions of the course world history would assume, and therefore of the pattern of world politics, and this divergence of world-view naturally has affected the policies of the two powers. This difference was, of course, in a general way well known; its implications for our respective actions, and therefore for our mutual relations and for

detente, was not however sufficiently understood. And this led to unrealistic expectations which were not met, and which undermined confidence in detente.

The pursuit of absolute security, by any state, is not only unattainable but (whether recognized or not) is premised on an unacceptable transaction: absolute security for one state can only mean absolute insecurity for others. The fact that absolute security is not attainable in the world as it exists today (geopolitically and in the nuclear age) is not sufficiently reassuring to those who fear that their adversaries seek it. While no doubt sincerely denying pursuit of such an absolute aim, both the United States and the Soviet Union do pursue their own military security in ways that give rise to real concerns on the part of the other. Whether advocating military superiority or not, the natural dynamic of military planning resolves the unavoidable uncertainties in measuring the military balance and the outcomes of hypothetical military conflicts conservatively, thus positing advantages to the other side--which one then seeks by his own unilateral efforts to overcome. Equally important, each is led to see the other side as seeking superiority, domination, and absolute security.

American perceptions of a Soviet drive for world domination are rooted in our image of the Soviet ideological expectations for the future. We see a relentless, inexorable Soviet drive for world communism under the leadership and control of Moscow, and military means as the most--some would say only--successful Soviet instrumentality, and therefore the key. The Soviet leaders, in turn,

see a re-born American pursuit since the late 1970s of military superiority as a basis for a policy of intimidation (in American terms, an aggressive use of "escalation dominance") aimed at world domination in a Pax Americana. In the Soviet case, rather than interpreting an underlying American ideological expectation for the future, they see a nostalgia for the past, atavistically for a time when imperialism ruled the world, and more proximately for a time when the United States had nuclear superiority and, in the Soviet view, did carry out a policy of intimidation (e.g., compelling the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from the territory of their ally, Cuba).

We have not even begun to analyze critically the underlying postulates either of our own, or of Soviet, conceptions--and indeed could not do so before they were more clearly articulated. For example, let us consider the Soviet proposition that "the class struggle" and "national liberation struggle" is not and can not be affected by detente. With the exception of a minuscule minority which accepts the Soviet line uncritically, virtually any American reacts to that proposition by regarding it as communist mumbo-jumbo being used as a transparently self-serving Soviet argument to excuse pursuit of their interests. In fact, a Soviet leader considers that proposition to be a self-evident truth: detente is a policy, while the class struggle is an objective phenomenon in the historical process and could not be "abolished" by policy decision even if the Soviet leaders wanted to (which, of course, they are not only determined, but predetermined, not to do). There is a self-serving dimension to the Soviet proposition, but it is not a cynical artifice—it is in fact sincerely believed. On

a logical plane, to whatever extent the Soviet premise is true, it is crystal clear that any inevitable historical process cannot be stopped by some agreement between the two states. But we do not have to assume a prior meeting of the minds of leaders of the two powers on ideological conceptions as a prerequisite to agreements based on calculated mutual advantage. While ideological conditioning and belief does affect policy, it does not determine it. Questions as to the historical process can be left to history. The critical questions are not whether there is a global class struggle or national liberation struggle, as defined by Marxism-Leninism, but what the Soviet leadership is going to do about it because of a belief in such a process. While the Soviet leadership accepts a moral commitment to aid the world revolutionary process, it also is ideologically obliged to do so only in ways that do not weaken or risk the attainments of socialism in the USSR. Moreover, the ideology also holds that the world revolutionary processes are indigenous. Revolution cannot be exported. Neither can counterrevolution. But both can be aided by external forces. Here the Soviet prescription naturally stresses the ultimate failure but proximate dangers of imperialist "export" of counterrevolution (for an excellent example, American support to the authorities in El Salvador, and "destabilizing" covert action against Nicaragua). The Soviet Union also expresses support for genuine revolutions and national liberation movements—but is careful and selective in providing one or another degree of material support, as ideologically-sanctioned prudence requires.

The United States should approach the Soviet leaders on the questions of what is proper and consistent with inter-state detente in a code of conduct governing Soviet--and American--behavior in the Third World with an understanding of the Soviet perspective. Of course we retain our own view of the historical process, as well as of our national interests. But while differences of concrete interests will remain to be reconciled, we only add to the problem rather than contributing to a solution by failing to take account of the Soviet approach.

Failures to Use Collaborative Measures

The second cause of the collapse of detente was the ultimate failure to turn toward a greater use of collaborative measures to meet the requirements of security, rather than reliance on unilateral military programs. National military power is bound to remain a foundation of national security in the foreseeable future. But it need not be the first, or usual, or sole, recourse. The American-Soviet detente involved efforts to prevent and to manage crises, and to regulate the military balance through arms control and arms limitation. In the final analysis, however, these efforts--while useful and potentially significant--were almost entirely dependent on the political relationship, and in large measure withered with it.

The effort to achieve strategic arms limitations (SALT) marked the first, and the most daring, attempt to move to a collaborative approach in meeting military security requirements. It involved an unprecedented joint consideration of ways to control the most vital (or

fatal) element of national power--the arsenals of strategic nuclear weaponry. Early successes held great promise--but also showed the limits of readiness to take this path. SALT generated problems of its own, and provided a focal point for objection by those who did not wish to see either regulated military parity or political detente. The final lesson of the failure of SALT II to be ratified was that arms control cannot stand alone nor bear the burden of sustaining a political detente which does not support itself. Even the early successes of SALT I, contributing to an upsurge of detente, and well worthwhile on their own merits, could not escape becoming a bone of contention as detente came under fire.

The widely held American view that SALT tried to do too much is, in this observer's view, a misjudgment: the real flaw was the failure of SALT to do enough. Despite remarkable initial successes in agreement on parity as an objective and on stability of the strategic arms relationship as a necessary condition, and notwithstanding success in controlling the strategic defensive competition in anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems, there was insufficient political will (and perhaps political authority) to "bite the bullet" on banning or sharply limiting multiple independently guided reentry vehicles (MIRV)--the key to controlling the strategic offensive arms race. Both sides share the blame for this failure, but especially the United States, because it led the new round of the arms competition when it could safely have held back (in view of the ABM arms control) long enough to make a real effort to ban MIRVs. The failure to control MIRV was ultimately the key to the essential failure in the 1970s to stabilize the military

dimension of parity, and it contributed to the overall failure of detente.

Too little attention has been paid to the efforts in the 1970s to devise a regime of crisis management and crisis avoidance. Paradoxically, the relatively more successful steps in this direction have been little recalled precisely because they do not seize the attention as do political frictions. The agreements of 1971 on averting war by accident or miscalculation and on upgrading the "hot line", the agreement of 1972 on avoiding incidents at sea between our navies, and the 1973 agreement on prevention of nuclear war have played a positive role. (In addition, there were multilateral "confidence building measures" in the European security framework.) The one instance sometimes charged as a failure of such efforts was in fact, if anything, a success in this respect: the defusing of the "crisis" between the two superpowers in October 1973 at the climax of the fourth Arab-Israeli war.

Failure to Define a "Code of Conduct"

A third cause of the failure of the American-Soviet detente in the 1970s was the inability to transform a recognition of superpower parity into a commonly accepted political standard to govern competitive relationships of the two superpowers with other countries. The divergent conceptions of detente and of the world order lay at the foundation of this failure, but these were compounded by other factors. One was the unreadiness of the United States, in conceding nominal strategic parity, also to concede political parity. Another was a

reciprocated hubris of application by each side of a one-sided double standard in perceiving, and judging, the behavior of the other. The "basic principles" of mutual relations and "code of conduct" were never thrashed out with the necessary frank discussion of differing views, and this gave rise to a facade of agreement which not only affected public, but to some extent even leadership, expectations. Expectations based on wishful thinking about the effects of the historical process, or on overconfidence in one's "managerial" abilities to discipline the behavior of the other side, were doomed to failure. Paradoxically these inflated expectations--on both sides--coexisted with underlying excessive projected fears and imputation of aggressive hostility, which indeed then resurfaced as those expectations were not met. That this process affected relevant political constituencies (a much wider body politic in the United States) only compounded a situation affecting the leaders as well.

The United States applied a double standard to Soviet behavior in occupying Afghanistan (and earlier to a series of Soviet moves in the Third World), and President Carter's pained confession of having learned more about Soviet intentions from that action than from anything else only illustrated the fact. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was not justified by the standards of a world order endorsed by the community of nations and in principle by the Soviet Union as well as by the United States. But this fact does not alter (though it has effectively obscured) the fact that the United States, as well as the Soviet Union, in practice applies different standards to the behavior of itself and of the rival superpower (and others). There

also was an important failure in the case of Afghanistan (as well as in many other cases, both by the United States and by the Soviet Union) to recognize--whether accepting them or not--the perceptions, and motivations, and security interests, of the other side.

The dominant American perception of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was that it was an aggressive, expansionist move, unprovoked unless perhaps by a temptation arising from declining American military power, unaffected by detente unless detente was being used by the Soviets as "cover" for such moves, and dangerous to American interests because it represented a steppingstone for Soviet advance toward vital Western interests in assured access to oil from the Persian Gulf.

There is no need to dwell on the official public Soviet justification for their move: to assist the Afghan people and government in resisting indirect armed interference by external powers via Pakistan; at the invitation of the Afghan Government, with which the Soviet Union had a treaty of friendship and assistance; and to counter the machinations of the traitorous President Amin, who was a CIA agent. Hardly a credible or even a consistent story. Yet, study of the subject leads to the conclusion that the actual Soviet perception of the situation was this: (1) Amin was personally ambitious and not reliable or responsive (from the Soviet standpoint), a potential Tito or Sadat, in fact already actively seeking contact with other powers; he had lived for some time in the United States and had American contacts; Amin was, moreover, known to be highly

suspicious of Moscow since the failure of an attempt to remove him from power (in September 1979, which backfired and led to Taraki's demise); (2) Amin was pursuing too radical a course of reforms and measures antagonizing and alienating the people of the country, disregarding Soviet advice against this course, and was objectively weakening communist authority; (3) there was external encouragement and support to the growing tribal resistance, operating from a sanctuary in Pakistan, and even more importantly, the United States and China (increasingly operating in anti-Soviet collusion) had to be expected to seek to fill any political vacuum that developed; Afghanistan risked becoming another link in a grand U.S.-NATO-Japan-China encirclement of the Soviet Union; (4) a fragmented nationalistic, religious regime in Afghanistan (as well as in Iran) would place a hostile and chaotic belt across the border from the Moslem southern areas of the Soviet Union; (5) decades of Soviet economic and political investment, and since the April 1978 Marxist coup and the November 1978 Afghan Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union an ideological-political stake as well, would be lost unless the Soviets acceded to the repeated appeals of the Afghan leaders for Soviet military forces to bolster their position; (6) with such support, and a change of command easing out Amin, a more reliable socialist regime could restore order; (7) without Soviet intervention, there would be no escape from a humiliating Soviet withdrawal and defeat; and (8) finally, Soviet vital interests were at stake in this adjoining Communist state, and the vital interests of the United States were not. The West had, moreover, accepted the accession of communist rule in Afghanistan in 1978, and the subsequent

incorporation of Afghanistan into the Soviet security system, with scarcely a murmur. Soviet military forces were already present in the country; criticism in the Western and Third Worlds of a larger Soviet military presence would be ephemeral. Nonetheless, the Soviet decision to escalate their direct intervention was most reluctant--it was not seen as seizing an "opportunity", but as a last resort to prevent a serious loss and potential threat.

It should be readily apparent that, to the extent that this represented the actual Soviet perception, the Soviet leaders would see an attribution to them of purposes stressed in the prevailing American perception not merely as incorrect, but as not representing a real assessment by the American leadership, and indeed as a hostile act. When the official American response then included a dismantling of virtually the entire set of American-Soviet relations developed over a decade of detente, the Soviet leaders were prone not merely to contend but also to believe that such a reaction must have represented the preferred American policy, and that the American Administration had used Afghanistan as a pretext for doing what it desired in mobilizing American (and to some extent world) opinion in support of an intensified arms race and an anti-Soviet political line of confrontation. This fitted the Soviet evaluation of the trend in American policy. It also conveniently excused the Soviet action in Afghanistan from any fault in the collapse of detente.

In the Soviet perception, it was the United States which was acting in a manner inconsistent with the implicit "code of conduct" of detente: the United States was not respecting vital Soviet interests

in its security sphere, as the Soviets had done with respect to Chile and Portugal, where their criticism of American actions had not been permitted to interfere with state relations. On the contrary, the United States was directly challenging them and unnecessarily converting the affair into a broad global political challenge, while discarding the achievements of detente.

In the Soviet perception, moreover, the United States was ignoring Soviet "parity" as a superpower, and applying a double standard. The United States, after all, had for example introduced its own military forces, and changed the local government leadership, in the Dominican Republic--a country on the American periphery and in the American political, economic, and security sphere. (How is the Monroe Doctrine essentially different from the Brezhnev Doctrine?) Yet, while voicing criticism, the Soviet Union had not made that or other comparable American actions, including intervention in Vietnam, a touchstone of Soviet-American relations. Indeed, in May 1972, even the American escalation to bombing of Hanoi and mining of Haiphong on the eve of the event had not been permitted to derail the first Brezhnev-Nixon Summit and the signing of SALT I.* Now the U.S. was putting the signed SALT II treaty on the shelf and cutting economic, consular, and even cultural and sports relations, and mounting a strident propaganda campaign and

* The American decision also reflected a decision by the Nixon Administration to give priority to prosecuting the war in Vietnam over detente with the Soviet Union, if necessary, a decision consciously taken by President Nixon, who anticipated that the Soviet leaders would probably cancel the summit.

pressing its Allies and others to join in a wide range of anti-Soviet actions.

Indeed, not only was the United States applying a double standard as between judging its own actions and reactions and those of the Soviet Union, but even as compared to China! After all, only months before, the United States had, while nominally expressing disapproval, done nothing in retaliation in a parallel case when the other large Communist power had intervened directly with its armed forces in invading a neighboring smaller Communist country. The United States even proceeded with a planned visit to China by its Secretary of the Treasury, who signed an agreement for broadened bilateral economic relations providing Most-Favored Nation status to China, while Chinese troops remained engaged in Vietnam.

The Soviet perception in this case is little understood in the United States. The Soviet failure to recognize the American perception in this whole episode, and more generally, has been reciprocal.

This example also illustrates Soviet difficulties in recognizing that Western actions are in fact often reactions to things they have done, rather than being part of a hostile design which would have led to those same actions regardless of what they had done. It also illustrates the Western difficulty in recognizing Soviet perceptions of a Western threat (that we ourselves do not see) as motivation for some Soviet actions, and further in recognizing that Soviet perceptions often do not take due account of the reactive motive for Western countermeasures.

The consistent failure of each side to sense and to recognize the usually differing perspectives and perceptions of the other has exercised a powerful negative effect on the development of their relations, compounding real differences of interests and objectives of the two powers. The dangers of failure to recognize the effects of one's own misperceptions are too little appreciated. So, too, are the dangers of failure to perceive the implications of differing perceptions and misperceptions by the other side. Frequently during the 1970s (and since) the unconscious assumption that the other side was "bound" to see something in a certain way has led to serious errors or distortions of assessment of the intentions and motivations of the other side. Rather than recognize a differing perception, whether judging it a valid alternative perspective or (rightly or wrongly) a misperception, both sides typically ascribe a different and usually malevolent purpose to the other. This has, for example, characterized the assessments by each of the military programs of the other, as well as many political moves. To be sure, we sometimes apply our respective stereotypes of "communist" (or "imperialist") modes of calculation to the other side, but in an easy superficial way that stresses the expansionist or aggressive image of the adversary, and that often does no more than provide a self-satisfying illusion that one has taken account of the perceptual factor.

In the United States, many see a cumulative series of Soviet interventions, often with proxies using military means--Angola, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, Afghanistan--which they believe form a pattern of Soviet expansion and aggrandizement inconsistent with the agreed "Basic

Principles" and detente. Now, the present Administration adds Nicaragua and El Salvador. Moreover, these "expansionist" moves are believed by many to have been tempted by detente, even falling into a trap of detente some would say, or at least were induced by American weakness of will and of military power. Hence the need to rebuild that power and reassert that will, and hence heightened suspicions of detente as well.

In fact, the history of diplomatic, political and interventionist activity during the last decade is much more extensive and complex, and much less one-sided. Certainly from the Soviet perspective not only has their role been more limited and more justified than we would concede, but the American role has been more active and less benign.

First of all, in Soviet eyes, the American policy toward China has moved during the decade of the 1970s from "triangular diplomacy" to active alignment on an anti-Soviet platform. We now offer military assistance to China, and have established intelligence collection facilities in that country directed at the Soviet Union. We coordinate hostile activities, for example in Afghanistan. "Objectively", at least, we have encouraged China to invade Vietnam and to arm the Cambodian forces of Pol Pot.

In the Middle East, we arranged the "defection" of Sadat's Egypt-- and of the Sudan, Somalia, and to some degree Iraq. We effectively squeezed the Soviet Union out of a role in the Near Eastern peace process, despite repeated assurances that we would not do so. We "used" the Iranian hostage crisis to mobilize a major new military presence in Southwest Asia, which we subsequently maintained. In

Africa, American Allies and proxies repeatedly intervene blatantly with military force--Portugal before 1974; France in numerous cases; France, Belgium, Morocco and Egypt in Zaire; with Zaire, South Africa and others in Angola in 1975-76, albeit unsuccessfully; etc. In covert operations we assisted in the overthrow of the elected Marxist Allende in Chile, and with European assistance of the Marxist-supported Gonçaves in Portugal. We were silent while Indonesia suppressed the revolt of former Portuguese Timor. We used a number of Southeast Asian mountain peoples as "proxies" in that region. In South Vietnam, we used South Korean and Thai "proxy" troops, and Australian, Philippine and other support contingents, along with the American armed forces. We encouraged anti-Soviet activity in Poland and Afghanistan, in the latter case with covert military assistance to the rebels and with Pakistani assistance and Egyptian supply of arms paid for by Saudi Arabia. The United States has provided military assistance to El Salvador, and orchestrated covert operations against Sandinista Nicaragua, ostentatiously permitting Nicaraguan exiles to train in military and paramilitary operations in California, Texas and Florida, as well as to mount active operations from Honduras.

Of course, the deterioration of relations during the latter half of the decade not only reflected some of these developments but also contributed to them. For the most part, these actions stemmed not from Soviet or American initiatives, but as responses to developments originating in local events. But there have also been conscious policies of assertive competition by both powers throughout the period of nominal detente.

Let us recall, for example, American policy initiatives in the immediate aftermath of the first summit meeting in Moscow in 1972, the summit that launched detente. President Nixon flew directly from the Soviet Union to Iran. One purpose of this visit was to establish the Shah, in effect, as American proconsul in the region, in keeping with the Nixon Doctrine. He was promised virtually any American arms he wanted. A contributory reason for this American deputation of the Shah, which was not apparent, was to follow through on some conversations with the Chinese and to signal to them American intention to build regional positions of strength around the Soviet Union, detente notwithstanding. In addition, while in Tehran, the President accepted the Shah's proposal covertly to arm the Iraqi Kurds. (Iraq had just signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union.) Thus the Kurds became "proxies" of the United States and Iran (and of Israel, which joined in providing support in order to tie the Iraqi army down). There also was a later chapter to this American initiative; the Shah persuaded and induced Premier Daoud of Afghanistan in 1977-78 to move away from his previous close alignment with the Soviet Union, to improve relations with Pakistan, and to crack down on Afghan leftists. It was Daoud's arrest of Taraki, Karmal, Amin and others in April 1978--not some plot concocted in Moscow--which led the Khalq military faction to mount a coup and depose him, turning over the government to the People's Democratic Party, setting in train the developments within Afghanistan culminating in the Soviet intervention nearly two years later.

From Iran, President Nixon flew to Poland to be greeted by a stirring public acclaim, demonstratively showing not only that the United States would support more or less non-aligned communist regimes (Nixon had visited Romania in 1969 and Yugoslavia in 1970, as well as China in 1972), but also that no part of the Soviet alliance was "out of bounds" to American interest under detente.

Directly stemming from the American handling of the Middle East question at the detente summit, Sadat--who was already secretly in touch with the United States--six weeks later expelled the 15,000 Soviet military advisers (and Soviet reconnaissance aircraft) from Egypt.

From the Soviet perspective one should also note that only a few months later, in September 1972, China and Japan--with American encouragement--renewed diplomatic relations. And in December new armed clashes occurred on the Sino-Soviet border.

Also, upon the President's return to Washington from the summit he urged not only ratification of the SALT I agreements but also an increase in strategic arms. Defense Secretary Laird even conditioned his support for SALT on congressional approval of new military programs, which he justified as necessary so as to be able to negotiate "from a position of strength", wittingly or not invoking a key "cold war" symbol.

It is not the purpose of this brief recapitulation of some examples of vigorous American competitive activity to argue either that the Soviet perception of American responsibility for the decline and fall of detente efforts is justified, or that the United States was

wrong in principle to compete with the Soviet Union (particular actions may have been wise or unwise on their merits, and good or bad in their consequences--as with particular Soviet actions). But we Americans need to recognize that not only the Soviet Union but also the United States was "waging" detente in the 1970s--and that we would not be justified in concluding that the Soviet Union was violating some agreed and clear impartial standard to which the United States in practice adheres. (If writing for a Soviet readership, the same point with respect to applying a double standard would need to be forcefully made.)

Both sides have in fact sought advantages. Surely Nixon (and Kissinger) and Brezhnev never for a minute believed that the other side, or indeed that either side, would fail to seek advantages at the expense of the other just because they had solemnly agreed in a document on Basic Principles on Mutual Relations that "efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, are inconsistent with these objectives" (of "reciprocity, mutual accommodation and mutual benefit").

In addition to taking a one-sided view of what is, in fact, an unrealistic commitment not to seek advantage, a failing reciprocated by the Soviet Union, on the whole over the decade after 1972 the leaders of the United States have probably been at least as inclined as those of the Soviet Union to ignore the further elaboration of that same "basic principle"--"the recognition of the security interests of the Parties based on the principle of equality". Some Americans, including some leaders, have spoken, and acted, as though the Soviet Union had no

legitimate security interests.

The United States and the Soviet Union must each recognize the need to take account of the other's interests, not from altruism but in its own self interest. Restraint and reciprocity are useful guidelines, but they must be applied by both sides, and to their own actions as well as being expected of the other side.

While both sides throughout the decade in fact recognized their continuing competitive and even adversarial relationship (although viewing it in a distorted image), at first they publicly muted this fact--until serious differences emerged, when each sanctimoniously accused the other of violations of an agreed code of conduct. Especially in the United States, this disjunction between private leadership appreciation of political competition and public avoidance of its acknowledgment contributed to later disillusionment with the detente process itself. In the Soviet Union, it was easier to maintain an advocacy of detente while blaming solely the other side for renewed tensions.

The essence of detente, as a practical proposition, was an agreement on mutual accommodation to a political competition in which each side would limit its actions in important (but unfortunately not well defined) ways in recognition of the common shared interest in avoiding the risks of uncontrolled confrontation. It called for political adjustments, both negotiated and unilateral. It did not involve a classical division of the world into spheres of hegemonic geopolitical interest, but it was a compact calling for self-restraint on each side in recognition of the interests of the other to the extent

necessary to prevent the sharp tensions of confrontation. While this general concept and approach was accepted by both sides, regrettably each side had differing conceptions of the proper restraint it--and the other side--should assume, and this later led to reciprocal feelings of being let down by the other side. From the outset, there was insufficient recognition of the need for more frank exchanges of view and collaboration in dealing with differences of interest. With time, these efforts collapsed. Both sides showed themselves not ready to accommodate the interests of the other. An additional complicating factor was inability of the American leadership to manage and control its own policy. But more important, on both sides there was a serious gap even in ability to perceive the viewpoint and interests of the other. This gap grew, rather than being narrowed, with time and experience. And as a consequence trust--never of course very great, but even conditional trust--declined, rather than growing.

Both sides also showed themselves guilty of myopia. Let us note but one additional broad and significant example. Too little attention has been paid, on both sides, to important interrelationships deriving from the interplay of the political strategies of the two sides. The Carter and Reagan Administration have seen rapprochement with China as contributing to containment of the Soviet Union, and therefore reinforcement of restraint on Soviet policy; they have failed to consider whether the tightening noose of a grand encirclement (the United States, NATO, China and Japan) may have impelled the Soviet Union toward more active measures to prevent such encirclement (as in Afghanistan, and potentially in Iran) and to leap-frogging for

"counter-encirclement" (as in Vietnam against China, and Syria, Yemen and Ethiopia in the Middle East). The Soviet Union, in turn, has underestimated the extent to which actions it may have regarded as defensive and counter-encircling (largely the same list) have in fact--not only in propaganda--been perceived in the West and China as offensive moves, and contributed to the development of the very encirclement coalition they were intended to counter.

Intentions, Perceptions, and Perspectives

Many developments during the period under review bear witness to the importance of evaluating correctly the intentions, not merely the capabilities, or the ambitions, of the other power. Close study suggests that the Soviet leaders in 1979 saw a real threat to their own security in a foreign-supported counterrevolution in Afghanistan. This judgment of the intentions of the Americans and Chinese, coupled with the internal vulnerability of the Amin regime in Afghanistan itself, led them reluctantly to decide on their own military intervention to replace the Amin leadership and bolster socialist rule within the country, while preventing Western and Eastern gains from the collapse or defection of the Amin regime. The Carter Administration's evaluation of the Soviet motivation for intervention, one widely shared in the West, imputed an expansionist purpose to the move into Afghanistan, a threat to the Gulf and its oil, and therefore stressed the need to deter further Soviet expansion by strong punitive retaliation. This reaction merely reinforced Soviet belief in their original judgment that a real threat had existed, and did not deter

further moves that had not been planned.

If one side is in fact motivated by an expansionist impulse, then a forceful advance stand in opposition or response in retaliation is called for and can be effective. If, however, the action--no matter how reprehensible and forcible--is motivated by fear of a threat or loss, a vigorous show of strength and threats of "counteraction" may in fact contribute to perceived threats and hence to moves which one had sought to deter, while measures to allay unfounded fears might have been the the effective course to pursue. It thus becomes highly important to assess, and to assess correctly, the intentions and motivations of the other side.

The importance of such assessment not only applies in a given case, but also affects the lessons one draws from experience. The easy conclusion often drawn from Soviet moves adverse to American interests has been (especially by critics, but sometimes also by incumbent administrations) to question whether we had possessed sufficient strength and clearly enough demonstrated our readiness to use it. And sometimes that may be the case. But the record suggests that often it has been not American strength and resolve which the Soviet leaders have doubted, but American restraint and American recognition of Soviet interests.

If international tension is seen as the product of perceived threats, detente can be characterized as the reduction of mutual threat perceptions. In the latter half of the 1970s both sides perceived growing threats from the military programs, and the political actions, of the other. Afghanistan in 1979 appeared to the Soviet leaders as a

threat, not an opportunity. But this was not recognized by the American leadership.

Both powers have also been reluctant to acknowledge, even to recognize, failures of their own political systems, and only too ready to project responsibility to the other side. Thus, for example, Soviet claims of American responsibility for internal opposition in Afghanistan and Poland serves (along with other purposes) as an alibi for failures of Soviet-style socialism. American charges of Cuban and Soviet responsibility for revolution in Central America are similarly more convenient than acknowledging failures of the reactionary "capitalist" regimes to provide for peaceful change. In addition to reflecting genuine fears from perceived vulnerabilities, it is simply easier to project hostile intervention than to admit one's own failures to facilitate or to permit peaceful change within the respective areas of predominant influence.

Among important perceptual failings have been not only inability to empathize with the other side or to consider perceptions of the other side as real (even if not necessarily as valid), but also a strong tendency to attribute to the other side exaggerated strength, control over events, and consistency both in purpose and in policy implementation. What makes this irony dangerous is that each side acts on perceptions of the intentions and power of its adversary in ways that tend to make these perceptions self-fulfilling prophecies.

The Arms Race and the Military Balance

A fourth cause of the decline in confidence in detente in the 1970s was the view widely held --on both sides--that the other side was acquiring military capabilities more than were needed for deterrence and defense, and therefore not in keeping with detente. This is a complex question. For example, agreed SALT limitations reduced some previously important areas of concern and uncertainties in projection of the military balance--notably, with respect to ABMs. But the very fact that some freedom of action in designing military responses to perceived requirements was constrained by the agreements (and more prospectively), and the fact that the rather complex real strategic balance was artificially reduced in the general understanding (and not merely to lay publics!) to certain highlighted indices, meant increased sensitivity to this symbolic arithmetical "balance". And national means of intelligence, which are given high credibility when it comes to identifying a "threat", are regarded with a more jaundiced eye when called upon to monitor or "verify" compliance with an arms limitation agreement.

In any event, during the latter half of the 1970s concerns mounted in the United States as to why the Soviet Union was engaged in a "relentless" continuing arms buildup; American military programs justified as meeting that buildup were in turn seen in the Soviet Union as designed to restore the United States to a position of superiority.

Throughout the preceding two decades of cold war and cold peace, the United States had maintained a clear strategic nuclear superiority. As the Soviet Union continued to build its strategic forces despite

earlier agreed strategic arms limitations, new fears and suspicions arose in the United States. Unfortunately, the actual consolidation of parity in the latter 1970s was not in synchronization with the political acceptance and public impression of parity in the early 1970s. What the Soviets saw as finally closing a gap with weapons deployment programs, fully consonant both with the terms of the SALT agreement and with achievement of parity, many in the United States saw as Soviet pursuit of advantages violating at least the spirit of SALT, if not its letter, and threatening to go beyond parity to Soviet superiority. What really was inconsistent was the relationship between the American public expectation derived from SALT and the Soviet deployments. The interim freeze of 1972 had set a "level" of forces deployment including some construction underway which had not yet been completed by the Soviet Union. In addition, only the level of strategic missile launchers had been limited, and the Soviets were again behind in time in MIRVing their strategic missile force. If the Soviet strategic deployments had occurred more nearly at the time of American deployment, and then both had agreed to accept parity and stop at the same time (not merely at the same level), the public perception would have been quite different.

While considerations directed at influencing opinion played a part in inflating presentations of the opposing "threat", there were real buildups on both sides, and perceptions on both sides of a hostile arms buildup were genuine. But both sides were unduly alarmist in exaggerating the military capabilities--and imputed intentions--of the other side.

In addition, the Soviet Union did not serve its own best interests or the interests of detente by continuing to be so secretive about its military forces and programs. To cite but one significant example, the Soviet argument that its SS-20 deployment represents only modernization of a long-standing theater missile force, and timely indication that it would replace a like number of older larger-yield weapons, might have convinced some in the West who were uncertain and fearful as to the Soviet purpose in the deployment. A strategic dialogue, before rather than after a NATO counter-deployment response was decided upon, might have permitted some "preventive arms control" without the heightened tensions and less promising ex post facto attempt at INF arms limitations.

Failures in Relating Detente to Internal Politics

In addition to major gaps in mutual understanding of such key elements of detente as behavior in international politics and in managing the arms race, a fifth cause of the decline of detente was failure in understanding the crucial relationship of detente to the internal politics of the two countries. In part this was reflected in errors, in particular by the Soviet Union, in comprehension of domestic political processes and dynamics of the other country. To be fair, there was also some failure by political leaders, especially in the United States, in gauging their own authority. The Soviet leaders put too much trust in the ability of the American President to carry through policy. This occurred with the whole matter of normalization of trade, and repeatedly with SALT II from 1975 to 1979. While Nixon,

Kissinger and Ford were careful to relate linkages to foreign policy issues, the Congress attempted to make its own linkages with Soviet internal affairs, failing in the effort, creating new issues in U.S.-Soviet relations, and reducing support for detente in the United States, in the process. The Soviet leaders also had difficulty in understanding the sudden changes and discontinuities between (and occasionally within) Administrations. American leaders, especially Presidents Carter and Reagan, have had little understanding of the Soviet political leadership or of Soviet political processes. President Carter was especially insensitive to the necessary limits on detente as a medium for influencing internal political affairs of the Soviet Union.

Leaders on both sides, especially the Soviet leaders, have frequently and seriously underestimated the impact of their own actions on perceptions and policy of the other side, and the extent to which various actions have in fact (whether wisely or necessarily) been responses to real or perceived challenges. And again, Soviet secrecy, and self-serving justifications on both sides, have compounded this problem.

Finally, the failure in the United States to sustain a political consensus in support of detente also ranks as a major cause of the ultimate failure of the detente of the 1970s. This is particularly so if one also considers the role of domestic political factors in the United States in torpedoing the attempt at detente. Most blatant, but far from unique, was the attempt to tie trade, and thus the whole economic dimension of detente, to what amounted to interference in the

internal affairs of the Soviet Union, made more tragic but no less lethal by the high moral motivations of many of the supporters of the effort. In this respect, the Soviet leaders were more successful in the less difficult, though not easy, task of maintaining a consensus in their quite different political process.

One reason for the disintegration of the consensus in favor of detente in the United States was the failure of the leadership to explain the limits as well as the promise of detente to the public. Of course to the extent that the leaders themselves failed to gauge the differences in conceptions of detente and were prisoners of their own view of the world order they cannot be faulted for failing to make clear to others what they themselves failed to see. But Nixon and Kissinger did understand very well at least that there was a continuing active competition--not only in the Soviet conception, but in their own policy line--which was masked by too much talk about a new structure of peace. When the expectations of the public, aroused by hyperbole on peace and detente, were not met, disillusion set in--and so did a natural temptation to blame the other side. This reaction against detente, based on disillusionment (in the pure meaning of the term) was thus in part engendered by an overestimation by both Nixon and Kissinger of their ability to manipulate and to manage both international and national affairs. It should, of course, also be noted that the public (including the broader Congressional and active political constituencies) are little aware of or prepared to understand the subtleties of international politics, or even the basic idea of a political relationship of mixed cooperation and competition with the

Soviet Union. In addition, the political process in the United States not only provides no tradition of continuity or cushion against sudden changes in foreign policy, but on the contrary invites domestic political exploitation of apparent and actual adversities in the course of international relations.

Conclusion

The "decade of detente" in American-Soviet relations was in fact a decade of mixed confrontation and detente, competition and cooperation, with a remarkable if ill-starred attempt to build--too rapidly--a structure for peaceful coexistence between powerful adversaries. "Detente" is not an entity, nor a single policy which has not yet really been tried, or on the other hand one that was been tried and has failed. Nor was "detente" betrayed by one side or any one action.

American-Soviet relations stand in need of a redefinition of goals and means. Any who in the heyday of "detente" a decade ago may have forgotten or misjudged have been sharply reminded since Afghanistan of the continuation of competition and of an adversary relationship. The fragility of the structure of cooperation erected early in the 1970s was evident in its collapse at the end of that decade. The absence of mutual trust is, in the early 1980s, stark and clear. Dispelling of illusions about the relationship, if painful, is nonetheless useful. What is not useful, however, and indeed is dangerous, is the resurrection and false confirmation of misperceptions of each side by the other. To the extent that either side misreads the motivation and intentions of the other, and acts on that basis, it is in one sense akin to Don Quixote's charge against windmills of imagined threatening evil strength. But the danger is much greater than misapplied chivalry and energy. We risk giving substance to a sharper and deeper conflict than would have been justified by a sound understanding and a sober evaluation of the real requirements for competition--and of the

opportunities still available to realize areas of potential cooperation in serving mutual interests, including above all survival in a nuclear world.

The imperative of coexistence, and the reality of competition, remain. So do the problems in reconciling them. Thoughtful study of the experience of the 1970s is of highest importance in order to learn as much as we can about the requirements and conditions--and limitations--on cooperation, and about the nature and forms of competition, so as to design policies and a common policy process for the future which will help to work toward a world order which, while short of the ideal or preference of any one ideology or power, will nevertheless preserve the essential peace without which no idea or people in our day can survive.

In this discussion we have sought to extract some conclusions from the American-Soviet detente experience of the 1970s. As we attempt to apply these and other conclusions to the future, one contribution to our effort would probably be to abandon the term "detente". Not only is the meaning of the term unclear, it is also now politically "loaded".

Some proponents have mistakenly suggested that "detente" provides the only alternative to war. What needs to be carefully weighed is what course of action, among many, best serves peace and security. Some opponents of detente, on the other hand, have attempted to counterpose detente to security. Detente is a possible, and if feasible a preferable, means to attain security. Again, what is needed is a sober consideration of a range of possible combinations of defense

programs, arms control measures, and broader political strategies. The true antipode to detente is not security or hard-headed national interest, but tension--which may serve neither of those objectives. Critics of detente, arms control, negotiation, engagement, and contact should recognize that the antipodes are tension, uncontrolled arms-racing, confrontation, containment, and isolation. Confrontation may represent the better course of action, but it is counter-intuitive and the burden of proof rests on the proponents of that proposition. Nor do opponents of detente, who ascribe to the Soviet leaders hard-headed pursuit of their interests and a very high degree of success and skill, explain why if detente, arms control, negotiation, engagement, and contact are "soft" policies, the Soviet Union pursues them. They do not adequately explain why they believe that the United States cannot endorse and pursue such a policy while the Soviet Union can. There are of course systemic differences which make at least some manipulation tactics much easier for the Soviet leaders to pursue. And there may be more of a tendency in American opinion to build excessive expectations. But there are also fundamental systemic strengths in an open society.

The experiment with punitive containment within a policy of nominal but suspended detente, pursued in the last year of the Carter Administration, and the avowed repudiation of detente and pursuit of a confrontational policy under the Reagan Administration, have also proven both ineffective and counterproductive. While this approach was designed and intended to place pressure on the Soviet Union, the result has been to reduce support in the world, in particular from our Allies, for American policies, and to provide the Soviet Union enhanced

opportunities. Even at home, the American public, while wary of "detente", is not eager to assume the avoidable additional burdens and risks of choosing a course of confrontation.

Whether a new sobriquet can be devised or will simply evolve, our understanding will have to include recognition of the reality that American-Soviet relations in the 1980s and beyond will remain an amalgam of competitive and cooperative elements. Whether some such term as "competitive coexistence" or "controlled competition" (shading, respectively, toward detente and confrontation) will find acceptance is much less important than acceptance of realities as a limiting framework for policy. The other essential ingredients are formulation of policy objectives, and selection of instrumentalities for realization of those policy aims.

We should not expect, or seek to rely upon, a codification of "rules" of international conduct. What is required is commitment on both sides to a process of diplomatic consultation and adjustment to prevent rivalry and competition from leading to an uncontrolled confrontation. Deterrence remains necessary, and in turn requires maintaining a military balance, preferably one stabilized by agreed arms control measures including arms limitations and reductions. But deterrence and military security is but one necessary element. An active diplomacy is needed, between the United States and the Soviet Union, but also with others, since the most dangerous crises can evolve from situations in which neither the United States nor the Soviet Union has the initiative or controls the actions of third parties. Moreover, diplomacy must not only be directed at crisis management, but at crisis

prevention, and more broadly at facilitating peaceful change so that crises do not erupt.

Possibilities for the future do not, of course, rest on the shoulders of the United States alone. In President Reagan's words, "It takes two to tango". Quite so. Particularly given the intensification of mutual suspicions in recent years, it will be even more difficult to determine that both sides are indeed ready to seek an improvement in relations and to work constructively to that end. But it can occur.

One aspect of the internal Soviet scene that may come to affect the future range of possibilities for American-Soviet relations is the recent change in the leadership. Yury Andropov and his colleagues face a number of problems in internal Soviet affairs (and some in foreign affairs) requiring difficult decisions. The problems are not new--nor are the Soviet leaders newcomers. But there is an important element of change. The deaths of not only Leonid Brezhnev, but also of Mikhail Suslov and Alexei Kosygin, illustrate the fact of a shift in leadership and the beginning of a generational change. The United States cannot expect, and should not attempt, to influence these decisions of the Soviet leadership, except in one important way: to reaffirm American readiness to support and defend American interests, and at the same time to indicate our readiness to improve relations if the Soviet leaders are prepared to seek such an improvement on the basis of mutual benefit, restraint, and reciprocity. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union should expect unilateral "concessions", but to the extent both show a readiness to resume a common effort to contain the risks in their continuing competition, and perhaps even to resume efforts to

build areas of cooperation, it should be possible to apply some lessons from the attempt to follow that path in the 1970s which could help to make the enterprise more successful in the 1980s.