**RAND/UCLA**
**Center for the Study of Soviet International Behavior**

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# THE RISE AND FALL OF DETENTE: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

by Harry Gelman

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# THE RISE AND FALL OF DETENTE: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Harry Gelman*

## I. INTRODUCTION

For many Americans, the contours and assumptions of the detente era have already come to seem, from today's perspective, somewhat blurry, indistinct, remote. In part, this results from a kind of temporal insularity: our perceptions inevitably tend to be dominated by the concerns of the present and the immediate past. It is difficult to recapture the state of mind that prevailed in most of the U.S. elite between, say, the spring of 1972 and the fall of 1973, when there was a widespread inclination toward optimism about the prospects for a steadily broadening Soviet-American relationship, periodically reinforced by summits and agreements, in which "cooperation" would increasingly predominate over "competition."

These assumptions were initially much more widely shared than some conservatives are now prepared to admit.[1] By the same token, regardless of whom we blame for the present condition of Soviet-American relations, the expectations of most of the U.S. elite about the long-term feasibility of good relations with the Soviet Union are now clearly dominated by the present atmosphere of pessimism.

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[1]It is instructive, for example, to recall the role which William J. Casey played in 1974, as Chairman and President of the Export-Import Bank, in defending the principle of extending large credits to the Soviet Union when this principle first began to lose support in Congress.

At the same time, this foreshortening of perspective also leads many to exaggerate the differences between the recent past and the middle distance. It is obvious that a sharp deterioration in Soviet-U.S. relations occurred during the Reagan administration. It should be equally clear, however, that this relationship has, on the whole, been deteriorating for a much longer period--and that the downward slide has already lasted four or five times as long as the relatively brief period when "cooperation" was thought by a consensus of Americans to predominate. It comes as something of a shock to be reminded that it is not only already five years since the invasion of Afghanistan, but also nine years since the Soviets began their interventions in Africa, a decade since the passage of the Jackson and Stevenson Amendments and the Soviet renunciation of the Trade Agreement with America, and eleven years since the Soviet-American crisis during the Yom Kippur war. There have been several ups and downs along the way, but the element of continuity in what has been happening to the relationship is difficult to ignore.

This is not to deny that something qualitatively new has been added during the last four or five years, since the invasion of Afghanistan and even more since the first election of President Reagan; and I will presently explore the extent of this difference. But we should be clear at the outset that we are speaking of a change in the slope of an already long-descending curve.

Against this background, four general questions raised by the detente experience and our present predicament seem to me particularly important.

First, was the decay of detente inevitable? Did detente collapse because the two elites held opposing assumptions about the goals of the relationship from the outset? If so, to what extent were these conflicting notions merely avoidable exaggerations and mistakes--illusions and misunderstandings, as is often suggested? To what extent, on the other hand, were the contrasts in perspective the inescapable product of incompatibilities of national interest?

Second, to what extent do the changes introduced into the relationship since the end of the last decade indeed represent a sharp break with what went before? What aspects of the post-detente era are completely different from those of the late 1970s, suggesting the passing of a watershed, and what aspects are merely the culmination of a long, incremental process of erosion?

Third, what, if anything, remains today from the wreckage? What features introduced into the relationship in the early 1970s have endured into the post-detente era?

Finally, what shall we consider "normal" for this relationship--the atmosphere of 1972, or that of 1984? If the answer is "neither," then we must ask what *mix* of attributes is normal, and thus what features of the post-detente era must be expected to last indefinitely, and what features might, in principle, be changed for the better.

## II. THE LONG TRANSITION FROM DETENTE

### The Two Sets of Motives

To begin with, it should be noted that although there were some points of symmetry in the motives that drew Washington and Moscow into detente, on the whole the practical inducements perceived by each side differed considerably.

On the Soviet side, the Brezhnev leadership's approach to the United States in the early 1970s was impelled by a mixture of considerations, all of which were gravely affected by the subsequent evolution of events. From the outset, four of these factors were probably dominant in persuading the Politburo that it had an interest in expanding bilateral dealings with the United States. These were:

-- the leadership's extraordinary anxiety about China at the start of the decade;
-- the Politburo decision that the problems of the Soviet economy made manifest by the disappointing results of 1969 required a much more vigorous effort to expand importation of Western, and particularly American, technology and capital;
-- the emergence in 1969-1970 of *Westpolitik*, which made more feasible long-held Soviet hopes for a European security conference that would legitimize Soviet World War II gains and possibly open the way for insinuation of greater Soviet influence into Western Europe, but which presently reached a stage that could not go further without specific new Soviet negotiations with the United States;
-- and finally, the Soviet discovery of an interest in reaching strategic arms agreements with the United States that would constrain U.S. deployment in areas of U.S. technological advantage, provided that Soviet strategic programs in areas of priority were adequately protected.

In each of these realms, Soviet hopes and expectations about what might be obtained from the United States experienced a sharp rise in the first years of the decade, and a long decline thereafter.

On the American side, meanwhile, the impulse to expand relations with the USSR was also channelled by a set of specific circumstances, many although not all of which have also now long since vanished.

Perhaps the most important of these conditioning factors was the Vietnam war, which had envenomed American society, destroyed the American foreign policy consensus, increasingly hemmed in the Presidency, created growing political constraints on all U.S. military programs, and offered the Soviet Union an irresistible opportunity to seize on the negative worldwide reaction to promote the erosion of American influence and the advance of Soviet influence with a multitude of audiences. At the same time, not the least important consequence of the war was to strengthen the illusion--adhered to with astonishing tenacity by distinguished Americans from Harriman to Kissinger--that given sufficient inducement, the Soviet Union both could and would get the United States out of this fix on terms short of total defeat. This bipartisan craving for a *diabolus ex machina*, rather pathetic in retrospect, was therefore one of the leading impulses that led the United States into detente, and of course subsequently faded away.

In addition, the American leadership was pointed into more intimate dealings with the Soviets by a confluence of other specific considerations. Attempts to negotiate constraints on Soviet strategic nuclear programs seemed increasingly desirable as U.S. concerns over the Soviet third-generation ICBMs grew, and also seemed increasingly possible as Soviet concerns over the U.S. advantage in ABM technology became more evident. A geopolitical windfall at the turn of the decade--the emergence of Sino-Soviet military confrontation and the opening of Sino-American dealings--simultaneously seemed to offer another major point of negotiating leverage upon the USSR. The creation of a broad, incrementally growing arms control regime with the Soviet Union, building on earlier partial agreements such as the test ban treaty, also seemed to offer the opportunity to counteract the enervating domestic effects of the Vietnam war by appealing to a latent tradition of bipartisan support for efforts to reduce tensions.

The prior movement of West Germany's Brandt government into dealings with the East since 1969-1970 meanwhile created both increased opportunities the United States could seek to exploit through negotiations with the USSR on European issues and increased political penalties in Europe for not doing so. Some sections of the U.S. business community anticipated important profits from investment in and trade with the Soviet Union, although on the whole this economic motive was much less important to the United States than to the Soviets. And finally, there was Mr. Kissinger's well-known vision of remaking the Soviet perception of self-interest, of enticing the USSR into a network of relationships with the United States that would inhibit Soviet expansionist behavior in the world arena.

## The Process of Mutual Disillusionment

Detente progressively unravelled as each of the two sides incrementally discovered that it could not obtain from the other the really enormous concessions needed to realize its own list of hopes. The two sets of discoveries involved in this process of mutual disillusionment went on simultaneously from as early as the fall of 1973, and increasingly reinforced each other thereafter.

The Soviets found, above all, that the United States was unwilling to make the huge transfers of capital and technology which the Soviet leaders had apparently envisaged at the onset of detente. In addition, the Politburo learned that the United States was unwilling to side with the USSR against China; that important elements in the U.S. polity viewed detente as sanctioning a degree of intrusion into the internal control practices of the Soviet dictatorship which the Soviet oligarchs regarded as threatening their legitimacy and therefore intolerable; and that the United States was unwilling to accept as consistent with detente those specific Soviet military advantages in the central and regional matchups which the Soviets regarded as both natural and essential to their interests.

Finally, the Politburo found that the United States was also unwilling to legitimize under the umbrella of detente what the Soviets regarded as the natural process through which they intended to strive to

supplant American influence wherever possible in different parts of the world and incrementally to reverse the many geopolitical advantages the U.S. retained over the Soviet Union as a great power on the world scene. On the other hand, the Soviet leaders themselves regarded as illegitimate and deeply resented the U.S. role in supplanting their influence in Egypt after 1973, as well as the subsequent U.S. refusal to shore up Soviet regional weakness by accepting the Soviet Union as co-arbiter in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Americans gradually found that the Soviets, despite long-held hopes to the contrary, lacked the leverage on Vietnam to bring about a lasting compromise settlement, had no intention of spending their political capital in Hanoi in pursuit of this chimerical purpose, and in fact were unwilling to refrain, at the height of the detente period, from supplying Hanoi with the military materiel used to cast aside the supposed settlement and to bring about the eventual humiliating U.S. defeat. This American discovery during the first half of the 1970s was eventually followed, at the close of the decade, by the discovery that the Soviets had ensconced themselves in the former U.S. military facilities in South Vietnam.

The Americans also discovered, again despite the hopes foolishly encouraged in the United States by some U.S. leaders, that the SALT I Interim Agreement did not resolve the threat to U.S. retaliatory capability originally perceived as latent in certain of the Soviet third-generation ICBMs. Instead, this Agreement was eventually found to have allowed the replacement of these weapons with a fourth generation of ICBMs which posed an even greater threat. The disruption of the U.S. arms control consensus that resulted from this belated discovery gave impetus to the subsequent growth of disagreement in the United States over the acceptability of a SALT II treaty that also did not resolve the issue of the threat posed by increased Soviet missile accuracy and throw-weight.

In addition, the Soviet achievement in the first half of the 1970s of what is generally called a "robust" parity in strategic capabilities was followed, in the second half, by what turned out to be a sustained and successful unilateral Soviet effort to build a more decisive theater nuclear superiority in Europe to supplement the substantial existing

Soviet local conventional force advantage. Concern over trends in the European military balance therefore tended to reinforce the growing anxiety in the United States about the purposes underlying the Soviet central strategic buildup.

The net result, by the end of the decade, was a profound schism in the U.S. elite, placing in question what had previously been fairly broadly shared assumptions about the efficacy and legitimacy of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. The political effects of disillusionment under this heading were greatly magnified by disappointment with Soviet conduct in other policy realms, so that the ratification of SALT II was ultimately defeated by a mixture of factors, some of which had little direct connection with arms control or the nuclear force balance. By the time that America entered the post-detente era of the 1980s, the arms control process with the Soviet Union had thus become not only far more problematical in its own right but also far more isolated from surrounding sources of mutual confidence. The role of arms control had been transformed from that of "centerpiece" in a broadening relationship with the Soviet Union to that of an increasingly precarious vestige of stability in a widening sea of mutual hostility.

## The Soviet Offensive in the Third World

The major factor whose effects coincided with the growth of the arms control debate in the United States in the last half of the 1970s and ultimately helped to prevent the ratification of SALT II was of course the major expansion of the Soviet military and political presence in different parts of the world that took place over the same period. This presence grew partly through the incremental widening of the scope of Soviet naval and air operations to more and more distant areas, and partly through the associated process of Soviet arms assistance to radical nationalist movements or to newly-independent states formerly dominated by the West.

Such Soviet efforts to expand the Soviet geopolitical position around the world could always be interpreted in three ways. On one level, this behavior could be seen as nothing more than the natural endeavor of a late-coming, newly-emerging power to catch up with earlier

rivals, analogous to imperialist Germany's behavior in Africa prior to World War I. On another level, it could be interpreted as reflecting the equally natural desire of the Soviet Union to achieve real equality in stature with the other superpower, the United States, which had long enjoyed (and for that matter, still enjoys) a world presence and power projection capability not matched by the USSR. These two interpretations might be termed the "secular" explanations for Soviet conduct. During the 1970s, they were repeatedly adduced in some quarters in the United States to demonstrate the nonthreatening nature of successive Soviet actions, and their compatibility with detente. Those who took this view also tended to see little pattern in Soviet efforts to exploit instability in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but rather, isolated regional events each of which should be of relatively minor concern to the United States.

However, superimposed on these two interpretations was a third, suggested by both the rhetoric and some of the actions of the Soviet leaders. Under the impact of events, this view became fairly widely held in the United States by the end of the decade of detente. It saw the Soviet impulse to expand as part of an internally-driven, perpetual contest with the West and the United States to which all other purposes and relationships were subordinated, a struggle impelled by the central myth under which the Soviet leaders seek legitimacy, and in principle ruling out acceptance of any point of final equilibrium or settlement with the main opponent. In this view, the purported Soviet quest for equality was in fact a never-ending drive to supplant.

The existence of such a quasi-religious impulse was suggested and advertised, *inter alia*, by Soviet rhetoric proclaiming an unalterable and inevitable duty to come to the aid of "revolutionary and national liberation movements." To be sure, the Soviets never behaved as though they meant this literally, and always displayed a highly selective sense of this obligation, which in practice was measured almost exclusively in terms of *realpolitik* and the net Soviet advantage in the struggle with the USSR's main rivals. Nevertheless, successive American governments recognized this reiteration of Moscow's alleged obligation to help to promote revolutionary change as suggesting a deep-seated Soviet intention--indeed, compulsion--to keep striving to erode the position of

the West and the United States around the world whatever the state of the Soviet-American bilateral relationship. A decade before the onset of detente, President Kennedy had reacted strongly to Khrushchev's enunciation of this doctrine in one notable programmatic speech. During the 1970s, at no point in the evolution of Soviet-American bilateral dealings did the Soviets cease to indicate that neither detente nor peaceful coexistence could be allowed to halt their effort to change the world at the expense of the detente partner.

Like Mr. Reagan today, but unlike many others in the United States, the Soviet leaders apparently took for granted a zero-sum relationship in the world arena, and evidently did not see how their position in the world could possibly be improved unless that of the opponent were whittled down. They evidently also saw American behavior in Egypt and the Near East in the middle 1970s as confirming a similar U.S. view of the underlying incompatibility of Soviet and American interests, and as furnishing tacit justification for assertive actions which the Politburo felt compelled to take in any case.

Although the possible consequences for the bilateral relationship with Washington were surely a factor in the leadership's consideration of Soviet moves in the Third World, they were apparently never allowed to become a dominant factor. It is difficult to believe that the members of the Politburo were oblivious to the effects of this Soviet behavior upon the trend of opinion in the United States, and were totally unaware that this conduct had something to do with the rightward evolution of the American polity late in the decade. But insofar as they considered restraint at all, they apparently saw any potential sacrifice of opportunities for Soviet gains as inadequately paid for--as matched against tradeoffs in benefits from the American relationship that became increasingly incommensurate as the decade went on. I shall return to this point shortly.

The Soviet solution was to attempt to impose on the United States a separation between the bilateral relationship and the interaction of the two powers in the world arena. Throughout the 1970s, the Soviet leaders sought to maintain a wall between the two sets of phenomena, and to induce the United States to acknowledge the legitimacy of a mutually profitable bilateral relationship even as the Soviet Union's supplanting

efforts went forward. They repeatedly made it clear that acceptance of this compartmentation was an essential aspect of their conception of detente. Accordingly, throughout the Nixon, Ford, and Carter presidencies, the Politburo consistently rejected American attempts at "linkage"--that is, efforts to hold aspects of the bilateral relationship hostage to Soviet behavior elsewhere.

In retrospect, however, preservation of the wall the Soviets sought to erect was out of the question; if Soviet behavior could not adapt to the conception of detente held by the American public, then those aspects of detente which the Soviet leaders did wish to keep could not survive. This was especially true because of the wounded state of the American Presidency from 1973 on, which rendered all dealings with the Soviet Union vulnerable to attack both from the left (in 1974) and from the right (thereafter).

In addition, the spectacular series of Soviet advances in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Southwest Asia between 1975 and 1979 were particularly traumatic for much of the American public because they coincided with a series of extraordinary American humiliations, from the evacuation of Saigon to the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Teheran. Although the Soviets were certainly not responsible for all the American misfortunes, they exulted in them and openly sought, with varying degrees of success, to profit from them.[2] The two sets of phenomena were therefore increasingly linked in the world's perceptions; much of the American public, and the Soviets themselves, seemed to share the Chinese judgment at the time that the United States was a "retreating wave" on the world scene, and the Soviet Union an "advancing wave." In consequence, by the end of the 1970s a sizeable majority in the United States had come to see the advent of detente as having opened the way for an explosion of Soviet efforts to wrest advantages from an

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[2]Particularly striking was Soviet behavior in response to the seizure of the American embassy in Teheran. Lacking a good opening to the new Iranian regime, the Soviet leadership apparently felt that it must seek one by fanning the flames of Iranian hostility toward the United States, and therefore it hailed the takeover of the U.S. embassy, at first quite explicitly, in the broadcasts of an "unofficial" radio station based in the USSR and under Soviet control. (See the discussion in Harry Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 36, 229 n.16).

internally and externally stricken America in several different spheres simultaneously.

In sum, I would suggest that Soviet behavior in the Third World in the late 1970s was the most important single factor in the destruction of the American consensus supporting detente, in the sense that it served as a catalyst for all the others. While some bilateral negotiating initiatives undertaken in the early Carter administration--notably the Conventional Arms Transfer and Indian Ocean talks--were undermined as a direct result of the clash of the interests of the two powers in the Third World, the more profound effects of this clash were indirect. Concern over Soviet strategic and European deployments, resentment of U.S. humiliations, and anger at the obstacles created for Jewish emigration from the USSR were all given focus in the public mind by a series of specific, dramatic, readily perceived events around the world that cumulatively seemed to confirm Soviet hostile intentions, creating a pattern perceived much more vividly by a wide audience than the abstruse calculations and complex allegations of defense analysts about the military balance.

## The China Factor

Could U.S. policy have caused events to evolve differently in the late 1970s? It has been suggested, for example, that the growth of Soviet efforts to expand their presence and influence in the Third World after 1975 was prompted, in part, by Soviet chagrin over the failure of their efforts to prevent or break the new American relationship with China. In this view, disappointment with the U.S. unwillingness to forego its China connection joined with other factors to disillusion the Soviets with the results of detente and thus helped to influence Moscow to launch an offensive in the Third World. This view seems to me implausible on several grounds.

It was, of course, evident from the outset--that is, from the time of the extended crisis on the Sino-Soviet border in the spring and summer of 1969--that the question of the U.S. attitude toward China was a paramount Soviet concern. The Soviets were intent in the first place to avoid excessive difficulties with the United States during the period of military confrontation with China, and thereafter to accomplish three

defensive and offensive purposes: to minimize the U.S. ability to derive leverage in Soviet-American dealings from Sino-Soviet difficulties; to head off any U.S. movement toward military alignment with China against the Soviet Union; and if possible, to induce Washington instead to align itself with Moscow against the interests of the PRC.[3]

Soviet anxieties under these headings produced a variety of reactions in the 1970s. At the outset, when the U.S. detente with the USSR and the American opening with China were developing together, the Soviets were apparently sufficiently exercised about the possibility of Sino-American collaboration to make some marginal concessions in negotiations with the United States, notably by accelerating conclusion of the Berlin Quadripartite Agreement in July 1971. After the summer of 1971, however, the situation in the triangle never again had a demonstrable effect upon the Soviet willingness to make tactical concessions.

Instead, the Soviets presented a long series of warnings and appeals to the United States--warnings against U.S. conclusion of a "military alliance" with China, and appeals to Washington to reach some sort of understanding with Moscow, formal or informal, against Beijing. The appeals for cooperation against China seem to have been concentrated in the first half of the decade, when a large measure of detente still existed. Two requests for formal written agreements having anti-Chinese intent were particularly notable; one was made in 1970, during the SALT I negotiations, and the other in 1974, in the waning weeks of the Nixon presidency. The warnings against U.S. collaboration with China against the Soviet Union, on the other hand, seem to have gone on spasmodically throughout the decade as detente dwindled, and indeed into the present decade and the Reagan presidency. Toward the end of the 1970s, when the United States, in reaction to Soviet behavior in other areas and to the general decay of detente, finally did begin to seek a significant degree of security cooperation with the PRC, the Soviet Union went so far as to warn publicly that arms control negotiations could be adversely

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[3]See Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-Taking Against China*, R-2943-AF (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, August 1982), pp. 46-52.

affected.[4] Here they professed, at least for a time, to believe in "linkage."

Nevertheless, it is anachronistic to suggest that this turn in American policy late in the decade had stimulated Soviet behavior in the Third World after 1975. Although Washington would not accept a security relationship with the USSR directed against China, Brezhnev's warnings against a U.S. "military alliance" with the PRC addressed a contingency that was not, in fact, a real possibility during Kissinger's tenure in office. Although extensive Sino-American information and opinion exchanges went on during the Nixon and Ford administrations, it does not appear that such security measures as U.S. arms sales to the PRC, naval port visits and joint contingency planning--let alone the creation of an "alliance" with the PRC[5]--were under active consideration in this period. American policy did not begin to move in this direction until the last half of the Carter administration, and this shift from 1978 on--the incremental triumph of Zbigniew Brzezinski's perspective on the strategic triangle over Cyrus Vance's--was itself propelled in large part by the American reaction to the Soviet offensive in the Third World.

It is reasonable to suppose that despite the repeated and vehement expressions of concern about the Sino-American relationship which the Soviets made in private, the Soviet leaders were well aware of the evidence that the Kissinger-Nixon policy toward China was a limited one, and that it was amply balanced by American concern to reach agreements with the Soviet Union. Indeed, the bulk of Soviet published comment between 1972 and 1975--particularly after the signing of the SALT I agreement in May 1972--suggested a growing inclination to assume that the United States would not wish to jeopardize the arms control process and other overriding American interests by entering a close security relationship with Beijing. It should also be remembered that even as late as November 1974, when detente had already begun to decline, the

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[4] *Pravda*, June 17, 1978. In January 1979, the Soviets did briefly hold up the final stages of the SALT II negotiations in response to the Deng Xiaoping visit to the United States.

[5] In addition, of course, it must be remembered that at no point in the Sino-American relationship has the PRC in fact indicated willingness to accept a relationship approximating a formal "alliance" with the United States.

Chinese leaders were themselves highly chagrined when the United States consented to hold a summit meeting with Brezhnev at Vladivostok, adjacent to China. The Soviets had chosen this site with precisely that effect in mind, and can only have been gratified and reassured by the Ford administration's acquiescence in this slight to Beijing.

It could be argued, to be sure, that the Politburo was disturbed in this period not by an expectation that the United States would line up with China against the Soviet Union, but rather by the repeated confirmation that Washington would not consent to an arrangement with Moscow directed against China. It would be far-fetched to conclude, however, that Kissinger's refusal to depart from a course he steered between the two powers was sufficient provocation to inflame the Soviet leadership and incite it to undertake more active measures in the Third World to counter American interests.

## The Stevenson Amendment and the December 1974 Watershed

It seems likely to me that a much more potent factor in reinforcing the Politburo inclination to seize on the opportunities that began opening up in the Third World after 1975 was the event that occurred in December 1974, when Soviet hopes that America might furnish decisive help to the Soviet economy were abruptly ended. This was, from the Soviet perspective, a real turning point.

This watershed was passed when the U.S. Congress approved the Stevenson Amendment to the Export-Import Bank bill, thereby limiting to $300 million the total the Bank could guarantee in loans to the Soviet Union over the next four years without seeking further congressional approval, and banning the use of any of this money for energy development and production. At immediate issue was the prospect of extremely large incremental U.S. loans to the Soviet Union over the next few years for the Yakutsk/North Star Siberian energy development projects. These capital transfers and the associated technology inputs were probably the biggest single dividend the Politburo had anticipated from the detente relationship. The passage of this legislation under the nose of a preoccupied Secretary Kissinger rendered moot an elaborate tripartite compromise which Kissinger had worked out with Gromyko and Senator Jackson granting the Soviets MFN status under the Trade Act in

return for certain Soviet concessions over Jewish emigration. The Soviet response was to disavow the emigration compromise and to abrogate the October 1972 Trade Agreement with the United States, indignantly proclaiming that the USSR could never be bribed to permit interference in Soviet internal affairs. In fact, however, the problem was that henceforth the bribe would always be too small.

The reasons the Congress took this step in 1974 are of larger interest today because they vividly suggest that Soviet and American desires from the relationship are always likely to be out of phase. The American executive leadership had wished, in effect, to make large credits available promptly to the USSR as an inducement to *subsequent* Soviet good behavior. The American legislature, in addition to being influenced by certain more ignoble considerations,[6] was fundamentally opposed to this sequence of tradeoffs. Various parts of the coalition[7] in the American elite that forced through the Stevenson Amendment were disturbed at Soviet behavior in the Arab-Israeli crisis before and during the October 1973 war, or angry at the Soviet attitude of encouraging and applauding the Arab oil embargo, or annoyed at Soviet continuation of very heavy arms shipments to Vietnam, or concerned that once very large credits were transferred to the USSR, the Soviet debtor could exercise political leverage over the American creditor by threatening to delay repayment. In general, this coalition was determined to ensure that all future credits to Moscow somehow be made contingent upon *prior* good Soviet behavior in all arenas.

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[6]There can be little doubt that major sections of the Congress and the press were, in addition to all else, interested in using the occasion as part of a more general campaign to attack and constrict the powers of the presidency in the immediate aftermath of Watergate. For some of those involved, the pros and cons of the Soviet-American relationship were secondary to this endeavor.

[7]It is worth stressing again that this was a coalition in which *liberal* forces played a major role, enforcing their will to defeat an essentially conservative effort to hand over large sums of money to the Soviet Union. Readers whose memory of these events is hazy and who find this comical reversal of roles a decade ago to be, from today's standpoint, incredible, are referred to the discussion in Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente*, pp. 148-151, 250 n.68, 251 n.69.

It seems unlikely, however, that the Soviet leadership, for its part, has ever been willing to contemplate such a bargain, either explicit or tacit, with the U.S. elite. The Soviets apparently expected large American economic assistance as a down payment in a relationship which the Soviet leaders would, at most, evaluate on an ad hoc basis to determine what, if any, acts of political restraint the returns from that relationship might from time to time justify. The members of the Politburo apparently never dreamed that the documents signed with the United States in 1972 and 1973 implied a general commitment to desist from the perpetual struggle for competitive advantage over the Americans. They therefore saw nothing inconsistent between the sweeping ritualistic promises recorded in May 1972[8] and such actions as their public and private efforts, the following year, to induce the Arabs to wield the "oil weapon" against the West. They were evidently surprised that American resentment of this behavior contributed to Washington's withdrawal from what they saw as its side of the bargain.

But quite apart from this issue of the priority of the Soviet chicken and the American egg, it is open to question whether even if the Stevenson Amendment had not passed, the economic benefits at stake would have sufficed to induce the Soviet leaders to follow a different course in the Third World during the next few years. Even if the Soviets had not been disappointed in the hopes they entertained in 1972 for massive American investments that would bring magical increases in Soviet productivity, there is considerable reason for doubt as to whether the Politburo in any case could have persuaded itself to refrain from exploiting those qualitatively new opportunities that emerged after 1975 in Africa and elsewhere. But in any case, of course, this contingency never arose.

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[8] It will be recalled that a document on "basic principles" of Soviet-U.S. relations signed at the 1972 summit pledged both sides to refrain "from efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly." The context had seemed to refer to behavior of all kinds, and not merely weapons deployments.

## The 1970s In Retrospect

To sum up thus far:

First, it appears to this observer that initial misconceptions on both sides did indeed play a role in fostering the eventual demise of detente--but that this was by no means the only factor, nor necessarily the most important one.

Fundamentally, Brezhnev for his part misconstrued the ability of the U.S. Presidency to deliver on the American side of the tacit bargain reached in 1971-1972.[9] He underestimated the capacity of a rampaging American pluralism to veto executive commitments, operating first from the standpoint of the left and then from that of the right. For this reason, he misjudged the willingness of the United States either to provide the kind of economic help envisioned by the Soviet Union at the start of the decade or to accept the kind of strategic arms agreement that was tolerable to the USSR at the close of the decade. At the same time, he greatly overestimated the willingness of the U.S. public to accept with equanimity the successive challenges and injuries to American interests--in the Third World and in the strategic and regional military balances--which he and his colleagues regarded as essential to Soviet interests and a legitimate part of the detente understanding.

The American leaders, for their part, erred in supposing that the Soviet Union as part of the detente bargain could and would deliver to the United States an acceptable and lasting compromise in Vietnam. They also erred in supposing, or at any rate in suggesting to the U.S. Congress, that SALT I could prevent the growth of the Soviet threat to American land-based retaliatory capabilities. They erred in their hopes

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[9] It is difficult to estimate with confidence Brezhnev's perception of the *quid pro quo* he was offering to the United States as the Soviet side of that bargain, particularly since elements of that *quid pro quo* emerged and then vanished incrementally. One may surmise, however, that in 1972 he may have seen four such elements as most important: (a) those limited constraints on previously existing Soviet deployment programs for third generation ICBMs which he accepted in SALT I; (b) the embarrassments which he was forced to accept in dealings with Vietnam and Egypt in the spring and summer of 1972 as a result of his dealings with the United States; (c) his temporary consent to allow expanded Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union; and (d) his temporary moderation of the customary vehemence of Soviet propaganda attacks on the United States.

that the Soviet leaders could be induced to display restraint in the Third World as the result of the construction of a network of relationships with the United States. And finally, they erred, most decisively, in assuming that building such a network of inducements would be politically possible in the United States in the absence of far more *prior* Soviet restraint than the Politburo was willing to consider.

In addition to these initial errors on both sides, historical accident played a role in undermining detente that should not be underestimated. A long list of fortuitous developments that were not foreseen in 1970--Watergate, the death of Salazar and its consequences in Africa, the revolutions in Addis Adaba and Kabul, the fall of the Shah, Pol Pot's disastrous pugnacity toward Vietnam after 1975--impacted from different sides and in different ways on the relationship between the superpowers during the 1970s to progressively exacerbate their underlying conflict of interests.

Finally, in view of the extent to which those interests did and do conflict, one should not have illusions about the possibilities for the relationship in the 1970s if the two sides had *not* begun the decade with separate sets of faulty assumptions. If mutual expectations had been significantly lower, the ultimate disillusionment and bitterness would have been less; but by the same token, far less would have been attempted. What attitude would the American leadership have taken in 1970 if it had known with certainty that any hopes of inducing Soviet restraint in the Third World were foredoomed? What attitude would Brezhnev have taken in 1970 if he had known that his hope of decisive American help for the Soviet economy was illusory?

In short, given the objective outside factors that impinged on the relationship during the decade of the 1970s, and given the inescapable asymmetries in the attitudes and goals of the Soviet Union and the United States--especially Soviet assumptions about the military requirements of Soviet security, and about the Soviet right and duty to change the world in the USSR's favor--it seems highly probable that the competitive aspects of the relationship would have strongly predominated over the cooperative aspects in this period under any circumstances. Even if the illusions associated with detente had not been fostered and killed, the atmosphere by the end of the decade would very probably have

been rather harsh in any case--perhaps analogous to that which prevailed in the late 1960s. It need not, however, have deteriorated as far as it has.

## III. THE POST-DETENTE ERA

### The Change in the Bilateral Atmosphere

Given all that has gone before, what has changed since late 1979?

The first, most obvious difference is of course the further exacerbation of the bilateral atmosphere. Here the preponderant trends have run strongly in one direction since 1980, beginning with the American reaction to the invasion of Afghanistan and the decisive victory of the point of view represented by Zbigniew Brzezinski over that championed by Cyrus Vance and Marshall Shulman, culminating the long guerilla struggle for Mr. Carter's oscillating soul. As earlier suggested, there seems little doubt that this tipping of the scales within the Democratic administration coincided with the culmination of a broader shift within the American polity that had been going on throughout the late 1970s. This polarization of popular perceptions of Soviet behavior in turn contributed, along with many other factors, to the advent of Mr. Carter's successor. The increasing Soviet pessimism about prospects for the bilateral relationship which Moscow evidenced as the Reagan Administration went on has thus derived, as much as anything else, from a sense that an underlying shift has occurred in the American center of political gravity which is at least as important as questions of political personality.

This shift was reflected from the start--that is, since 1980--in both demonstrative American gestures and in more basic, secular changes that have become increasingly important as time has gone on. Some of the punitive steps taken against the USSR in 1980, while regarded as infuriating and injurious by Moscow, did not themselves represent fundamental and long-lasting changes in U.S. behavior. The announced rationale for many of the more notable moves against Soviet interests in President Carter's last year was that of imposing "sanctions," that is, *ad hoc* responses with the avowed aim of punishing specific Soviet acts, with the extremely faint hope of getting the Soviets to undo what they had done (i.e., to get out of Afghanistan), and with the somewhat larger hope of inhibiting future Soviet behavior. Many of these steps were either intrinsically one-time in nature (the boycott of the Moscow Olympics) or were at least posed as theoretically reversible upon

evidence of better Soviet conduct (the elimination of Aeroflot landing rights, the grain boycott).

At the same time, the political reaction which the invasion of Afghanistan evoked within the Carter Administration and among the public also tended to reinforce strongly certain longer-term shifts in U.S. policy that were already in train. These existing secular trends that were strengthened by the events of December 1979 were hostile responses to cumulative trends in Soviet behavior, and the added impulse they received in 1980 was, in the long run, much more serious for Soviet interests than the "sanctions." They included, among other things, the collapse of support for the ratification of SALT II, the trend toward heightened U.S. military spending, and the tendency to seek security cooperation with the PRC.

**The Institutionalization of the American Posture:** It seems likely that one of the chief Soviet grievances against Mr. Reagan is that he has sought to institutionalize this broad underlying shift in the American posture that began under his predecessor. Mr. Reagan has on the whole carried the process much further and systematized it. The late-Carter period rationale of "punishing" specific Soviet acts in an empirical spirit has now been overlaid by assumptions about an unending struggle against the Soviet Union and what are now judged to be long-term requirements dictated by the eternally hostile essence of the relationship. These assumptions bear a strong resemblance to those which have impelled Soviet competitive behavior against the United States in the world arena for many years. In the post-detente era, the posture of the United States has thus become somewhat more symmetrical with that of the Soviet Union, in broad outline and in certain specific respects.[10]

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[10]Specific examples of the tendency of the Reagan administration to strive to reduce asymmetries that appear to give the Soviet Union an advantage include the reciprocal decay in American adherence to the doctrine of mutual assured destruction, considered by many to have been long rejected by the Soviet Union; the effort to impose a sharper strategic focus upon control over trade with the USSR, in response to Soviet central coordination of foreign trade activities for strategic purposes; the effort to enforce greater secrecy controls upon the American government and upon American research, in emulation of Soviet practice; the effort to compete more vigorously with the KGB by allowing a longer leash to covert action; and the sporadic effort to enforce

One characteristic of this new American posture, particularly in the first two years of the Reagan administration, was a degree of sustained stridency in rhetorical denunciation of the Soviet Union which the Soviet oligarchs had not heard for many years from the American leadership. Although they expected more reserve in propaganda emanating from the highest level, the Soviet leaders were affronted by Mr. Reagan's rhetoric not so much because they were personally insulted, but primarily because this rhetoric appeared to be consciously employed as part of a broad effort to undo the Soviet gains over the United States registered in the 1970s. On the one hand, the attacks on the Soviet Union were used to muster public support for large increases in strategic and conventional weapons spending programs that were openly advertised, at least initially, as intended to restore American superiority. On the other hand, the same attacks were used, in effect, as tacit justification for a new American refusal to accept as a basis for future strategic arms control agreements certain of those existing Soviet advantages that had been previously accepted and, in the Soviet view, legitimized during the 1970s in SALT I and SALT II.

In addition, the United States in the post-detente era has sought to impose America's new zero-sum view of the relationship with the Soviet Union upon Washington's European allies. This was reflected in particular in the unsuccessful attempt to compel the West Europeans to abandon their gas pipeline deal with the Soviets, and more generally in the greatly intensified and sustained efforts to induce the West as a whole to constrict the flow of technology and scientific ideas to the East. At the same time, the impulse to strive to impede Western inputs that help Soviet military strength grow has merged with a much vaguer

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greater reciprocity in the access of Soviet spokesmen to the United States and to the American media.

Many of these endeavors have encountered great resentment and resistance in the United States as running counter to American traditions. Those who take this view are often led to indict the "Manichean" view of the Soviet Union which Mr. Reagan uses to justify the quest for greater symmetry. The central dilemma in judging how many of these measures are acceptable for America, however, is compounded by the fact that this Manichean view is already deeply implanted in the Soviet Union, and does indeed give the USSR certain very important tactical advantages in the competition with the United States.

and inconsistently applied desire to minimize Western help to the Soviet economy as a whole, on the general grounds that any easing of Soviet economic dilemmas must also ease constraints on Soviet military resources.[11] In broadest terms, the present administration has conveyed to the Soviet leaders an aspiration to wage economic warfare against them, albeit on a scale that has greatly exceeded political capabilities to carry it out. As in some other cases, the administration has provided a stimulus to Soviet paranoia without obtaining a commensurate payoff.

**The U.S. Regional Counteroffensive:** Finally, the last four years have also seen three American regional efforts against Soviet interests abroad that have, in effect, merely carried through initiatives begun under the Carter administration. In all three cases, these efforts have consequently enjoyed a broader consensus in the United States than have some other features of the Reagan program.

In Europe, the Reagan administration has carried to its logical conclusion the train of events inaugurated with the NATO double-track decision of December 1979, when the Atlantic alliance resolved to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles to restore the linkage to the U.S. strategic deterrent threatened by the Soviet SS-20 deployments in Europe unless negotiations could remove that threat. The Soviet Union proved unwilling to give up the military and political advantages inherent in the SS-20 deployments, and despite an enormous Soviet political campaign and great domestic tumult in Western Europe, was ultimately unable to prevent the start of the Western INF counter-deployment.

In Japan, the Reagan administration has found it possible to continue and enlarge the trend of heightened Japanese military cooperation with the United States begun by Mr. Carter. This trend, which significantly helps U.S. military capabilities against the Soviet Union in the Western Pacific, has been assisted by the Soviet continued militarization of the southern Kuriles that are claimed by Japan, and by the threat perceived by Japan in Soviet SS-20 deployments in Asia.

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[11]One of the reasons this goal is not often avowed explicitly--in addition to the impossibility of getting America's allies to accept it--is its incompatibility with the U.S. domestic political realities that induced Mr. Reagan first to abandon the Carter boycott on grain shipments to the USSR and then to conclude a new, "boycott-proof" long-term grain agreement with the Soviet Union.

And with China, despite an initial crisis in Sino-American relations occasioned in part by Mr. Reagan's ideologically motivated inclinations toward Taiwan, the Reagan administration ultimately found it possible to reestablish the trend of unacknowledged security cooperation with the PRC inaugurated by its predecessor. The United States was able to do this partly because Mr. Reagan shifted his priorities, but more importantly because the Soviet Union's policies attacking Chinese geopolitical interests in Asia made it impossible for Beijing to abandon its loose security connection with America despite its desire to reduce tensions with Moscow. In all three cases, therefore--with Europe, Japan, and China--the post-detente era has witnessed specific American achievements in the regional competition with the Soviet Union that Soviet military priorities and heavy-handed behavior have greatly facilitated.

**The Soviet Response:** The Soviet leadership has responded to all these developments by reaffirming the policies that each of its various adversaries perceived as threatening, and by asserting heightened defiance of all adversaries, beginning, of course, with the United States. The oligarchy deployed against the United States a degree and volume of propaganda vituperation not seen since the 1950s, and far surpassing Mr. Reagan in rhetorical extravagance. The American President was repeatedly compared with Adolf Hitler, and incessantly charged with leading the world toward "the flames of nuclear war." This rhetoric was not moderated, but on the contrary, further elevated after Mr. Reagan began to moderate his own attacks on the USSR in 1983. It is clear that this Soviet language was intended, at least in large part, to frighten Western publics and thereby place pressure on Western governments for concessions to the Soviet Union. In addition, the Soviet propaganda campaign about the allegedly increased danger of nuclear war and Mr. Reagan's alleged resemblance to Hitler was evidently pressed by certain segments of the Soviet elite, particularly in the military establishment, as tacit justification for claims in resource allocation that may be controversial.

At the same time, however, the exceptionally noisy and savage Soviet rhetoric of the last few years has also seemed to reflect the heightened internal and external stresses placed on the leadership of the 1980s. A prolonged, enervating succession crisis has been superimposed on the grave secular problems of the Soviet economy, at the same time that those problems have been exacerbated by the heightened challenge of the Reagan military program. Meanwhile, the Soviet oligarchs since the start of the post-detente period have also been compelled to deal with an apparently unendable war in Afghanistan, a severe challenge to the stability of their position in Poland, and the previously-mentioned setbacks to Soviet hopes of blocking INF deployment and drawing China away from its orientation toward the United States. The tensions created by these multiple pressures were dramatized in both the confusion and the pugnacity displayed by the leadership in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's September 1983 destruction of a Korean airliner. In addition to all else, the adoption of this posture of vehement defiance and vilification of the main antagonist may be regarded as the normal reaction of a Soviet leadership that has come to see itself as beset from many sides.

## The Soviet Interregnum

The second major new feature of the post-detente era has just been alluded to. This has been a noticeable deterioration, for the time being, in the effectiveness of Politburo leadership. The semi-paralysis of policy characteristic of Brezhnev's last years as his health worsened has been followed, since his death, by an interregnum of two successive ailing General Secretaries and an increasing perception, both at home and abroad, of policy deadlock, inertia, and vacillation. In particular, the perceived physical and political weaknesses of the General Secretary chosen in February 1984, Konstantin Chernenko, have engendered in the Soviet Union a growing malaise associated with a sense of exceptional weakness and division at the center. Many Soviets, particularly in the military, appeared to regard this prolonged dearth of vigorous leadership as damaging to the national interest. The Kremlin's entry into this Time of Troubles in the early 1980s was in

striking contrast to the simultaneous partial recovery in the status of the American Presidency, which had been seriously weakened throughout almost the entire decade of the 1970s as a result of the effect on American society of the Vietnam war and the Watergate crisis.

## The Arms Control Impasse

The third major change since late 1979 has been the grinding to a halt of the arms control process, the principal remnant of detente that had endured through the second half of the 1970s. The decay of this process is by now a familiar story, unfolding in stages from long before the signing of SALT II in June 1979. Ratification of this treaty was threatened from the outset by the unwillingness of major sections of the U.S. elite to accept certain aspects of the bargain concluded--particularly the failure to place greater constraints upon Soviet land-based ICBMs, to eliminate the Soviet advantage in throw-weight, to obviate what was consequently perceived as a growing threat to U.S. retaliatory capabilities, or to avoid what some saw as intolerable ambiguities in some of the provisions regarding verification. As already suggested, political opposition on these strategic grounds was reinforced by resentment on other grounds, particularly the cumulative reaction to the various Soviet military adventures in the Third World and geopolitical advances over the past few years and to the simultaneous U.S. humiliations. This accumulation of grievances undoubtedly contributed to the vehemence of the reaction of the American polity as a whole to the invasion of Afghanistan. That event, in the closing days of the decade, put an effective end to the already dwindling chances of ratifying SALT II, and simultaneously contributed to the eventual advent to power of a man who had termed that treaty fatally flawed.

Meanwhile, the NATO dual-track decision on INF deployment in Europe, adopted in the same month that Soviet airborne forces began landing in Kabul, set in motion decisive changes in Soviet arms control priorities. After having reluctantly persuaded themselves that the Alliance was serious and that there was a real possibility that the Pershing IIs and cruise missiles would some day arrive, the Soviets in the first half of the 1980s shifted the focus of their negotiating efforts to the prevention of these deployments.

This shift in priorities was facilitated by the long delay in the presentation of a U.S. negotiating position in START, and by the eventual Soviet discovery that this position encompassed projected cuts in Soviet land-based missile capabilities which the Soviet leaders considered out of the question. Expecting little from START over the short term, the Soviets became increasingly inclined to make these negotiations hostage to satisfaction of their demands regarding INF. When at last defeated on the INF front late in 1983, the Soviets' reaction was therefore to suspend both sets of negotiations. Nuclear talks regarding both central strategic weapons and intermediate-range weapons thus remained in abeyance in 1984, ostensibly awaiting satisfaction of the Soviet demand that the Western INF deployments be undone as a prerequisite to the resumption of talks, but in fact awaiting a Politburo decision on how and when to climb down from this untenable position. This decision was eventually forthcoming, around the turn of the year, with Soviet agreement in principle to enter new, vaguely-linked talks on offensive and defensive strategic and intermediate-range weapons.

In the meantime, however, the existing arms control regime established through the series of agreements signed in the detente era of the 1970s has begun to erode. The SALT II treaty whose provisions, although unratified, the United States has unilaterally undertaken to respect will expire at the end of 1985, and the United States has already indicated plans for a second new ICBM--the Midgetman--which would require changes in any renegotiated treaty. The Soviets, for their part, have already begun to diverge more and more significantly from the letter and spirit of the existing unratified treaty. They have done so by declining to make certain reductions specified by the treaty; by developing and deploying two new ICBMs, contrary to the treaty provisions; and perhaps most strikingly, by displaying a more and more cavalier attitude toward the ludicrously ambiguous provisions of the treaty regarding telemetry encryption.[12] At the same time, the viability of the ABM treaty, which had long ago been ratified by both

[12]The SALT II "Common Understanding" on this subject is one of the best examples to date of an arms control provision setting forth

sides and which for a decade had been regarded as the more successful half of SALT I, was being increasingly threatened both by American plans for the future and by Soviet present transgressions. The American future challenge to the treaty is inherent in U.S. plans for space defense. The Soviet nibbling at existing ABM treaty obligations is implicit in the USSR's development of new SAM systems that may have capabilities against strategic ballistic missiles, in Soviet development of rapidly deployable components for a new ABM system, and especially in the Soviet construction of a large new radar of a kind and in a place apparently banned by the treaty.[13]

Whatever implications this gradual process of mutual preparation to jettison commitments and understandings reached in the 1970s may have for the military balance, this feature of the post-detente era is likely to be increasingly nerve-wracking for Western populations. Moreover, the threat to stability perceived in the growing shakiness of the arms control structure is generally seen as greatly exacerbated by new technological developments with grave implications for arms control--most notably, in the short run, the advent of the cruise missile with its possibly insoluble problems of verification.

At the same time, the experiences and the revelations of the post-detente period have probably made it even more difficult to assemble an adequate consensus in the American elite and public in support of whatever new arms control structure the U.S. government may seek to create with the Soviets to replace the old one. The evidence suggesting that the Soviets are in fact already violating the ABM treaty is likely to become an increasingly important factor in future internal U.S. political struggles over the acceptability of arms control formulae reached in any new negotiations with the Soviet Union. This is all the more likely to be the case in view of the strong conviction in many

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criteria so inherently ambiguous as to virtually dictate contemptuous circumvention in the absence of good *political* reasons, outside the treaty itself, not to do so. That is, this provision, because of its really exceptional ambiguity, was exceptionally dependent on an atmosphere of good will to induce a degree of Soviet voluntary compliance in interpretation sufficient to satisfy the United States. In June 1979, it was therefore already becoming an anachronism, and shortly became much more so.

[13]See Michael Krepon, "Both Sides Are Hedging," *Foreign Policy*, #56, Fall 1984, pp. 153-172.

(although not all) quarters in the United States that the Soviet Union had previously flagrantly violated at least one earlier arms control agreement, the 1972 Bacteriological Weapons Convention ratified by Moscow in 1975, by manufacturing and transferring to Vietnam mycotoxins for use in Indochina. Thus one of the striking new features of the post-detente era has been a significant enlargement of the portion of the U.S. elite and public that is inclined to believe that the Soviet Union does, in fact, violate arms control agreements.

Against this background, the chief pressure on the Soviet side toward reaching a new compromise arrangement with the United States is likely to come from the Soviet perception of technological inferiority to the United States in the new realm of space defense. As in the early 1970s, the United States is again seeking to use Soviet awareness of an American advantage in strategic defense as a lever through which to compel Soviet concessions regarding the strategic offense. Meanwhile, the chief pressure on the American side, as before, is likely to come from the growth of apprehension within the U.S. and allied publics. In view of the objective difficulties, it was by no means clear, as of the fall of 1984, that these two factors would be sufficient to produce a viable new agreement.

## The Slowdown of Soviet Advance in the World Arena

A fourth distinctive new feature of the post-1979 era has been a noticeable slowdown in the previously rapid multiplication of Soviet military and political footholds around the world. This phenomenon has varied considerably from region to region. In general, the Soviets have been principally concerned to strive to defend and consolidate the main geopolitical advances staked out in the late 1970s, notably in Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Indochina. In Africa, their position has been somewhat weakened, at least for the time being, as a result of diplomatic agreements signed by South Africa with Angola and Mozambique. In the Middle East, where their political leverage had already been gravely hampered since their estrangement from Sadat's Egypt and the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, the Soviets for a time seemed humiliated by their inability to prevent the Israeli conquest of South Lebanon or the arrival of the Western powers in Beirut. In Afghanistan,

they are widely perceived to have become bogged down since 1980 in a seemingly endless punitive war against the local population. In the Far East, despite a steady increase in their theater nuclear advantage and a gradual expansion in their new military position in Cam Ranh Bay, the Soviets have been forced to deal in the 1980s with increasingly adverse reactions from local states to these very military advantages, notably in the case of Japan, China, and the ASEAN countries. Even in the Caribbean and Central America, where since 1979 they have contemplated the prospect of risk-free advances in Soviet influence as a result of Cuban exacerbation of U.S. difficulties, by mid-decade this prospect, while still fairly promising, had become much less of a sure thing.

As in the past, many in the United States have heavily overemphasized voluntaristic explanations for what has seemed to be a sudden change in Soviet fortunes around the world. Observers who in the late 1970s had persisted in seeing evidence of a "master plan" in the succession of Soviet advances in Africa, Afghanistan and Southeast Asia now perceived evidence of a deliberate Soviet decision to hold back from efforts to advance. Some who in the immediate wake of the invasion of Afghanistan had conjured up visions of imminent further such Soviet invasions in the crude style of Hitler now saw the Politburo as being newly and mysteriously inhibited from executing such plans. President Reagan did not hesitate to cite the Soviet failure to make new additions to their sphere as evidence of the success of his policies; and even some Americans who are not supporters of Mr. Reagan have seemed to believe that the general posture of the Reagan administration has dissuaded the Soviet leadership from adventurist initiatives it would otherwise have taken. The Soviet failure to take violent action to halt the 1982 Israeli advance to Beirut and the expulsion of the PLO from that city was sometimes cited as an example of such allegedly unwonted Soviet caution.

Such views appear to me to considerably exaggerate both the extent of the Reagan administration's inhibiting influence upon Soviet behavior and the extent to which the stagnation of Soviet fortunes in the Third World over the last few years can in fact be attributed to Soviet inhibitions. This is not to say that Mr. Reagan's demeanor has had no influence at all, nor that the Soviets have seen no new reasons for caution.

It is plausible to suppose that Soviet behavior since 1980 has indeed been constrained to some degree by the USSR's multiple preoccupations, although this has probably not been the most important reason for the Soviet failure to make large new advances. Soviet military manpower, particularly ground force manpower, has been increasingly stretched by the competing demands created by the recent growth in the list of adversaries. The Soviet leaders, in addition to satisfying the ongoing requirements of their buildup against China in the east and NATO in the west, felt obliged to hold very large forces perpetually in readiness to crush the Poles during 1980 and 1981, and have also, of course, believed it necessary to allocate more than 100,000 troops on a permanent basis for the war against the Afghans. It is possible, as some Chinese analysts contend, that the Politburo has considered itself "pinned down" by the Afghan war, in the sense that it has been constrained more than hitherto against large new commitments of Soviet ground force resources in additional theaters.

In addition, there is some propaganda evidence, persuasively put forward by Stephen Sestanovich and others, to suggest that since Brezhnev's death the Soviet regime has become at least somewhat more pessimistic about the economic and political cost/benefit ratio of commitments to Third World regimes in marginal situations.[14] Charles Wolf and some Rand colleagues have also produced evidence suggesting that the effective burden to the Soviet economy of supporting the Soviet empire--including the cost of subsidizing countries such as Cuba and Vietnam for strategic and political reasons--has at last grown to proportions that are likely to give Soviet leaders reason for caution in assuming large additional such burdens.[15]

But although these inhibiting considerations may play some role in Soviet thinking, particularly in marginal situations, there is little reason to doubt that the primary cause of the recent slowdown in Soviet

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[14]See Stephen Sestanovich, "Do Soviets Feel Pinched by Third World Adventurism?" *Guardian*, June 17, 1984.

[15]See Charles Wolf, Jr. et al., *The Costs of the Soviet Empire*, R-3073/1-NA (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, September 1983).

fortunes has been the same factor that was the primary cause of the rapid Soviet advance in the late 1970s: the scope of perceived opportunities. A wave of favorable circumstances that began a decade ago permitting decisive Soviet exploitation--e.g., the death of Salazar and the dissolution of the Portuguese empire, the Ethiopian revolution, the Kabul April 1978 coup, Pol Pot's pugnacious behavior toward Vietnam--has now been followed by a recession of that wave. The last few years have therefore been perforce devoted largely to efforts to defend and consolidate the advances of the past.

The Soviet leaders probably assume, however, that the recent slowdown in the evolution of Soviet opportunities in much of the Third World is not likely to persist to the end of the decade. They are well aware that past Soviet advances have been predicated upon openings created by civil and international instability and violence, and that the Soviet Union is at a great disadvantage in competing with the West in economic dealings with the Third World states in the absence of such turmoil. But they have reason to be confident that more such instability and new such opportunities will be generated somewhere in Asia and Africa before the 1980s are finished, as they have already been generated in Lebanon and Central America. In such countries as the Philippines and Pakistan, where severe threats to the stability of the American position now exist, the Soviet leaders may already see the seeds of such future opportunities. In 1984, they have already shown signs of increased activity and some improvement of their position in the Middle East, building on the Western fiasco in Lebanon. In sum, there is little reason to assume that the Politburo believes that the long-term effort to expand Soviet presence and influence on the world scene at the expense of the West and the United States must come to a halt, or that it has ceased to pay dividends.

Until the next dramatic evidence of Soviet advance does materialize, however, the perception of a near-stagnation of Soviet fortunes around the world is likely over time to cause a gradual dilution of the American consensus which the Reagan administration has sought to mobilize against the USSR. As was earlier suggested, the hardening of U.S. opinion in the years immediately prior to Mr. Reagan's advent had been accelerated by the widespread perception of a rapidly

expanding Soviet global presence; this sense of a dangerous worldwide political trend was as alarming to many as were the adverse aspects of trends in the force balance. Mr. Brzezinski's suggestion that the impulse of the 1970s toward cooperation with the Soviet Union finally perished in the "sands of the Ogaden" is therefore undoubtedly correct. By the same token, however, since 1980 the slackening of the wave of Soviet opportunities to advance has contrasted more and more vividly with the intensification of American official rhetoric, and this contrast is in turn slowly eroding the large majority that had supported Mr. Carter's new posture toward Moscow in his last year. In sum, the very lack of notable new Soviet gains under the Reagan administration has become a factor gradually adding to the pressure on that administration to find ways of reaching agreements with Moscow.

## The Lasting Legacies of the 1970s

Given these changes in the five years of the post-detente era, what has endured from the preceding decade? Which of the leading developments of the period that saw detente's rise and fall are likely to remain with us indefinitely? I shall cite five such developments.

**The Relics and Vestiges of Detente:** First, several new Soviet-American institutional relationships that came into existence in the last decade still remain in being, although their value remains limited by present circumstances.

Perhaps the one with the greatest potential importance for the future is the joint Standing Consultative Commission which since SALT I has dealt with matters of arms control interpretation and compliance. Although now virtually paralyzed, like most Soviet-American forums, by the intensity of mutual distrust and the halt of the arms control process, this institution is an important structural innovation and could be useful to both sides in the future.

In addition, certain other arms control-related venues established as a consequence of initiatives taken in the 1970s continue to exist, notably the MBFR negotiations in Vienna and the talks on "confidence-building measures" in Stockholm. Both of these are now little more than propaganda battlefields--in the case of MBFR, largely because of Soviet unwillingness to acknowledge their existing conventional force

advantages in Europe, and in the case of the Stockholm talks, because of the Soviet preference for generalized mutual pledges with asymmetrical effects on Western interests rather than for concrete and intrusive CBMs. Nevertheless, both of these empty vessels remain available to be filled should the Soviet perspective some day be modified.

Beyond this, an important remnant continues to exist from the network of informal contacts between the United States and the Soviet Union that had enormously expanded in the 1970s. This network has in recent years been constricted by the worsening of the bilateral atmosphere, by the Reagan administration's attempts to impose reciprocity on some mutual contacts, and by certain recent Soviet efforts to tighten security controls over all Western communications and contacts with the Soviet population. In addition, it should be recognized that the effects of informal contacts upon the two countries were always highly asymmetrical, since the Soviet Union was always far more interested in using such contacts to press the Soviet viewpoint upon the American elite than in allowing American views to reach the Soviet policymakers. Nevertheless, the continued existence of some such contacts remains a modest factor making for political stability in the relationship.

Finally, it is noteworthy that one aspect of the Soviet-American trade relationship has endured since the 1970s and has, indeed, become more firmly institutionalized in the post-detente era. This is of course American grain exports to the USSR, evoked in the last decade by the Soviet incremental discovery that Soviet agriculture was unlikely for the foreseeable future to be able to supply the feed needed to expand meat production. A long-term grain agreement negotiated in the Carter administration was partially breached by the Carter boycott imposed in 1980, but has now been succeeded by a "boycott-proof" agreement reached with Moscow by the Reagan administration. Although an extraordinary anomaly in the overall posture of that administration toward the USSR, this permanent grain trade is now also a modest element of stability in the relationship.

**The Two Inherited Soviet Dilemmas:** Secondly, two trends of the 1970s adverse for Soviet interests have endured in the post-detente era to hamper Soviet competitive efforts against the United States.

-- The first of these is the previously-mentioned fact that Soviet encirclement of China has continued to refuel Sino-Soviet hostility and has impelled China to maintain a degree of security association with the United States. The net effect has been to guarantee that a considerable portion of Soviet military efforts continues to be directed against China and away from the United States and its European allies. At the same time, the U.S. association with China, for its part, continues to create a sense of encirclement in much of the Soviet elite, and to feed Soviet bitterness and pugnacity toward the United States. All these mutual, interlocking effects are likely to go on for some time.

-- The other adverse trend of the 1970s that has continued in the 1980s is the malaise in the Soviet economy, the first symptoms of which had originally helped impel the Soviet leadership to seek a remedy in association with the United States. The secular decline in the rate of growth of the Soviet economy--which began to gather speed not long after the Soviets in effect lost hope for an American remedy to this problem in December 1974--today impinges on three major aspects of the Soviet competition with the United States. Soviet economic difficulties render the burden of military spending increasingly onerous, and make the prospect of heightened arms competition with the Reagan administration a grim one. Soviet technological backwardness in most non-military areas of production helps make the Soviet Union a marginal factor in the world economic system dominated by the capitalist industrial powers, and also makes it difficult for the USSR to consolidate some of those Third World gains it initially staked out with security assistance. Finally, as suggested earlier, Soviet economic constraints are apparently increasing the effective burden of supporting the Soviet empire, and may be making Soviet leaders somewhat more cautious about assuming large new burdens for political and strategic reasons in marginal cases.

**The Two Inherited Soviet Achievements:** Finally, two major countervailing trends inaugurated in the 1970s that the Soviets consider highly favorable to their competitive interests against the United States have also endured.

-- First, despite all that has been said thus far, the qualitative change in the late 1970s that saw the Soviet Union's emergence as a much more visible competitor to the United States in more distant portions of the world has not been undone. Despite some ebbing of Soviet fortunes in certain places from the high tide of advance in the last decade, the Soviet geopolitical presence remains much more far-flung than before, and is likely to remain so. The Soviet Union has not been forced to abandon the most important of the new bridgeheads established in the 1970s--in Ethiopia, Aden, Afghanistan and Indochina--and there seems little reason to expect it to do so in this decade. The USSR continues to strive to consolidate these positions, and if possible, incrementally to improve on them.

All of these places, along with the earlier bridgehead established in Cuba, are linked to the gradually growing deployment of Soviet military and naval strength into previously unknown regions, from the South China Sea to the Red Sea to the Khyber Pass to the Gulf of Mexico.[16] The effort to continue this long-term process is in turn linked to very extensive naval and other weapons building programs. Although it is true that in all major respects the Soviet Union's political presence, geopolitical weight and power projection capabilities in distant regions around the world remain inferior to those of the United States, this very fact is continuous incentive to the Soviet leaders to persevere in efforts to build on what was accomplished in the 1970s, as prudent opportunities permit.

These realities seem to ensure that whatever fortunes befall Soviet efforts in the future, the United States and the Soviet Union will remain geopolitically engaged across a broader canvas than was the case before the 1970s, and that this worldwide interaction will remain an essential aspect of the bilateral relationship.

-- Secondly, along with this enlarged global presence, the Soviets thus far appear to retain in the post-detente era the essence of the advances they registered in the last decade in the central strategic and regional nuclear balances. The 1970s was not only the period in which

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[16]Symbolic, in this regard, was the arrival of Badger medium bombers at Cam Ranh Bay in November 1983.

the Soviet Union attained what is generally termed a "robust" overall parity with the United States in strategic nuclear capabilities, but also the period in which the USSR established and enlarged an important advantage in theater nuclear capabilities in both Europe and Asia. All three of these changes have endured after 1980, and all seem likely to remain for a long time. Although the Soviets are undoubtedly concerned at the prospect that the United States will attempt to use its technological advantages to undo the Soviet central strategic gains of the 1970s, they seem grimly determined to make every sacrifice necessary to prevent this from happening. In Europe, despite the violent Soviet objections to the limited INF deployments begun in 1983, the Soviets have every reason to believe that they will retain a considerable advantage in intermediate-range nuclear delivery capability even after these deployments are completed. In Asia, where the Soviet nuclear advantage has always been much greater, the Soviet SS-20 building program accelerated since 1983 appears designed to guarantee to the USSR a decisive theater nuclear edge whatever contingencies may emerge in future Chinese or American deployments.

These present realities, which reflect the Soviet sense of what is required in each of the three spheres to adequately protect Soviet security, seem to guarantee continued tension between the Soviet Union and those of its adversaries--notably the United States and China--who find this degree of Soviet insurance unacceptable and threatening. Beyond this, the evident Soviet desire to retain simultaneously all three existing sets of nuclear force ratios is likely to come into increasing conflict with the exigencies of a revived arms control process, particularly if the superpowers move to merge negotiations on central and regional systems.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The panorama surveyed in this paper suggests the following conclusions:

1. Neither the atmosphere of 1972 nor that of 1984 is "normal" for the Soviet-American relationship. That relationship is likely to be extremely competitive for the foreseeable future, and there is little ground for hope that bilateral cooperation can diminish that competition

to secondary importance or make the relationship, on the whole, a "friendly" one, as was being suggested in 1972. This generalization will probably hold true regardless of the personalities who lead the United States and the Soviet Union over the rest of this decade. This is essentially an adversarial relationship, and this underlying reality is probably not subject to change by U.S. policy. At the same time, the degree of tension seen in the last few years is highly abnormal and untypical, and can possibly be significantly reduced. Whether this will in fact happen will depend upon the interplay of many variables, some of which can indeed be affected by the U.S. posture and negotiating position, but some of which will be beyond the control of any American government.

2. The most important underlying cause of the present tension is not the behavior of the Reagan administration, although this can indeed be criticized on several grounds, but rather the assertive dynamism of the Soviet regime striving to press outward on the world scene, and the associated peculiar Soviet view of the military requirements essential to Soviet security. Both of these factors are internally generated by a combination of historical, geopolitical, and ideological considerations. These two central aspects of Soviet behavior were the most important causes, although not the only ones, of the destruction of detente in the 1970s and the sea-change in American public opinion that helped bring the Reagan administration to power.

3. Consequently, although the outcome of the November 1984 American election may have some effect on the Soviet-American atmosphere over the rest of this decade, the ultimate outcome of the prolonged leadership succession struggle that has been going on in Moscow since 1982 will probably have a much greater effect. Given the virtual certainty of continued intense competition between the superpowers in the world arena, much will depend upon whether personalities come to the fore in the Soviet leadership who are willing to modify the past Soviet view of acceptable geopolitical compromise, a view that proved fundamentally unacceptable to the majority in both American political parties in the last decade.

4. Although the content of the Soviet-American arms control agreements concluded in the 1970s appears, on balance, to have played at best only a marginal role in restraining strategic nuclear competition, the arms control *process*--the ritual sequence of negotiate-sign-negotiate--appears to have played a much larger role as a talisman of stability for the multitudes. Whereas the implications of the agreements reached became a matter of increasing disputation within the U.S. elite, the fact that agreements were being reached remained the essential matter for millions in the United States and in the West who had neither knowledge of nor interest in the minutiae of what was being disputed. The effective end, for the time being, of this cycle of negotiation--signalled by the U.S. failure to ratify SALT II at the close of the 1970s and then confirmed by the Soviet walkout from negotiations four years later--was thus a traumatic political event of major proportions, quite apart from the concrete consequences for the strategic balance. This change, the most important one produced by the demise of detente, is increasingly unacceptable to the American consensus. The Reagan administration is therefore likely to come under growing domestic pressure in its second term to reach some agreement in new talks with the USSR.

5. At the same time, the political viability of any nuclear negotiations that the two powers may undertake in the future will always remain highly vulnerable to the political consequences of a successful advance by one of the parties at the expense of the other in the world arena. In the United States, this generalization appears especially likely to be true, and to be relatively independent of the preferences of any particular American government. Regardless of the degree of urgency attributed to arms control and the desire of part of the U.S. elite to protect this process at almost any cost, no American nuclear agreement with the Soviet Union, whatever its terms, would be likely to be ratified in the next few years if the USSR in the same period somehow found it possible, for example, to move into dominant influence over the government of Pakistan or that of Iran. Even if linkage is formally excluded from the negotiating process, it is always likely to exercise a tacit but decisive role in the confirmation process. All major

Soviet-American bilateral negotiations should therefore be understood to have an unstated global political aspect.

6. No major such Soviet geopolitical advances have in fact occurred since 1980. This state of relative Soviet quiescence, however, appears to stem much more from happenstance than from Soviet intention, and could change without notice at any time. Although the Soviet leaders feel somewhat burdened by their war in Afghanistan, and are also likely to be somewhat reluctant to assume major new economic burdens for the sake of new Third World clients, there is still no evidence, and little reason to believe, that they are willing to accept the status quo in the overall division of political forces in the world, which still greatly favors the United States. They therefore continue to await major new geopolitical opportunities, and they are unlikely to be willing to sacrifice one, should one present itself at acceptable risk, for the sake of any bilateral agreement with the United States. In addition to all other impediments, therefore, the Soviet-American relationship will always be vulnerable to independent factors that may unexpectedly open avenues of Soviet opportunity.