
POWER AND PROTEST

GLOBAL REVOLUTION AND THE RISE OF DETENTE

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INTRODUCTION

The 1960s were years of unrest: students demonstrated in streets across the United States and Western Europe, dissidents agitated for more freedom in the Soviet Union, and—most astonishing of all—young “Red Guards” created chaos throughout China as part of a “Cultural Revolution.” Events in China were certainly unique, especially in that the chairman of the ruling Communist Party, Mao Zedong, manipulated the masses who attacked established authorities. No Western or Soviet leader served as an equivalent inspiration for protesting citizens.

China and the other great powers did, however, share one important similarity in their respective domestic upheavals. Leaders in each state had to accommodate themselves to a stalemated Cold War world that restricted policy flexibility. Protests during the 1960s—controlled from above in China, more independent in Europe and America—attempted to escape the limits of the post-1945 “long peace” between the largest communist and capitalist states.¹

The mechanisms of dissent differed in each society, but internal unrest threatened the leadership in nearly every country—including China. In July 1967 Mao had to depart in haste from the industrial city of Wuhan, fearful that the domestic upheaval he had unleashed imperiled his personal security. Soon thereafter the chairman began to warn against “extreme anarchism.”²

Like Mao less than a year earlier, in late May 1968 French President Charles de Gaulle whisked his wife away from turmoil in Paris. After an unplanned helicopter trip across the West German border, de Gaulle lamented the “total paralysis” of his government. Popular protests throughout France left the president confounded by the evidence that he was, by his own admission, “not in charge of anything any more.”³

In West Germany, where de Gaulle had sought temporary haven, popular unrest in 1968 created similar difficulties for leaders. Foreign Minister Willy Brandt—who became chancellor a year later—despaired that “young people in many of our countries do not understand why we, the older ones, cannot cope with the problems of [our] age.” Brandt called for a period of “reason” to control “dangerous tensions” within society.⁴

States; the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported to President Lyndon Johnson that "disidence, involving students and non-students alike, is a world-wide phenomenon." On all continents organized "militants" were challenging leaders. Protesters of the sort described by the CIA even placed the White House under siege. One aide remembers that the president "could not go anywhere . . . that was disastrous."⁵

Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, labeled these conditions a "war at home." He spoke in his inaugural address of a "long night" for the "American spirit." During the wee hours of 9 May 1970 this "long night" produced a bizarre moment. Accompanied only by his valet, Nixon confronted a group of antiwar protesters encamped around the Lincoln Memorial. He attempted to convince the skeptical audience that he shared their ideals but could not avoid "extremely unpopular" policies. The president's late-night efforts proved futile; protests continued across the nation.⁶

Despite severe Soviet restrictions on dissent, leaders in Moscow also confronted a domestic struggle during the late 1960s. General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev received a KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) report in November 1968 concerning "negative processes" and "harmful developments among our youth." The word "opposition" had become "something students find appealing." A young soldier's failed attempt to shoot Brezhnev in January 1969 made the threat of internal violence tangible for the Soviet leader.⁷

The widespread unrest of the 1960s had a direct effect on each state's foreign policy. The reverse was also true: relations among the most powerful nations inflamed domestic contention. Social movements and diplomacy during this period interacted with one another across a broad international terrain. This book narrates and explains these important interactions between peoples, cultures, and governments.

The period of "détente" at the end of the 1960s reflected traditional balance of power considerations, as other authors have argued.⁸ The following chapters describe how it also grew from a common urge for stability among leaders under attack at home. The diplomatic compromises and domestic pressures that accompanied détente reflected the deepening anxieties of government officials. Détente, in this sense, had a social origin that scholars have largely neglected. It was a convergent response to disorder among the great powers.

I begin by describing what I call the "strains of nuclear destruction." Then nonnuclear warheads and intercontinental missiles greatly expanded the de-

structive capabilities of the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s. In fact these weapons were so powerful that they were useless. During a series of crises involving Berlin, the Taiwan Strait, and Cuba, leaders recognized that they had to accept permanent stalemate rather than risk a mutually suicidal nuclear exchange. Strategic balance stabilized American-Soviet relations, but it created noticeable discomfort for those who suffered from enforced Cold War divisions—particularly the citizens of Europe. West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer began in the early 1960s to seek mechanisms for breaking the nuclear logjam through arms control agreements, increased East-West trade, and more frequent cultural exchanges across the Berlin Wall. Domestic groups in the United States and Western Europe also agitated for disarmament measures during this period.

Charles de Gaulle and Mao Zedong expanded on Adenauer's efforts to transcend Cold War divisions. The two men cultivated "charismatic" power by departing from existing routines, institutions, and alliances. In January 1964 they opened official relations between their states, symbolizing a decisive break with the bipolar structure of great-power competition. In their rhetoric de Gaulle and Mao drew on a shared image of revolution that attracted popular support from its promises of independence and national greatness. The energies the two leaders mobilized in their respective societies contributed to dramatic programs—French and Chinese nuclear development and the Chinese Great Leap Forward—but they ultimately produced rising expectations that neither leader could fulfill. The popular hopes encouraged by charismatic figures in France and China contributed to disillusion, anger, and confusion among citizens in the 1960s.

Popular expectations coalesced around what I call an "international language of dissent." As a consequence of the post-World War II baby boom, each of the great powers experienced a large growth in its young population. Expanded institutions of higher education, designed to nurture more productive and loyal citizens, empowered a sizable group of potential dissidents. A series of authors—including John Kenneth Galbraith, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Wu Han, and Herbert Marcuse—provided literate and disillusioned citizens with new ways of expressing their discontent. These writers did not create the unrest of the 1960s. They offered simple arguments and appealing slogans that readers could understand and organize around. Mao Zedong was unique among political leaders in his attempt to kidnap dissident language for his own purposes through a self-proclaimed Cultural Revolution.

Dissident activities—especially the American civil rights movement—preceded the Vietnam War. Ironically, public unrest during the early 1960s motivated policymakers in Washington to pursue a more aggressive program of

foreign intervention. Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson attempted to build popular support for their leadership by increasing the nation's commitment to industrial development and communist containment overseas. Kennedy's calls for a "new frontier" extolled the virtues and glories of meddling in faraway lands.

Indochina, in particular, appeared to be a safe showcase for America's economic and political capabilities. It was distant from the most dangerous areas of Cold War conflict—Europe, the Caribbean, and the Taiwan Strait. From the American perspective, impoverished villagers wanted tutelage in developing a modern economy and a democratic society. Nationalist resistance, corruption in South Vietnam, and communist assistance to local forces undetermined these aims. Evidence of American brutalities and recurrent military setbacks triggered a rapid rise in antiwar protests. Those inspired by the "new frontier" were now horrified at the destruction it had wrought. Escalating warfare in Southeast Asia deepened domestic turmoil in the United States and Western Europe.

Attempts to quell domestic discontent through foreign intervention were profoundly self-defeating. As a consequence of the Vietnam War, President Johnson lost control of his political agenda. He became isolated from an agitated American public. Johnson painfully reconsidered his mistaken commitment to Indochina at the end of his term in office, but this long-awaited turnaround came after he had profoundly weakened the moral authority of the presidency.

The dissident impulses of the early 1960s and the public outrage against the Vietnam War contributed to a truly "global disruption" in 1968. Domestic violence convulsed urban communities in each of the great powers as men and women revolted against state institutions. Besieged and physically threatened, leaders turned their attention away from foreign affairs to more pressing difficulties at home. Events in 1968 precipitated a crisis of political authority for the most powerful national figures.

Governments could no longer assume that they commanded legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens. Local and national authorities frequently resorted to force against protesters. Police power assured regime continuity, but it also deepened resentment among many domestic groups. Politics became noticeably more contentious for the leaders of the largest states.

This was the point, after 1968, when detente among the great powers took shape. Willy Brandt used his position as West German foreign minister, and later chancellor, to push for new agreements among leaders that would replace Cold War competition with economic and social collaboration. This was Brandt's "Ostpolitik." He accepted the political status quo in Europe,

and worked to use communist authority in the East for his own purposes. Through increased trade and human contact across the Berlin Wall, Brandt sought to make national division appear more "normal." In the process, Brandt condemned domestic critics for jeopardizing East-West cooperation.

President Richard Nixon applied similar techniques for broader purposes. He offered both the Soviet Union and China cooperative overtures in trade and political recognition. In return he sought their assistance in bringing the Vietnam War to an end. Like Brandt, Nixon used the prospects of great-power cooperation to argue that his opponents threatened international peace. The president and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, made secrecy a central organizing principle for their leadership, isolating their deliberations from intrusion by the enemies they feared most—domestic bureaucrats, journalists, and critics.

Nixon deserves praise for intelligently playing the Soviet Union and China against each other to America's gain. His "triangular diplomacy" opened new avenues for policy flexibility in what had become a stalemated bipolar world. In this sense, Nixon learned a lot from de Gaulle and Mao. Unfortunately, he lacked their charisma. The secrecy and maneuvering of his administration isolated domestic opponents, without ever reintegrating them into the political system. Many protesters turned away from politics entirely in the next decade.

As detente alienated citizens, it offered communist leaders what they craved most: Western recognition of their legitimacy. Regimes that did not possess a popular base at home exploited connections with the United States, West Germany, and France to bolster their domestic standing. Summit conferences made government officials look strong and powerful. Brezhnev and Mao used detente to condemn their internal critics for threatening international peace and the dignity of the state.

Across North America, Europe, and Asia, detente was a profoundly conservative response to internal disorder. It sacrificed domestic reform for the sake of international stability. Leaders abandoned their hopes for political change in order to smother the challenges they faced at home. The Cold War became less volatile as a consequence of detente, but it also grew more permanent. Although domestic critics posed fewer immediate threats to established authority after the 1960s, they became more isolated from government than before. International collaboration among leaders furthered international disillusion among citizens. To this day, large segments of each nation's population remain politically alienated as a consequence of detente.

This is a story of Cold War stalemate in the early 1960s, a crescendo of global protest, and conservative reaction at the end of the decade. Although

events varied greatly across societies, they followed a general pattern that I explain in the following chapters. International history of this sort not only crosses national boundaries; it also connects the world of politics and diplomacy with social and cultural experiences. Institutions and inherited conditions created global difficulties that elicited a series of comparable responses. The 1960s were filled with colorful and tragic personalities who, as Karl Marx predicted, made history, but not as they wished.

THE STRAINS OF NUCLEAR DESTRUCTION

Nuclear weapons changed the military landscape after World War II. Their explosive power could destroy cities, and even entire countries, in short order. Amidst widespread nuclear destruction, human civilization might not survive another total war between the great powers. War, in this sense, had become more nearly "absolute" than ever before.¹

As they embodied the potential future consequences of war, nuclear weapons also bolstered the prestige of the two dominant countries after World War II—the United States and the Soviet Union. The leaders of these governments exercised military influence across the globe. They could threaten, if they so desired, to destroy entire nations unilaterally. More significant, the rapid deployment of nuclear power in the late 1940s and early 1950s gave an indication of the extraordinary accomplishments the United States and the Soviet Union could produce when they mobilized their respective scientific, military, and human resources. Nuclear weapons were indeed symbols of national greatness.

Threats of destruction and promises of greatness went hand in hand. They constituted the central contradiction of the nuclear revolution. Nuclear arsenals made the United States and the Soviet Union "superpowers" in the 1950s, but they did not enhance the usable strength of either nation. Leaders soon recognized that they could not exploit their nuclear power to secure political dominance of distant territories. Land conquered by nuclear force would not serve anyone's purposes, contaminating occupier and occupied alike. The destructive power of nuclear weapons exceeded any proportional definition of political aims. As a consequence, the most powerful states after World War II quickly lost the will to use armed conflict against each other for the "pursuit of policy by other means."²

The years 1958–1963 stand as a critical juncture in the history of the nuclear world. The United States and the Soviet Union struggled to reconcile their political aims with the risks posed by developments in thermonuclear

the allegiance of many citizens. The legitimacy and prestige that had made the nation-state the accepted form of political organization for at least three centuries now confronted an unprecedented number of detractors. Leaders could no longer count on persuading the population at home to support their programs. Most often, they could expect the opposite from skeptical citizens. Leaders now had to formulate policy *against* their constituents.

Great-power politics after 1968 operated under a self-conscious siege mentality that drove Charles de Gaulle, Lyndon Johnson, and others from office. The strongest states struggled to maintain their domestic cohesion. Men such as Leonid Brezhnev and Mao Zedong no longer commanded the public respect they demanded. To preserve their personal authority and the general strength of their states, policy-makers had to find new sources of power away from home. This endeavor became the foundation for what contemporaries called the politics of "detente."

6 THE DIPLOMACY AND DOMESTIC POLITICS OF DETENTE

The distinction between foreign and domestic politics is artificial. During the 1960s nuclear stalemate, alliance disputes, and the Vietnam War were issues of domestic, as well as foreign, policy. Excessive institutional growth, intellectual criticism, and public protest had international, in addition to obvious internal, repercussions. Social and cultural influences created tectonic shifts across frontiers, even in the largely "closed" lands of the Soviet Union and China. As the sources of international stalemate tightened and the evidence of transnational social unrest mounted, leaders in all the major states became aware of their precarious hold on power. Cold War antagonists now unexpectedly recognized their interdependence. Not only could they virtually annihilate one another; they also shared difficulties in maintaining basic order within their boundaries.

Policy-makers cooperated to protect their authority against a wide range of internal challengers. Detente was, in this sense, a direct reaction to the "global disruption" of 1968. From 1969 through 1972 leaders in each of the major states attempted to reconstruct order from the international "top" down to the domestic "bottom." They used agreement with foreign adversaries to contain increasingly virulent internal pressures. They used promises of international peace to deflect attention from domestic difficulties and to free their resources for repressive measures. Cooperation among the great powers reinforced established authorities.

Despite the chaos on the streets, the years after 1968 witnessed *no* significant institutional change in any of the major states. The politics of this period were profoundly conservative. At its core, detente was a mechanism for domestic fortification.

Like the protesters around them, leaders during the late 1960s questioned many of the inherited assumptions about hostility between capitalist and

communist states. New domestic challengers made old international adversaries seem more benign. After two decades of Cold War rivalry, policymakers felt that they understood their foreign enemies and could rely on their consistency and pragmatism. They were known quantities.

One could not say the same of the protesters. They appeared uncompromising, unpredictable, and unorganized. For leaders accustomed to the cautious world of diplomacy, dealing with radical critics posed a series of difficulties for which they were poorly prepared. State sovereignty made questions of national leadership relatively clear. The spontaneity of dissident activity, in contrast, offered few broadly representative figures with whom one could negotiate. Fragmented domestic authority made effective compromise and consensus-building virtually impossible.

State elites cooperated with their counterparts who faced similar domestic difficulties. They worked to sustain the existing structures of domestic and international authority—now stripped of much of their ideological baggage—in the interest of stability. Jetisoning long-standing policies—such as “nonrecognition” between the two Germans and between the United States and China—the great powers now affirmed one another’s legitimacy as sovereign states.

Nuclear arsenals and other military facilities, constructed because governments had refused to coexist peacefully, remained in place. In many instances—especially with regard to strategic striking forces—Cold War capabilities continued to grow despite the new amity between leaders. Attitudes among elites changed, but state institutions stagnated. As a result, the Cold War did not end in the 1960s, as some suggest it should have. Its basic structures—military and political—guaranteed a predictable status quo that led to the face of an uncertain future. Detente emphasized continuity over change, and stability over reform. Detente “normalized” the Cold War instead of replacing it with something better.

Politicians were profoundly insecure and fearful that the forces of history had aligned against them. Secrecy has always played an important role in the relations among governments, but leaders now became obsessive about shielding their activities from their citizens, their domestic bureaucracies, and even their chosen advisers. The people at home were the greatest perceived threat to prudent policy.¹

Idealistic protesters grew disillusioned with the impediments to reform. By the late 1960s they recognized that far-reaching change would not come from a quick burst of activity. The radicals had many effective instigators, but few figures capable of constructing a real alternative to contemporary politics. Students could shut down universities and other institutions, but they could not operate them on their own. Protesters lacked the resources,

unity, and clarity of purpose necessary to build a viable replacement for the existing political order. Criticism and protest alone produced widespread frustration.

Now more cynical than idealistic, dissidents learned to live under what they perceived as illegitimate—or at least deeply flawed—governments. Many turned away from their former political activism to a self-imposed isolation from what they saw as the corrupt world of state power. Social criticism found expression in what one observer called “new types of community” formed among educated men and women who left the city streets for life in self-governing communes and artistic colonies. In communist societies, citizens often totally withdrew from official activities, creating their own isolated groups. The majority of former protesters did not choose these alternative communities. Instead, they adjusted themselves to existing circumstances by either confining their dissident instincts to thought or changing their ideas to make a virtue of political necessity.²

All these responses furthered social fragmentation. Several scholars have pointed to a dramatic decline in connections among citizens—“social capital”—beginning in the late 1960s. Educated men and women now devoted far less time to public activism than before. Groups within society became smaller and more isolated from one another. Social relations grew noticeably more uncivil.³

The trends toward “countercultural” and “antipolitical” behavior that many writers have identified were the unintended consequences of detente. Leaders isolated policymaking from public accountability. They used secrecy, manipulation, and lies to accomplish this end. Protesters furthered this process of public alienation by refusing to engage in the hard work of daily compromise required for effective reform. Too many radicals rejected institutional change altogether because their revolution had failed. Isolated elite politics and widespread disengagement in the 1970s replaced the mass politics and public protests of the 1960s. This was detente’s social legacy.⁴

If one defines national power in broad terms—including economic productivity, technological innovation, cultural attractiveness, and military capabilities—the United States was always predominant after 1945. By the late 1960s, however, the Soviet Union possessed a formidable quantity of nuclear weapons, enough to destroy the United States swiftly and completely. China had also become a nuclear power, capable of inflicting horrific damage throughout Asia. France and Great Britain possessed modest nuclear arsenals of their own.

Under these circumstances, with war among the great powers guarantee-

ing almost complete annihilation, cooperation made sense. Large-scale conflict had become too costly. The dominant states avoided dangerous provocations—such as the Cuban missile crisis—and worked together for their common survival. The *balance of power*, in this context, created a stable international equilibrium. This is the traditional interpretation of the origins of detente.⁵

Balance-of-power explanations focus too narrowly on nuclear weapons. Leaders in the late 1960s worried more about domestic unrest than about nuclear war. They formulated foreign policy as a barrier against escalating internal turmoil. Great-power cooperation reduced the public tensions fueled by ideological conflict. Cold War antagonists now criticized each other less often, reduced their support for subversives, and more readily ignored their adversaries' acts of repression. Detente had a powerful domestic component that exceeded a mere agreement to avoid nuclear armageddon.

Responding to both domestic and international pressures in the late 1960s, leaders pursued what I call a *balance of order*. This involved a desperate attempt to preserve authority under siege. It emphasized stability over change, repression over reform. It was less about accepting nuclear parity than about manipulating political institutions to isolate and contain a variety of nontraditional challengers. Detente brought together an international array of threatened figures who coordinated their forces to counterbalance the sources of disorder within their societies.

The "peace" created by detente entrenched the social and political status quo. Cooperation among the great powers became a substitute for both domestic and international reform. It served as a balance against what policymakers saw as unreasonable public expectations. Diplomatic arrangements made war less likely, but they also froze most of the initial sources of antagonism in place. These circumstances could never provide a foundation for long-term harmony among states and peoples. The profound shortcomings of detente were evident in its immediate origins.⁶

■ The West German Origins of Detente

In July 1963 West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt and his close aide Egon Bahr attended a conference of notables in a little-known location outside Munich, the Tutzing Christian Academy, conscious that Cold War politics had reached a dead end. Like Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, they found American policy regarding the future of the two Germans unsatisfactory. In addition to the nuclear dangers that worried the long-serving leader of the Federal Republic, Brandt and Bahr recognized emerging domestic pressures for policy change.

Brandt praised the chancellor's recent overtures to the Soviet Union. He called not only for more of the same, but also for creative measures aimed at improving living conditions in Central Europe. "There is no hope for us," Brandt warned, "if there is no change." Germans must "break through the frozen front between East and West." Progress required peaceful diplomacy coupled with a "dynamic transformation."⁷

Brandt argued for a closer integration of domestic and foreign policy. Openness to East Germany, especially through economic relations and human contacts, would undercut the enforced division in Central Europe. This assessment followed from what Brandt called the trends toward a "decentration of power" away from the traditional centers that had managed affairs on the continent since World War II. As he affirmed the importance of Bonn's partnership with Washington and the West European capitals, Brandt argued that improved relations with the East must stand and fall on the actions of German citizens, mobilized for the cause of peace and freedom. Grassroots overtures had now become the "real test for German foreign policy." Bonn had a "duty" to sponsor richer and more diverse connections across the Berlin Wall.⁸

Egon Bahr elaborated on Brandt's general pronouncements. He emphasized the importance of "recognizing the other side's interests." "The [East German] zone must be transformed," Bahr explained, "with the consent of the Soviets." Cold War adversaries had to respect one another's fundamental security concerns. Mutual recognition between states would allow nongovernmental groups to create new connections, improve living conditions, and, ultimately, eliminate national divisions. Bahr advocated an increase in "interzonal trade" between East and West. Not only would West German products improve the lives of consumers in the Soviet bloc; they would also create sources of dialogue and common interest. Trade would break down many of the barriers that the Federal Republic's stubborn policy of isolating the East—the so-called Hallstein Doctrine—appeared to reinforce. Economic exchange could operate with Soviet approval to build bonds between people in separated states.⁹

If military conflict had stalemated in an era of nuclear weapons, human interactions through trade promised a more flexible avenue for policy influence. As the strongest and most dynamic economy in Europe, the Federal Republic could offer Soviet-bloc leaders and their citizens many attractive consumer products in return for greater access to their societies. Instead of simply reinforcing the status quo through strategic cooperation, trade would allow West Germans to work with their Eastern counterparts for liberal, anti-communist purposes. According to this vision, Bonn would induce the Kremlin and its satellites to dig their own grave.

West German politicians began to use the term *Ospolitik* for this proposed departure from previous Cold War policies. Instead of trying to force change through strength, Bahr argued that West Germany should encourage "change through rapprochement." Social and economic engagement would replace enforced division and mutual deterrence. Bonn had to encourage some risky contacts and concessions to the Soviet Union. Bahr and Brandt believed that there was no alternative in the pursuit of German reunification.¹⁰

The West Berlin mayor and his assistant pursued this vision with remarkable consistency during the 1960s. In the months before the Tutzung Conference, Brandt and Bahr initiated a series of secret contacts with Soviet diplomats, aimed at creating opportunities for citizens to travel across the Berlin Wall. After meeting in early 1963 with Victor Belezki, a representative from Moscow's embassy to East Berlin, Bahr reported to the mayor that the Soviets appeared to want a "modus vivendi" that would prevent future crises. They accepted tentative proposals for more trade and human interaction between East and West.¹¹

In December 1963 the East German government, responding to pressures from Moscow, issued the first travel passes since the construction of the Berlin Wall, allowing West German citizens to visit their relatives in the East. Bahr called this a "very interesting example" of the accomplishments possible from informal diplomatic contacts and increased activism within the Federal Republic. He hoped it marked the first step on a "long road" to "friendship" between states and peoples divided by the Cold War.¹²

Bahr employed the German equivalent for the term *detente*—*Entspannung*—in a June 1964 speech delivered at the University of Hamburg. "The only hope for solving the German question," he explained, "is to push forth the development of detente." There were "no guarantees" that the Soviets and East Germans will allow more travel passes and other East-West contacts in the future, he warned, "but there is a chance, and we do not have any other alternatives."¹³

Ludwig Erhard, Konrad Adenauer's successor as chancellor, generally opposed any rapprochement with the East. Pressures from Brandt, Bahr, and other West German citizens, however, led him to make some guarded overtures, especially in the area of trade. Erhard admitted in late 1964 that Bonn must make it evident that "German reunification in peace and freedom also serves Soviet interests." Without more East-West contacts, the Federal Republic could not conduct what Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder called an "active, daily, direct pursuit of reunification."¹⁴

Erhard concluded bilateral trade protocols with Poland, Rumania, Hun-

gary, and Bulgaria. Bonn did not maintain embassies in the other East European states, but West Germany now established economic missions throughout the region as points of contact between ministers, business people, and even some ordinary citizens. In order to provide the Soviet-bloc states with the hard currency they needed to purchase West German products, Erhard's government began to offer generous credits labeled "development aid." Trade and aid, the foreign ministry explained, helped the cause of freedom and self-determination without jeopardizing security or stability.¹⁵

By 1966 economic and person-to-person contacts with the East dominated Erhard's foreign policy. Washington had become distracted with the war in Vietnam, and President Johnson—despite his advocacy of "building bridges" between Eastern and Western Europe—appeared uninterested in European affairs.¹⁶ France and other Western states opened their own trade links with the East, jeopardizing West Germany's ability to control the future development of *Ospolitik*. Members of the Foreign Ministry began to fear that de Gaulle might build such strong connections with the communist states that East-West reconciliation would bypass Bonn. In this nightmarish scenario, German hopes for reunification would get lost once again in the maneuvers of other states. Erhard had to pursue more aggressive overtures to the East, as Brandt and Bahr continued to advise.¹⁷

In March 1966 West Germany issued a "Peace Note," addressed to the Soviet Union and its East European allies. Rejecting Cold War divisions in Central Europe, the document proclaimed that

the German people . . . consider it their greatest national task to remove the partition of Germany under which they have suffered for many years . . . The German people would be prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of their unification . . . The German people desire to live on good terms with all, including their East European neighbors. Hence the Federal Government has been trying in various ways to improve relations with the states and peoples of Eastern Europe.¹⁸

Erhard's commitment to "make sacrifices" for reunification marked the triumph of Brandt and Bahr's vision. The West German Foreign Ministry admitted that while the Cold War had reached a stalemate in Central Europe, the citizens on both sides of the Berlin Wall had grown visibly "restless," living with the painful division of their nation. Domestic pressures for broader East-West connections—beyond the diplomacy of the Adenauer years and the trade of Erhard's tenure—had "sharpened" the need for a more active and perhaps riskier *Ospolitik*. The Peace Note indicated an important turn

in West German foreign policy to embrace Bahr's call for "change through reconciliation."¹⁹

In December a new West German "Grand Coalition" government formed between the two dominant parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). It made improved relations with the Federal Republic's Eastern neighbors one of its most prominent aims. The "Declaration of the Grand Coalition" explained that the German people "want reconciliation with Poland whose sorrowful history we have not forgotten and whose desire ultimately to live in a territory with secure boundaries we now . . . understand better than in former times." "The German people also wish," the declaration continued, "to come to an understanding with Czechoslovakia."²⁰

As foreign minister for the Grand Coalition, Brandt worked to create better state-to-state relations between the Federal Republic and its Eastern neighbors. He also sponsored expanded economic and person-to-person contacts for the sake of transcending the "sterility" of great-power politics. Central Europe, he proclaimed, must become a "European zone of detente," characterized by nuclear disarmament in the region, freer movement of citizens, and a "normalization" of borders—even those between the two German states.²¹

Brandt and Bahr believed that a true detente required greater independence from external powers and inherited policy assumptions. Given the opportunity, the citizens of the two Germanys would surely create living conditions far better than those enforced by Cold War rivalries. In the long run, reunification required much deeper coordination between leaders and publics. "Foreign policy," Bahr explained, "begins with domestic policy."²²

Brandt felt that he could provide this connection, but the politics of the Grand Coalition constrained his options.²³ The CDU remained deeply suspicious of the states in the East. Both Brandt and Bahr criticized the conservative inclinations of their coalition partners. When they took over as the leaders of West Germany in October 1969, however, they also abandoned much of their optimism about the reconciliation of citizens in the East and West. After the domestic upheavals of 1968 even the earliest and most progressive advocates of detente pursued conservative policies.

As early as 1966, Egon Bahr had warned of a crisis within the Federal Republic. "Twenty-one years after the end of the war," he wrote Willy Brandt, "there exists a new generation." Bahr worried about rising "extremism on the right" and "extremism on the left." Ostpolitik offered the opportunity for

creating a new political middle between right and left, but it also risked unleashing unrealistic public expectations. Domestic contention could jeopardize the stability required for any durable overtures to the East.²⁴

This was exactly the difficulty that Brandt and Bahr confronted at the end of the decade. Their concept of Ostpolitik called for broader public connections between citizens in the East and West. Domestic radicalism in the Federal Republic and other European states, however, made leaders fear that young people, when given opportunities for more freedom and movement, would create new sources of disorder and conflict. The student protests throughout West Germany indicated that if not properly managed, "change through reconciliation" between societies could spark increased violence.²⁵

Speaking to a group of fellow politicians in September 1968, two weeks after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, Brandt made this very point. "Young people in many of our countries," he lamented, "do not understand why we, the older ones, cannot cope with the problems of [our] age." Counseling against extensive public criticism of Soviet intervention in Prague or America's war in Vietnam, Brandt argued that leaders had to control "dangerous tensions" through pragmatism and "reason"—two qualities frequently absent from the naive behavior of protesters. Policymakers needed to temper popular urges for well-intentioned but reckless political change.²⁶

In contrast to protesters in West Germany, Brandt refrained from any significant condemnation of the foreign policies pursued by Moscow and Washington during the late 1960s. He feared that criticism of the superpowers would create new barriers to East-West reconciliation. West Germany pursued a more independent foreign policy than ever before, but Brandt remained acutely aware that the functioning of Ostpolitik was dependent on the consent of the more powerful governments—the Soviet Union and the United States—that continued to dominate the European continent.²⁷

This was an accurate strategic assessment, but it alienated many of Ostpolitik's supporters in the Federal Republic. Brandt's caution appeared to perpetuate the great-power politics of the Cold War. Once again, it seemed that the people of Central Europe had to sacrifice their interests for the sake of international stability. Once again, leaders accepted repression in Europe, instead of promoting resistance and change.

West German youths who traveled to the Soviet bloc as participants in a series of cultural-exchange programs supported by Brandt, became his most vocal critics. They observed the repressive conditions in the East, but they also imbibed the condemnations of political leaders circulating among protesters in the West. During one meeting between students from the two

Germanys in East Berlin, speakers from both sides called for more attention to "our freedom," allegedly smothered by domestic institutions, East and West. Disparaging all German leaders, they demanded that power devolve from national figures to student groups. Other meetings of Eastern and Western students inspired discussions about the alleged absence of moral values in politics on both sides of the Berlin Wall.²⁸

By 1969 Ostpolitik had produced some important convergences between East and West, as Brandt hoped, but in a form he found most threatening. Radicalized by protest movements in their respective states, students now formed East-West networks of criticism against established authority. Citizens traveling from the Federal Republic to the East curiously neglected the issue of reunification for discussions about what many called a common "system" of repression throughout Europe. Peace and national unity would come, one group of Eastern and Western students proclaimed, when "existing communists and capitalists can meet one another on the socialist road." Another group explicitly condemned the great powers for prolonging the Cold War. They called for grassroots, all-German answers to political and social problems that state leaders, including Brandt, appeared unable to solve.²⁹

Accompanied by the spread of radicalism throughout Europe, Ostpolitik contributed to growing domestic upheaval within the two Germanys. Events followed the earlier pattern of educational expansion and proliferating dissent. East-West connections supported by Brandt and Bahr for the purpose of improving internal conditions had the opposite effect. With more knowledge and human contact, Germans on both sides of the Berlin Wall grew more restive, disorderly, and violent. Increased interaction between the two German states did not foster reconciliation and reunification, as Brandt and Bahr had hoped. Instead, Ostpolitik contributed to a set of new domestic dangers for the future of the Federal Republic.

The members of the CDU who had only reluctantly embraced Ostpolitik in the 1960s took advantage of Soviet aggression in Czechoslovakia and domestic unrest in the Federal Republic to criticize Brandt's policies. Rainer Barzel and Franz-Josef Strauss (the latter from the CDU's sister party, the Christian Social Union) claimed that concessions to Moscow would legitimize Soviet tyranny in the East and prevent German reunification. They accused Brandt of undermining the stability of the Federal Republic by advocating an overtly optimistic foreign policy. The chancellor did too little for Ostpolitik in the eyes of social activists, but he was reviled by the CDU for doing too much.³⁰

Embattled on both the political left and right at home, Brandt and Bahr

shifted gears. Late 1969 marks the point when they turned their overtures to the East against their own citizens. As chancellor, Brandt made Ostpolitik more elitist, centralized, and secret, emphasizing political control and speed at the expense of public deliberation and debate. Through Bahr, Brandt personalized his foreign policy to prevent interference from both established bureaucracies and allegedly irresponsible domestic groups. One historian has compared Bahr to a "greyhound" who moved so quickly in 1969 and 1970 that he left his detractors—young radicals and CDU conservatives—"spluttering with shock and indignation."³¹

As Brandt's "state secretary"—the rough equivalent of the American national security adviser—Bahr opened an unprecedented channel between Bonn and Moscow. Secret meetings with Soviet representatives created what Bahr describes in his memoirs as a "relaxed atmosphere" among the small group of participants. Other members of the West German government—including Foreign Minister Walter Scheel—knew little about what transpired during these discussions. The public remained almost entirely ignorant of their occurrence.³²

Brandt and Bahr acted with secrecy and haste to contain their internal opposition. Lingered public debate about their policies would allow criticism to coalesce on both the right and the left. Instead of following the deliberative approach common to West German foreign policy, Brandt and Bahr rushed to create a *fait accompli* that assured a series of openings between East and West, but also established limits on how citizens could use Ostpolitik. While diplomatic, economic, and cultural contacts would increase across the Berlin Wall, the two German states would remain firmly intact, further empowered to control activities within their respective borders.

Bahr explained to President Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, that the chancellor sought to "normalize" political authority in Central Europe. West Germans would interact more with their Eastern neighbors, but not in the free and uninhibited way that Brandt and Bahr had contemplated years earlier. The leaders of the Federal Republic no longer sought reunification, except perhaps over the very long term. In the context of growing domestic upheaval, they wanted to use Ostpolitik to improve living conditions throughout the region while reinforcing existing sources of state authority. Any new challenges to political leadership threatened to unleash dangerous forces within the societies on either side of the Berlin Wall.³³

In 1970 Bahr extolled the virtues of coupling agreements for increased human movement with reinforced state boundaries. He argued that this maneuver would increase the political flexibility available for embattled lead-

ers. West German families receiving frequent travel passes to visit relatives in the East would react favorably. Businesspeople and social activists would also appreciate a softening in European divisions. At the same time, the strengthening of existing frontiers promised that the region would remain stable and orderly. Ostpolitik, in this form, promoted social and cultural change, but only on the political and strategic margins.³⁴

This was a more conservative vision of East-West relations than Brandt and Bahr had voiced at Tutzring seven years earlier. Political stability, not progressive change or what Brandt had called "deconcentration," emerged from the Bonn-Moscow channel. Cold War divisions in Central Europe became less rigid while they also grew more permanent. Instead of eliciting new openings for popular initiative, Ostpolitik confined the activities of citizens within a very limited framework.

Bahr called this "respecting realities," but his secret negotiations with Moscow revealed that many of the inherited East-West animosities had in fact dissipated.³⁵ Although domestic unrest in Berlin and other cities had replaced recurring superpower crises as the greatest immediate threat, the leaders of the Federal Republic used the old reality of Cold War division to control the new reality of internal weakness. In the early 1970s Brandt, Bahr, and their Soviet counterparts preferred managed great-power conflict to the risks of fundamental political and social change.

East German leader Walter Ulbricht attempted to exploit the opening of relations with the Federal Republic to increase his regime's autonomy from Moscow. The Soviet Union, however, acted quickly to limit his room for maneuver. During the first half of 1970 Leonid Brezhnev cautioned Ulbricht to "pause for reflection" before embracing the alluring offers of trade that accompanied Bonn's attempts to open East German society to Western influences. The Soviet leader wanted to make sure that he, not Ulbricht, controlled events in Central Europe.³⁶

Moscow rejected Ulbricht's argument that the Soviet bloc should encourage East-West dependency for the purpose of financing communism. This vision promised more unrest within the Eastern, as well as the Western, half of Europe. Brezhnev and a number of prominent East German Communist Party officials pressured Ulbricht to use contacts with Bonn for the purpose of stabilizing existing Cold War divisions, rather than risking new efforts at domestic development. The Moscow Treaty, signed in August 1970 by the leaders of West Germany and the Soviet Union, enforced Brezhnev's control over the East European responses to Brandt and Bahr. It preceded Ulbricht's

forced "resignation" in May 1971, and his replacement by Erich Honecker, a more deferential Krenmlin ally.³⁷

The text of the Moscow Treaty made the conservative inclination of Ostpolitik obvious. Article 1 pledged the signatories to a "normalization of the situation in Europe" and "peaceful relations among all European states," without any mention of German reunification. Article 3 stipulated that "peace can only be maintained in Europe if nobody disturbs the present frontiers." Acknowledging the permanence of East-West political divisions, Brandt and Bahr promised to "respect without restriction the territorial integrity of all states in Europe," including "the frontier between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic."³⁸

At the signing ceremony for the treaty, West German foreign minister Walter Scheel handed his Soviet colleagues a letter stipulating that the document "does not conflict with the political objective of the Federal Republic of Germany to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will recover its unity in free self-determination."³⁹ Scheel's note, never formally acknowledged by the Soviets or appended to the treaty, indicated what was missing from Bonn's relations with the East. The language of the treaty associated "peace" with the acceptance of current divisions. Signing the agreement, Brandt legitimized Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and the existence of a separate East German state. In return he received promises of future stability in the area. Leaders from Bonn and Moscow promised to accept and strengthen the "actual situation" in Central Europe, no matter how morally reprehensible.⁴⁰

Nowhere did the treaty, or even Scheel's letter, provide any of the measures for improved living conditions, increased human interaction, and East-West integration promised by Brandt and Bahr throughout the 1960s. Family visits and trade across Central Europe continued to increase, but the respective societies also became more separate than ever before. Restrictions on personal freedom and the discussion of dissident ideas tightened in the Soviet bloc just as Brandt and Bahr rushed to justify territorial boundaries. The West German leaders gave the Soviets the political legitimacy in Eastern Europe that they had long desired without any accompanying advances for the cause of reunification. The August 1970 treaty ensured that East-West relations would remain, in Bahr's words, under "full control," and not subject to dangerous public emotions.⁴¹

In the next four years Brandt's government concluded major treaties with Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. Each document emphasized the "inviolability of frontiers" and the "normalization" of diplomatic relations. None of the treaties mentioned reunification or any other measures de-

signed to promote self-determination for citizens living under tyrannical rule in Eastern Europe. Increased trade between East and West received attention in these treaties, but only within a framework of assured political stability.⁴²

Ostpolitik had now come full circle. The Berlin crises of 1958-1961 had pushed Konrad Adenauer to seek new diplomatic measures for overcoming East-West division. Through the 1960s Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr had expanded on Adenauer's vision to include many additional proposals for person-to-person cooperation and eventual German reunification. They had spoken with eloquence about the promises of "change through reconciliation." By the early 1970s, however, domestic instability throughout Europe turned Ostpolitik into a mechanism for reinforcing, not transcending, the political structures of the Cold War.

In September 1971 the four powers that controlled Berlin after World War II—the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain—gave up on reunifying this city or the larger German nation. They pledged "mutual respect" for the division of Berlin, and restraint against "unilateral changes." The leaders of the two German states signed an agreement indicating that the Berlin settlement was a "contribution to detente in Europe."⁴³

Ostpolitik was, according to one scholar, a "motor" for detente.⁴⁴ Brandt and Bahr displayed remarkable energy, but they really did not travel very far. Their activities after 1969 froze the international system in place. They answered public calls for an end to the Cold War with efforts to make the Cold War seem more "normal." Over time, Brandt and Bahr hoped that people would associate normality with legitimacy, and even with justice. Despite their progressive inclinations, domestic circumstances led these two men to pursue a form of detente that opposed change. By the early 1970s they had pioneered a new international conservatism, quickly emulated by the leaders of the other major states.

■ Detente with Chinese Characteristics

Despite the violence unleashed by the Cultural Revolution, China's Foreign Ministry managed to follow the development of Ostpolitik very closely during the late 1960s. Publicly, Beijing opposed any agreement between the Federal Republic and its communist neighbors to the East. Mao Zedong's government argued that the forced division of the German nation, like the separation of Taiwan from the mainland, could find resolution only in the formation of a unified socialist country. The policies pursued by Brandt and

Bahr legitimized two German states, setting a dangerous precedent for Beijing's relations with Taiwan.⁴⁵

In the context of rising Sino-Soviet tensions, Mao's government also worried that the stability promised by Ostpolitik would allow Soviet leaders to transfer more of their military forces to their disputed eastern border. The Kremlin might form temporary alliances with West European nations—and even the United States—against China. All of these were serious possibilities that leaders in both Moscow and Beijing contemplated after 1968.⁴⁶

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spoke out against Ostpolitik, but it also made a series of overtures to Bonn that preceded similar openings to the United States by a number of years. In early 1967 Beijing conveyed a message to Paris, requesting assistance in establishing new connections with West Germany. The Chinese did not desire "only economic contacts." They sought "political" relations as well.⁴⁷

Paris passed Beijing's message to Bonn.⁴⁸ In May a high-ranking official in West Germany's Foreign Ministry, Klaus Schütz, met with one of Beijing's informal envoys, Fei Yiming. Fei described China's reasons for pursuing better relations with the Federal Republic. First, he explained, the Sino-Soviet rift had become "unbridgeable." Moscow did not assist communist development, but exploited Chinese resources for its own selfish purposes. Beijing needed new friends, like West Germany, to counteract Soviet hostility.⁴⁹

Second, relations between China and East Germany had also turned sour in recent years. Fearful of new communist heresies, Moscow had pressured its allies to condemn Mao's government. The economic and cultural contacts that had briefly flourished between Eastern Europe and China during the early 1960s declined in the context of the Sino-Soviet rift. Fei observed that Beijing and Bonn now had similar enemies in East Germany and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

Third, and most important of all, China's envoy revealed that the mainland had a strong desire for West German imports. Fei intimated that the domestic dislocation caused by the Cultural Revolution had made leaders in Beijing desperate for industrial goods manufactured abroad. The Federal Republic could serve as the ideal partner. West Germany had become the dominant industrial producer in Europe, and, as Schütz explained to Fei, it was anxious to open new export markets. Politicians in Bonn did not share Washington's inhibitions about trading with Communist China.⁵¹

Schütz provided West German leaders with an optimistic report of his meeting. He explained that Beijing and Bonn shared an interest in "constant contact." Both the Federal Republic and China could exploit bilateral con-

nections to balance Soviet behavior, as Adenauer had predicted years earlier. Expanded trade also served domestic needs, especially in the chaotic circumstances of the Cultural Revolution and the slumping conditions of the recent European economic cycle.⁵²

By the end of 1967, only seven months after the Schütz-Fei meeting, West Germany's exports to China had grown by 60 percent. During the next two years informal contacts between the People's Republic and the Federal Republic continued to expand. As trade increased, representatives from both states began to speak more favorably about each other in public. China continued to oppose Ostpolitik, but it confined its criticisms almost exclusively to the Soviets.⁵³

Egon Bahr interpreted Beijing's overtures as an indication that opportunities would soon open for broader agreements between the Western and Asian states. He noted that the dangers of the Sino-Soviet split and the stale-mated war in Vietnam motivated China to seek cooperative arrangements with capitalist states. Trade links to more productive economies—West Germany, Japan, and even the United States—offered Beijing great promise for needed domestic development.⁵⁴

Discussions between Beijing and Bonn convinced the leading proponent of Ostpolitik that a similar attempt to reinforce the existing political order in Asia could prove fruitful. Mao's revolutionary rhetoric notwithstanding. Through an affirmation of the status quo and agreements on controlled contacts between societies, Bahr recognized an opportunity to "normalize" the Cold War in Asia. Beginning in March 1967 the Chinese Foreign Ministry had given numerous signals that it desired this very kind of conservative political framework for improved relations with the West.⁵⁵

In 1969 Beijing and Bonn informally joined forces to encourage American consent for what would quickly become the Asian component of detente. China and West Germany established full diplomatic relations in October 1972, a little more than six months after President Richard Nixon's dramatic meeting with Mao Zedong. Connections between the People's Republic and the Federal Republic provided the precedent for the better-known "back channels" that made Sino-American rapprochement possible.⁵⁶

American diplomacy in Asia was consistently contradictory during the second half of the 1960s. President Lyndon Johnson gradually escalated U.S. military activities against North Vietnamese forces, including large deployments of air, land, and sea power. Simultaneously, Washington sought improved relations with North Vietnam's longtime patron, the People's Republic

of China. In the eyes of American policymakers Beijing was both a "belligerent" agitator in Southeast Asia and a necessary partner in building a "more peaceful" world community.⁵⁷

Averell Harriman, one of Washington's most experienced diplomats, observed the contradiction between "giving full support to the war in Vietnam, while at the same time making a gesture towards Red China." Harriman affirmed a growing consensus among Johnson's advisers, however, when he argued that the president had to follow this course. He explained that Washington could build international and domestic support for military activities in Southeast Asia only if it also initiated a "spectacular change in attitude towards Red China." The United States received widespread criticism for its stubborn refusal to acknowledge the authority of Mao's government, even after almost every other major state established formal relations with the People's Republic. New forms of engagement with Beijing would, according to Harriman's logic, allow America to appear less intolerant in its foreign policy.⁵⁸

Following the advice of Harriman and others, in July 1966 the president offered his clearest public call for Sino-American reconciliation. After ritualistically affirming his determination to "make the Communists of North Vietnam stop shooting at their neighbors" and his opposition to "Communist China's policy of aggression by proxy," Johnson surprised many listeners. He advocated "reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies . . . Lasting peace can never come to Asia as long as the 700 million people of mainland China are isolated by their rulers from the outside world." America, he explained, wanted to break the mainland's isolation by increasing informal contacts, including exchanges of journalists, scholars, and health experts. Beijing had "rejected" most of these contacts in the past, Johnson lamented, but he promised to "persist" in opening new doors to China.⁵⁹

American overtures to Beijing in 1966 did not get far. Convulsed by the early months of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese ignored Johnson's conciliatory rhetoric. Mao's condemnations of Western "imperialism" and Soviet "revisionism" inspired a surge of activity directed against any meaningful relations with the allegedly corrupt external powers. In 1966 and 1967 groups of Red Guards besieged foreign diplomatic offices operated in Beijing by Great Britain, France, and even fellow communist states such as East Germany. If anything, youthful revolutionaries on the mainland used Johnson's speech to confirm their injunctions against compromise with "counterrevolutionary" forces seeking to ingratiate themselves in Chinese society.⁶⁰

Watching the Cultural Revolution from Washington, American policymakers were astounded by what Alfred Jenkins, a China expert on the National Security Council, called "the spectacle of the oldest civilization on earth methodically digging up its roots to the tune of raucous, uncivilized ballyhoo and bedlam." Jenkins counseled caution to avoid antagonizing China with provocative threats. Washington also had to resist the temptation to address "moderates" on the mainland with its hopes for reconciliation. American overtures would sully the reputation and imperil the safety of the most receptive figures in China. "We can hope," Jenkins wrote, "that the chaos on the mainland may continue a while, and may prove to be in our interest in the denouement. . . . Meanwhile, we should try not to provide a way out for a Mao in trouble, should he sooner or later require a particularly devilish devil."⁶¹

Adopting Jenkins' counsel, President Johnson abandoned his inclination to seek an immediate improvement in Sino-American relations. Policymakers continued to press for expanded contacts with Beijing, but the White House put most overtures on hold. The United States would wait until a clear outcome emerged from what Walt Rostow—Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs—called "China's vaulting chaos."⁶²

Through the most disruptive months of the Cultural Revolution the Chinese Foreign Ministry managed somehow to maintain limited contacts with the United States. Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, for example, continued.⁶³ Despite their calls for isolation from American "imperialists," Chinese leaders continued to find diplomatic meetings "useful." Zhou Enlai also sent messages to Washington through Pakistan. He asked the nation's president, Mohammed Ayub, to tell Johnson that Mao's government would remain cautious about its commitments in Vietnam. If American forces did not threaten Chinese sovereignty, Beijing's army would refrain from combat with U.S. soldiers. Through Warsaw and Pakistan, Zhou assured Johnson that the chaos on the mainland would not create new sources of communist aggression.⁶⁴

After the Chinese Foreign Ministry expanded its contacts with West Germany in mid-1967, direct communications between Beijing and Washington improved as well. The American ambassador in Warsaw found his Chinese counterpart more forthcoming than ever before. The frequent references to American "imperialism" made during the last two years became almost nonexistent among diplomats. This was a "significant departure from the past performance."⁶⁵

Signs of a more conciliatory Chinese attitude toward the United States proliferated in other forums as well. In late 1968 Mao Zedong told E. F. Hill,

the chairman of the Australian Communist Party, that the world had entered a period of "neither war nor revolution." Despite the belligerent rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese leader rejected the Marxist-Leninist argument that capitalism inevitably leads to imperialism and war. "It seems," Mao explained, "that this rule no longer works now." East German observers noted that such comments from Mao, Zhou Enlai, and other Chinese figures pointed to a new, "nonconfrontational" stand toward Washington.⁶⁶

Officials in Hong Kong also reported that after months of Red Guard threats to the British-controlled island, Mao's government had acted decisively to protect order. In November 1967 the Chinese Foreign Ministry negotiated a series of very reasonable "understandings" with London's representatives. These included an exchange of Chinese and British prisoners, assured movement for workers from the mainland to the island, and, most important, guarantees that citizens from the two sides could engage in "proper and normal" interactions. Chinese and British authorities pledged to prevent violent activities in or near Hong Kong.⁶⁷

London's chief negotiator observed that the representatives from the mainland operated without any "attempt to browbeat or to shout political slogans or even adopt starchy attitudes," as had been common during most of 1966 and 1967. The new professionalism of Chinese diplomats led the British to predict that after months of uncertainty "we can talk turkey with these people in the future." Like their Western counterparts, leaders in Beijing appeared intent on assuring domestic order and nurturing amicable relations with other states.⁶⁸

In 1968 Mao confirmed his commitment to stability instead of continuous revolution when he purged many of the radicals who had recently assumed positions of authority in foreign affairs. As a consequence, the Foreign Ministry, like many other government departments, suffered from a shortage of staff. Only about 30 percent of its pre-1966 personnel remained in place. These circumstances reduced the breadth of the ministry's capabilities, but they also allowed moderates such as Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi to exert personal control over policy.⁶⁹

Mao, Zhou, and Chen used contacts with external powers to restrain Red Guard groups that had grown too disruptive. Foreign policy moderation justified domestic moderation. In addition to the benefits of trade for a country devastated by the successive disasters of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, closer foreign associations contributed to a domestic atmosphere of peace and friendship rather than violence and recrimination. Negotiations with "counterrevolutionaries" allowed Beijing to begin humaniz-

ing the enemy in Chinese eyes. A less demonic image of the United States undermined the radical anti-Americanism and xenophobia of the young Red Guards. Managing new relations with foreigners legitimized the continued authority of elderly Communist Party figures.⁷⁰

Sino-American reconciliation grew from the work of Chinese leaders frightened by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Improved relations with the United States reflected a determination to pursue stability rather than risk further disruption in the name of ideological purity. As Mao's government limited the activities of radicals and bolstered the image of moderate figures, it also turned to closer relations with its most consistent Cold War enemy.

When Richard Nixon became president in January 1969, he possessed a deep understanding of American policy in China. Nixon had never visited the People's Republic, but he had come of age as a politician just as Mao's communist forces wrested control of the mainland from the Guomindang. While many of his counterparts focused their attention on the Soviet threat to Western Europe, Nixon was always drawn to Asia. As a congressman and senator from California he had strongly condemned America's postwar setbacks in China. As Eisenhower's vice president he had had little influence on policy, but he had always remained active in Asian affairs. Nixon's reputation as a rigid anticommunist hid his awareness of the importance of improved relations with China—something other than reflexive isolation—for the future of the United States.⁷¹

As early as October 1967 Nixon spoke of closer American contacts with Mao's government. Writing in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, he argued that "we simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors." Nixon elaborated: "Dealing with Red China is something like trying to cope with the more explosive ghetto elements in our own country." Carrying this analogy between the domestic and international sources of disorder forward, he explained that "in each case a potentially destructive force has to be curbed. In each case an outlaw element has to be brought within the law; in each case dialogues have to be opened; in each case aggression has to be restrained while education proceeds; and, not least, in neither case can we afford to let those now self-exiled from society stay exiled forever." Threats of violence at home and abroad required "an urgency born of necessity and a patience born of realism, moving step by calculated step" toward improved Sino-American relations.⁷²

Nixon's inaugural address, delivered on 20 January 1969, marked his first move in this direction as president. In place of the muscular rhetoric about "paying any price and bearing any burden" that had punctuated Kennedy's speech eight years earlier, Nixon admitted that "we are approaching the limits of what government alone can do." Referring to Vietnam, he explained, "We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division, wanting unity."⁷³

Proliferating challenges abroad and deep divisions at home made it impossible for the United States to dominate every major struggle against communist expansion. The turmoil of 1968 had left the nation in such disarray that the public's willingness to pay the costs—financial and social—of fighting the Cold War had reached a post-1945 low. "We find ourselves rich in goods," Nixon observed, "but ragged in spirit; reaching with magnificent precision for the moon, but falling into raucous discord on earth."⁷⁴

The president emphasized cooperation with allies and adversaries for the sake of restoring stability both at home and abroad. Addressing "America's youth" and "the people of the world," Nixon argued that "we cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another—until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices. . . . For all our people, we will set as our goal the decent order that makes progress possible and our lives secure."⁷⁵

Nixon did not utter a single confrontational word in his inaugural address. He trumpeted the language of "convergence" among longtime enemies despite deep ideological and strategic conflicts. Instead of deterrence and containment—core concepts of the Cold War—he emphasized compromise. "After a period of confrontation," Nixon explained, "we are entering an era of negotiation."⁷⁶

Historians have largely neglected this inaugural address, but the leaders of China did not make the same mistake. Almost immediately Mao Zedong ordered the two largest state-run newspapers to publish the speech in its entirety.⁷⁷ Contemplating an overture of his own to the United States, Mao found Nixon's words encouraging. When he addressed a large meeting of the Chinese Communist Party three months later, the chairman sounded strikingly like the American president. He called for renewed efforts to "unite with more people" rather than pursue the "contradictions" that had provoked such violence during prior years. Instead of urging ideological purity and continuous revolution, he emphasized that "every one of us should be prudent and cautious."⁷⁸

In the context of the Cultural Revolution this meant amnesty for alleged class enemies. The "crude and careless" behavior of the Red Guards had led

to many "mistakes." Mao ordered the release of those individuals imprisoned for following the "capitalist path." He also sounded a conciliatory chord in his discussion of foreign affairs. Mao reaffirmed that "we should be prepared for war year by year," but he warned that "we must not invade others' territory." In contrast to his past enthusiasm for armed conflict, Mao now emphasized caution. Even if invaded, he surprisingly conceded, "I am in favor of giving up some land. China is not a small country." The chairman proclaimed that internal unity and international peace took priority over immediate "socialist revolution." Like Nixon, Mao was clearly backing down from his previous belligerent rhetoric.⁷⁹

A report that Mao commissioned from four prominent Communist officials—the "four marshals"—confirmed this conservative turn. In July 1969 they advised that "in the foreseeable future it is unlikely that U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists will launch a large-scale war against China, either jointly or separately." Both of these states, the authors explained, faced "crises at home and abroad" that limited their fighting capabilities.⁸⁰

China did not require excessive preparation for war, but it needed to remain vigilant against foreign competitors, particularly those supported by Moscow. "The Soviet revisionists," the marshals wrote, "have made China their main enemy, posing a more serious threat to our security than the U.S. imperialists." The report alleged that the Kremlin's forces were "creating tensions along the long Sino-Soviet border, concentrating troops in the border area and making military intrusions. They are creating anti-Chinese public opinion, creating chaos on the international scene, while at the same time forcing some Asian countries to join an anti-China ring of encirclement."⁸¹

In response to Soviet challenges, the marshals advised that Beijing maintain China's armed strength while promoting "industrial and agricultural production." The future security of the People's Republic required that the nation become a "stronger economic power." For this purpose, the marshals suggested, "We should enhance our embassies and consulates in other countries, and actively carry out diplomatic activities." Breaking out of its isolation, China would expand the "international united front of anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism," also acquiring more access to foreign imports, technology, and ideas.⁸²

Coupled with China's already significant connections to West Germany and Mao's recent turn against the Cultural Revolution, this analysis pointed to better Sino-American relations. Nixon appeared favorably disposed to new contacts, and Chinese leaders—especially Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi—saw many advantages for their state. The four marshals wrote that "both

China and the United States take the Soviet Union as their enemy." Working with Washington, leaders in Beijing could balance against Soviet power on "two-fronts" while preventing the feared possibility of anti-Chinese collaboration.⁸³

Chen Yi, one of the four marshals, added a personal note to the final report. He wrote that "it is necessary for us to utilize the contradiction between the United States and the Soviet Union in a strategic sense." He also called for "a breakthrough in Sino-American relations." Chen admitted that his ideas were somewhat "wild" in the context of anti-American rhetoric during the Cultural Revolution, but he recommended that state policy reflect how the "situation has changed today" for each of the great powers.⁸⁴

Chen Yi, Zhou Enlai, and other moderate figures in the Chinese government understood that improved relations with Washington would help to stabilize international affairs and restrain radical impulses after years of chaos. The advocates of Sino-American reconciliation in Beijing sought to undermine the xenophobia and extremism of their domestic challengers by humanizing the image of their Cold War adversary. Mao's speech in April and his request for the four marshals' report gave those who wished to curtail the Cultural Revolution and end China's isolation more influence than at any time in the previous three years.⁸⁵

In Beijing and Washington momentum began to build for reconciliation between longtime adversaries. Conciliatory gestures reflected clear strategic interests. Mao's government wanted to balance against a growing threat from the Soviet Union. The Nixon White House was desperate for Chinese assistance in ending the Vietnam War. Leaders in both states also hoped that new international openings would help to dampen domestic radicalism. After reading a report about Chinese policy debates in 1969, Nixon observed that "Mao [too] fights the educational establishment." By "educational establishment," the president referred to protesters in the United States, China, and many other states. Improved relations between governments would undercut criticisms of American "imperialism" (popular in the United States and China) and calls for "international revolution" (voiced by Chinese Red Guards and the most extreme Western demonstrators).⁸⁶

During the summer of 1969 Sino-Soviet border tensions gained new intensity as Moscow contemplated large-scale military action against China. On 18 August 1969 Boris Davydov—a KGB agent working out of the Soviet embassy in Washington—casually asked an American official over lunch "what the U.S. would do if the Soviet Union attacked and destroyed China's nu-

clear installations." To the astonishment of Davydov's interlocutor—William Stearman, a special assistant to the State Department for North Vietnamese affairs—the Soviet official argued that military action against the mainland's nuclear facilities would serve U.S. interests, restraining future Chinese aggression. Similar remarks from other Soviet contacts, accompanied by military preparations near the border, confirmed that the Kremlin was serious about striking an extensive, perhaps even nuclear, blow against its communist neighbor.⁸⁷

Soviet leaders had good reason to believe that the U.S. government would look favorably upon a preventive attack against Chinese nuclear facilities. After all, the Kennedy administration had floated similar ideas in the early 1960s. Nixon, however, was not Kennedy. Washington's political aims at the end of the decade differed markedly from those only a few years earlier.⁸⁸

The president did not view the world in bipolar terms. He recognized that Soviet military action against China would limit U.S. leverage in Asia. It would also complicate the possibility of a dramatic breakthrough in Sino-American relations. Washington could best turn tensions among the communist states to its advantage. Henry Kissinger advised Nixon, if it refused to sanction Moscow's hegemony along the Sino-Soviet border. According to this logic, the United States could use China to play upon the Kremlin's insecurities. Continued fear of possible American collaboration with Mao's government would, the White House predicted, induce maximum Soviet flexibility on security issues in other parts of the world.⁸⁹

Nixon adopted this approach. He told his closest advisers that Washington should tilt toward China, not the Soviet Union. American officials issued a series of public warnings against any "massive breach of international peace and security" on the Sino-Soviet border. Moscow got the message. In his next meeting with William Stearman, Boris Davydov avoided any discussion of possible Soviet military action against China.⁹⁰

Soviet-American contacts were now circumscribed, but communications between Washington and Beijing expanded considerably.⁹¹ In January 1970 the United States suggested that a special representative visit Beijing for high-level consultations. One month later the Chinese accepted this proposal, explaining that the visit by "a special envoy" of the president would provide a forum for "further exploration of questions of fundamental principle between China and the United States."⁹²

These overtures depended upon secret channels of communication, and they justified more of the same. At a time when public unrest frequently imperiled the basic operations of government, private contacts between leaders preserved continuity. Both Richard Nixon and Zhou Enlai would later agree

that confidentiality had insulated conciliatory policies against the disruptive criticisms of allies and domestic groups, especially in the West.⁹³

Secret contacts also increased the stature and indispensability of particular individuals. Henry Kissinger became an international celebrity in the early 1970s—more renowned than any previous U.S. national security adviser—for his surreptitious contacts with the high and mighty. Nixon, Mao, and Zhou Enlai were already recognized around the world, but they inspired additional fascination because of their quick and unpredictable maneuvers, shrouded in secrecy. These leaders cultivated charismatic sources of authority—as Max Weber had predicted decades earlier—with a self-conscious manipulation of mystery and surprise. Stealth activities provided leaders with an unknown "magic," in Weber's terms, that made Sino-American relations a source of power and prestige for the select few who controlled the exclusive channels of communication.⁹⁴

Events in 1970 could easily have derailed the gradual improvement in Sino-American relations if the two sides had defined their purposes in narrow strategic terms. Contrary to repeated Chinese demands that the Nixon administration reduce its military activities in Indochina, on 29 April 1970 American and South Vietnamese forces invaded the Saigon government's western neighbor, Cambodia. The operation, which included heavy B-52 bombing raids and an incursion of 31,000 American soldiers, sought to cut off North Vietnamese supply and infiltration routes.⁹⁵

Demonstrations against this military action immediately spread across the United States. On 4 May 1970 poorly trained national guardsmen at Kent State University in Ohio fired upon a crowd of protesters, killing four unarmed students and wounding another nine. By the end of the month violent confrontations had occurred at more than seventy other schools.⁹⁶

Mao condemned America's international and domestic "aggression." "U.S. imperialism," he argued, "looks like a huge monster," but it "is in essence a paper tiger, now in the throes of its death-bed struggle." "The Nixon government," Mao continued, "is beset with troubles internally and externally, with utter chaos at home and extreme isolation abroad." "Aggressors" and "paper tigers" were hardly candidates for friendly relations. Accordingly, the Chinese leader reaffirmed his support for anti-American forces in Indochina. He called for listeners to "unite and defeat" the United States. The fighting around Vietnam and within America offered little promise of a strategic partnership between Washington and Beijing.⁹⁷

In contrast to the escalation of warfare in Indochina, Sino-Soviet border

tensions tapered off during this period. Zhou Enlai met with Soviet premier Aleksei Kosygin in September 1969 to defuse fears of war. During three hours of discussion at the Beijing airport, the two leaders agreed to avoid military confrontations on their long frontier. They also initiated negotiations for a peaceful settlement of disputed territorial claims. In the next year Beijing and Moscow completed a new trade agreement and noticeably decreased their public criticisms of each other. China and the Soviet Union continued to harbor mutual suspicions, but their relations in 1970 grew far less antagonistic. Comparing the relative calm on the Sino-Soviet border with America's heightened military activity in Indochina, Beijing inevitably saw the United States as posing the more immediate threat.⁹⁸

In this context, Sino-American contacts became less frequent, but they continued to operate through various confidential channels. In the summer of 1970 Beijing opened an important new line of communication with the United States in Paris. Huang Chen, China's ambassador to France, began a series of informal meetings with American military attaché Vernon Walters. Discussions through the Paris channel contributed to personal amicability between the representatives of Beijing and Washington. On a number of secret trips to the French capital in the next year, Henry Kissinger gained his first sustained and direct contact with Huang and other Chinese interlocutors.⁹⁹

Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai also communicated with Washington through Edgar Snow. The chairman invited the journalist to China again, as he had in 1960, for the purpose of sending a conciliatory signal to the United States. On 1 October 1970 Snow and his wife, Lois, stood beside Mao on the balcony of the Heavenly Peace Gate (Tiananmen) during the annual parade celebrating the founding of the People's Republic. According to Zhou Enlai, this unprecedented move indicated that "the door is open" for Sino-American friendship. Having used the occasion in previous years to address revolutionary Red Guards, Mao now wanted to associate himself with individuals who desired peace and coexistence. The chairman expressed his desire for mutual respect and equality between the peoples of his society and those of the United States.¹⁰⁰

With Mao's encouragement, Snow recounted these sentiments in a *Life* magazine article published at the end of April 1971. Members of the U.S. government "read and re-read" Snow's text. One of Kissinger's assistants recalls that American policymakers used it as "our road map for the future."¹⁰¹

Recognizing that the White House might miss what Kissinger called the "excessive subtlety" of Snow's reception in Beijing, Zhou Enlai made China's intentions more explicit. He sent a handwritten letter to Nixon through Pa-

kistani president Yahya Khan, declaring that China "has always been willing and has always tried to negotiate by peaceful means." "In order to discuss the subject of the vacation of Chinese territories called Taiwan," Zhou stated that "a special envoy of President Nixon's will be most welcome in Beijing."¹⁰²

The United States and China had reached a turning point. Through Pakistan, Nixon sent a typed message to Beijing on a blank sheet of white paper, without signature. The president accepted China's invitation for a special emissary, and he explained that personal discussions should touch "on the broad range of issues which lie between the People's Republic of China and the United States, including the issue of Taiwan." The meeting would also "encompass other steps designed to improve relations and reduce tensions."¹⁰³

During the next seven months Washington and Beijing prepared, largely through the Pakistan and Paris channels, for Henry Kissinger to visit China under a cloak of utmost secrecy. In the interim, however, Chinese leaders encouraged public anticipation of a Sino-American breakthrough. Mao and Zhou crafted images of Chinese openness in marked contrast to the isolation and fanaticism of the Cultural Revolution. Edgar Snow's very visible presence in 1970 conveyed this change in atmosphere. The chairman and his chief deputy understood that favorable publicity would encourage goodwill for the People's Republic abroad, and it would also isolate domestic radicals from those citizens buoyed by the prospect of better American relations. As China appeared less belligerent to onlookers overseas, foreign adversaries also seemed less threatening to citizens on the mainland.

The so-called Ping-Pong diplomacy of April 1971 reinforced this use of conciliatory public posturing for political purpose in China. To the surprise of almost everyone, Mao invited a group of nine young American table-tennis players, then competing in Japan, to visit the mainland. The photogenic U.S. citizens toured China along with a number of Western journalists. They created an international sensation as they posed with their Chinese counterparts for some of the most eye-catching examples of cultural friendship between the two societies since before the Cold War. *Life* magazine published a montage of photographs depicting the dedication and amicability of Chinese citizens—many in harmless-looking Red Guard uniforms, toiling in a vast and pacific mainland landscape. Overcome by the spectacle of the table-tennis players' visit, *Life* exulted: "The great wall comes down!"¹⁰⁴

Kissinger, in contrast to the Ping-Pong players, traveled to China avoiding all public notice between 9 and 11 July 1971. His visit, codenamed "Polo" after the famous Italian traveler, sought to fit the emerging signs of Sino-

American friendship to specific policy purposes. In particular, the Nixon administration wanted to stabilize the international situation in Asia and use its rapprochement with Beijing to increase the president's standing at home.¹⁰⁵

During Kissinger's three days of discussion with Zhou Enlai, he and his host focused on solidifying the political status quo. The United States would not abandon its close relations with Taiwan and South Vietnam, but in both cases the Nixon administration pledged to reduce its military commitments sharply and quickly. Kissinger indicated that in the United Nations and other international forums the United States would begin to recognize not only the long-denied legitimacy of Mao's government, but also its role as the representative of the Chinese people.

In return for Washington's promises of disengagement in Asia and recognition of Mao's government, Zhou indicated that Beijing would help Nixon to increase his personal standing among domestic groups and allies. Many other Western leaders—including West German chancellor Willy Brandt and the American Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield—wanted to make their own dramatic visits to China. Zhou pledged that he would not allow any other major Western figure to upstage Nixon. In addition, Beijing would curtail its public criticisms of the American president and avoid any actions that exacerbated conflict in Vietnam or the Taiwan Strait.¹⁰⁶

On 15 July 1971 Washington and Beijing dramatically revealed the cooperative tenor of the secret Kissinger-Zhou meetings. The joint announcement, read to a television and radio audience in America by Nixon, explained that the president had accepted a Chinese invitation to visit the mainland before May 1972. "The meeting between the leaders of China and the United States," the statement elaborated, "is to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to the two sides."¹⁰⁷

Kissinger comments in his memoirs that this announcement "shook the world."¹⁰⁸ For the first time, the governments in Washington and Beijing accepted each other publicly as equals. They committed themselves to work together for shared interests. Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Zhou Enlai stood at the center of this process, elevated as the men who had made this sea change in diplomacy possible. The Sino-American rapprochement had accomplished little of immediate substance, but it now gained an exciting momentum that, especially in the United States, isolated many opponents of the existing leadership. Nixon, Kissinger, and Zhou had displayed breathtaking initiative for conservative political purposes. Meanwhile, radical opponents remained mired in tired old rhetoric.

On the evening of 25 October 1971, after Kissinger had completed a second (this time public) visit to China, the United Nations General Assembly voted to seat the People's Republic of China and expel the Republic of China on Taiwan. After twenty-two years of American objections, Mao's government finally represented China in the United Nations. The Nixon administration had recently supported the admission of the People's Republic to the General Assembly, but it had also continued to oppose Taiwan's expulsion. The momentum of Sino-American rapprochement had, however, overtaken this position. By October 1971 both the United States and the United Nations had accepted Beijing as a legitimate great power in Asia, and as a partner against the spreading tide of disorder throughout the world. Taiwan now had to live in Beijing's shadow.¹⁰⁹

After months of anticipation, on the morning of 21 February 1972 President Nixon arrived in Beijing. Zhou Enlai met the leader of the People's Republic's longtime adversary at the airport. Reversing former secretary of state John Foster Dulles' infamous refusal to shake Zhou's hand at the Geneva Conference in 1955, Nixon descended from Air Force One with an outstretched palm. The Chinese premier stared into the American president's eyes and seized Nixon's hand as an acknowledged equal. Referring to this poignant moment hours later, Zhou expressed appreciation for the reversal of Dulles' indignity. Nixon agreed that "we have broken out of the old pattern."¹¹⁰

Only three hours after the American entourage touched down in Beijing, Zhou Enlai whisked Nixon—accompanied only by Kissinger and a notetaker (Winston Lord of the National Security Council staff)—to Mao Zedong's personal study. The chairman stood with great difficulty. He shook Nixon's hand with a mix of emotional enthusiasm and physical weakness. Mao displayed what Kissinger called a "concentrated willpower" that awed his visitors.¹¹¹

China's leader seemed to identify personally with the American president, despite the ocean of difference in their respective backgrounds. Seated in modest armchairs, surrounded by a scattering of books and hidden medical equipment, Mao told Nixon that "I voted for you during your election." He recalled reading an article predicting Nixon's victory in 1968, "when your country was in havoc."¹¹²

The chairman observed that China also had its share of domestic troubles. Many people had created grave difficulties for the leadership, he explained, especially in its attempts to pursue a more peaceful foreign policy. Mao re-

ferred to Lin Biao's recent attempted coup, allegedly supported by "a reactionary group which is opposed to our contact with you . . . they got on an airplane and fled abroad."¹¹³

Nixon recognized that both he and Mao wanted to use improved Sino-American relations to stabilize the international system and restrain domestic troublemakers. He commented that he "had similar problems," especially from the "American Left." The president called upon the leaders of China and the United States to work together for the sake of eliminating "vacuums" that created disorder throughout the world.¹¹⁴

At Mao's suggestion, the two leaders pledged to keep their dealings secret. They would cooperate personally to overcome the "deadlock" that made both states, in the chairman's words, "bureaucratic in dealing with matters." Mao called his own public words about "defeating imperialism" and "establishing socialism" a "lot of big cannons." Despite all the upheaval in the name of international revolution, Mao lamented that he hadn't been able to transform China. "I've only been able to change a few places in the vicinity of Beijing," he explained. Tired and unhealthy, the chairman appeared resolved to work for order and stability, not the mirage of communist internationalism.¹¹⁵

The two leaders agreed that they shared international interests and domestic difficulties. This observation made them indispensable "friends," according to Mao. Having criticized every previous U.S. president for "gangster" behavior and excessive anticommunism, the chairman admitted that he hoped Nixon would not be "overthrown." "I like rightists," he exclaimed, contrasting their pragmatism and conservatism with the more belligerent behavior of socialists and liberals.¹¹⁶

Nixon corroborated this surprising comment from Mao. He emphasized the common experiences that connected the two leaders in the early 1970s: "I also came from a very poor family," Nixon recounted of his childhood in Whittier, California, and Mao's formative years in the Chinese province of Hunan. "History has brought us together," he continued. "The question is whether we, with different philosophies, but both with feet on the ground, and having come from the people, can make a breakthrough that will serve not just China and America, but the whole world in the years ahead . . . that is why we are here."¹¹⁷

Mao and Nixon shook hands again at the end of their hour-long conversation. The president departed from the chairman's study convinced that the leaders of the two states understood each other. Both wanted to promote order at home and stability abroad.

Nixon described the audience with the chairman as "refreshing." The mo-

ments in Mao's presence revealed that "there are many reasons why the People's Republic of China and the United States should work together." Zhou Enlai reciprocated this sentiment, commenting that "we will invariably find common ground to promote the normalization of relations between us."¹¹⁸

During their eight days in China, Nixon and Kissinger met with Zhou seven times. Only two other members of the NSC staff—Winston Lord and John Holdridge—joined the American contingent during most of these discussions. The Nixon-Zhou conversations followed the outlines of the meeting in Mao's study, but with much more detailed attention to the future of Taiwan, the Vietnam War, and the intentions of the Soviet Union. In each case, the leaders of the two states agreed to avoid provocative actions or drastic changes that would endanger their respective positions. They would cooperate to help each other find stable solutions for long-standing problems.¹¹⁹

Nixon promised to proceed with his announced disengagement from Taiwan and Vietnam. Washington's overseas withdrawals would gradually for the purpose of appeasing domestic critics of America's military commitments in Asia, without antagonizing hard-line anticommunists. The Chinese government would use the evidence of U.S. disengagement to strengthen its calls for unification with Taiwan and solidarity with Southeast Asian allies. Beijing would, however, refrain from embarrassing Nixon as he sought an honorable retreat.¹²⁰

Sino-American cooperation also focused on containing the rising economic power of Japan. Memories of the Manchurian invasion, the attack on Nanjing, and World War II raised continued fears in Beijing about Japanese militarism. China's worries about a revitalized and independent government in Tokyo roughly paralleled Soviet anxieties about West Germany throughout the Cold War. Zhou and Nixon agreed that they would prevent Japan from exploiting its growing wealth to fill the "vacuums" left as the United States reduced its commitments in Vietnam, Taiwan, and perhaps even South Korea. Instead of competing for influence in Tokyo, as the interests of Realpolitik would dictate, Zhou and Nixon discussed how both could maintain "friendly" relations with Japan for the sake of encouraging "normal" development. Contradicting its public calls for the complete departure of American military influence from Asia, Beijing indicated its approval of a prolonged U.S. presence in Japan. In return, Washington would help China improve its connections with the largest capitalist economy in the region.¹²¹ These commitments to collaborate in containing Japan guarded the Asian status quo against disruption. They departed from the earlier American logic

of using the dynamic island nation to counterbalance Communist China. As the United States reversed its Japanese favoritism, Beijing jettisoned its long-standing antipathy to any association with Tokyo. The conservative inclinations of Nixon and Zhou turned established strategy and ideology on their heads.

The joint statement approved by the leaders of China and the United States on 27 February (the "Shanghai Communiqué") embodied the efforts of the two sides to ensure future order against threatening uncertainty. The document, officially released as Nixon departed China the next day, rejected "spheres of interest" and regional "hegemony." These caveats notwithstanding, the statement affirmed the managerial role that Beijing and Washington would undertake for the future of Asia. The two sides rejected the use of force and other efforts to carry out rapid change in disputed borders between India and Pakistan, North and South Vietnam, and North and South Korea. With regard to Japan, both China and the United States emphasized the importance of friendly and democratic, rather than expansionist and unilateral, behavior in Tokyo.¹²²

Most significant, Washington accepted that "the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China." Within this framework, Taiwan would eventually return "to the motherland." The Nixon administration made this concession that Mao's government so desperately wanted, but it rejected the use of force in pursuit of the island's "liberation." Beijing had to arrange its future with Taiwan through "peaceful" means that would not threaten stability in the region. This meant that although the People's Republic had a right to authority over the Guomindang-held territory, it could not govern Taiwan so long as local resistance threatened armed conflict.¹²³

The Shanghai Communiqué created a firm basis for great-power stability in Asia and "normalization" of Sino-American relations. Less than seven years later, on 1 January 1979, China and the United States established full diplomatic relations following most of the guideposts outlined by Zhou and Nixon. At the same time, Washington severed all official ties with its long-time ally in Taiwan.¹²⁴

Foreign policy "normalization" between China and the United States was an important part of their internal "normalization." Mao, Zhou, Nixon, Kissinger, and their successors used improved relations to limit troubling external commitments and assure international stability. At home, the gains in Sino-American rapprochement reduced the influence of inherited ideologies advocated by radical groups—the Red Guards, the New Left, and the New Right. The secret connections between Beijing and Washington insu-

lated policy against critics. The imagery of friendship between old rivals provided a rationale for patience and order among citizens in each state.

The Sino-American rapprochement of the early 1970s did not eliminate the antagonisms born of conflicting national interests, ideological predilections, and historical experiences. Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon did not reject these differences. Quite the contrary, they accepted them and simply made them "normal" by pledging to avoid violence and disorder in their continuing competition. The threat that the Soviet Union posed for both nations made an agreement on tactical cooperation in Asia sensible to balance a common enemy. The spread of domestic chaos provided Mao and Nixon with an even greater shared difficulty. They exploited the opportunities for collusion between their states to contain disorder and bolster their standing against proliferating challengers.

Sino-American detente reflected the conservative politics of leaders running from the threatening consequences of Cold War rhetoric. Relations between China and the United States have remained uncertain since 1972, thanks, at least in part, to these shallow foundations. The two sides did not resolve long-standing strategic and ideological conflicts. Instead, they passed them on to future generations.¹²⁵

■ Soviet-American Detente

Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had already reached relative stability, especially in Europe, during the decade before Nixon's visit to China. The peaceful settlement of the Cuban missile crisis and the conclusion of the Limited Test Ban Treaty marked a clear turn toward coexistence between the two nuclear superpowers. Near military parity contributed to stability, balance, and caution.

Coexistence, however, was not the same as cooperation. In the Middle East, Africa, and especially Southeast Asia, Washington and Moscow increased their challenges to each other after 1963. They frequently employed proxies to avoid the risks of direct confrontation. They supported local wars in all these areas, and expended large sums to finance domestic development along capitalist and communist lines in states—such as North and South Vietnam—that promised dubious strategic and economic benefits. Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union continued, but in places unlikely to trigger nuclear armageddon.

This system of displaced superpower conflict—mostly in the so-called third world—began to come undone in the late 1960s. Instead of buttressing the respective hegemony of the strongest states, costly foreign commitments

jeopardized their political standing. Resistance to military intervention, particularly in Vietnam and Czechoslovakia, motivated leaders in Washington and Moscow to curtail their competitive use of force away from home.

The U.S. government was desperate to reduce its military commitments in Asia, and most especially in Vietnam. Each day appeared to bring mounting human losses with few prospects of victory. In place of "counterinsurgency" operations, policymakers formulated the "Nixon Doctrine," which placed more of the burden of communist containment on regional powers. Washington would feed anticommunist strongmen with generous aid and equipment, but it would rely on local, not American, manpower to fight battles on the ground.¹²⁶

The "Brezhnev Doctrine"—articulated by the Soviet leader to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia—only temporarily hid a similar development in the Kremlin's thinking. Soviet tanks crushed the Prague Spring, but they inspired anger in many communist states. Leaders in Yugoslavia, Rumania, China, and other countries condemned the violation of Czechoslovak sovereignty. Domestic groups in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union engaged in a series of daring protests. Most significant, morale in the Soviet and Warsaw Pact armies declined to a dangerous low point. These threatening "spillovers" convinced Brezhnev and his colleagues that they could not afford to implement the Brezhnev Doctrine again.¹²⁷

Moscow and Washington needed to escape their difficulties through new, but still limited, forms of cooperation. The two sides remained adversaries, but they also acknowledged their interdependence. Safe Cold War competition required firm superpower authority to impose limits on the behavior of respective allies. When necessary, the United States and the Soviet Union had to collaborate to prevent local conflicts from spiraling into larger confrontations. Lyndon Johnson's undersecretary of state for political affairs, Eugene Rostow, candidly explained that he and others in Washington worried most about the international anarchy that would emerge as the authority of both superpowers began to "dissolve." "It's a nightmare situation," he warned. Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States, voiced Moscow's agreement with this sentiment. He also emphasized the importance of "bilateral" consultations to contain international difficulties.¹²⁸

Washington and Moscow pursued improved relations during the late 1960s despite festering points of strategic conflict. In his last year as president, Johnson refrained from frequent criticism of the Kremlin's aggression, even after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. To the surprise of Soviet ambassador Dobrynin, Johnson continued to push for a superpower summit. When alerted that Moscow's tanks had entered Prague, the president was preoccu-

pled not with the repression of reform, but with his plans to visit the Soviet Union "in the nearest time."¹²⁹

The Kremlin, for its part, exerted its influence in both Hanoi and Washington to improve the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam War. Despite the weakening effect it had on the United States, leaders in Moscow feared that a continuation of the conflict would create mounting pressures for more costly Soviet intervention. Brezhnev wanted stability in Vietnam rather than continued uncertainty. He approved a Foreign Ministry report predicting that "an end to the Vietnam conflict would undoubtedly have a positive effect on Soviet-American relations and open up new possibilities for solving certain international problems."¹³⁰

Domestic disorder provided additional incentives for Soviet-American cooperation. More amicable relations between Moscow and Washington would reduce the overseas conflicts that encouraged internal dissent, and they would also increase the standing of leaders. Detente would create a vital new source of political stability. Policymakers within both superpowers shared an interest in drawing clear boundaries and enforcing orderly spheres of authority. Some influential figures—including McGeorge Bundy—hoped that Soviet-American detente would allow for a new focus on what he called, somewhat euphemistically, the "common problems of advanced societies."¹³¹

Paradoxically, the international and domestic incentives that made Soviet-American detente sensible also distracted Johnson and Brezhnev from its accomplishment. Daily crises in Vietnam, Eastern Europe, and cities throughout the world left politicians with little freedom for long-range planning. The "common problems of advanced societies" were just too overwhelming. Agreements on superpower cooperation required a period of detachment from the global shock of 1968 and a change of American leadership. In the interim, the pressures for detente continued to grow, particularly in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe.

The urban upheavals of the 1960s left a deep imprint on Polish society. In March 1968 students and intellectuals demonstrated against what one writer called a "dictatorship of the dumb." Students from Warsaw University announced that after two centuries of German, Russian, and Soviet domination they would fight "to defend the democratic and independent traditions of the Polish nation." Popular protest movements throughout Europe, especially Czechoslovakia, inspired men and women to rise against the repressive government of Wladyslaw Gomułka.¹³²

The Polish leader, who came to power during the earlier uprisings of 1956,

had offered citizens a series of promising reforms—including wage increases, rehabilitation of “internal enemies,” semi-independent worker councils, and relative autonomy for the Catholic church. By the late 1960s Gomułka and his Soviet patrons had replaced these reforms with strict autarchy. To compensate for declining economic growth, the Polish Communist Party pursued a centralized plan for “selective development” that focused upon export-generating industries such as steel. Squeezing maximum productivity out of the nation’s limited resources, Gomułka mobilized citizens for more work and less leisure. Individual and group freedoms became rare commodities in Polish society.¹³³

The student and intellectual rebellion of 1968 only furthered Gomułka’s determination to attain economic growth through an enforcement of political discipline. He manipulated popular anti-Semitism to label the demonstrators as “enemies of order” and “fifth columns” inspired by treacherous Zionist groups allegedly festering within the Polish nation. Police forces arrested thousands of dissidents, universities and factories dismissed countless critics, and many “hostile” individuals suffered public beatings.¹³⁴

Gomułka repressed the demonstrations in 1968, but two years later he encountered much more extensive resistance. In December 1970 the Polish government raised food prices by 36 percent as part of Gomułka’s plan to boost national production by reducing domestic consumption of resources. The price hikes took effect immediately—before the Christmas holiday—and they were not accompanied by wage increases or other mechanisms to support workers already struggling to survive on minimal pay. One resident of the northwestern port city Gdansk described the horror that the latest measure of “selective development” inspired among citizens: “The coming holidays were to be the last feast before January . . . This sudden unexpected price rise in December is impossible to explain. Why before the holidays? What do they care about these few days? Why are they unnecessarily irritating people who are already anxious and worried?”¹³⁵

From 14 through 20 December angry workers—led by the employees of the huge state-run shipyards—launched a series of strikes in Gdansk and other Baltic coast cities. Unrest soon spread to interior areas. In Łódź, for example, female textile workers refused to work without a repeal of price increases. The work stoppages, riots, and police confrontations that convulsed Poland in the last weeks of 1970 constituted what two scholars call “the largest and most violent working-class uprising in the history of state-socialist regimes.”¹³⁶

As crowds of men and women left their factories for the streets, Polish military discipline quickly broke down. Unlike in 1968, the army and police were not arresting privileged students and allegedly “traitorous” intellectu-

als. Gomułka’s government asked its troops to fire upon ordinary working citizens who feared that they could no longer feed their families. As early as 15 December one security officer reported that soldiers “don’t want to shoot . . . they are going over to the other side.” Sentiments of this kind pervaded the military. One lieutenant colonel reacted with indignation when ordered to fire upon crowds attacking a Communist Party building: “You son of a bitch, who am I going to shoot? There are women and children out there!”¹³⁷

These circumstances marked the demise of Gomułka and his plans for “selective development.” The consumer sacrifices required by state-directed investment in heavy industry had risen too high. They inspired a broad citizen revolt, and they also failed to produce promised economic growth. Under Soviet pressure to “strengthen ties with the working class,” on 19 December the Polish Communist Party chose Edward Gierek as its new leader. Gomułka was forced into early retirement.

A former coal miner, Gierek pledged to reestablish stable relations between citizens and the Communist Party. He would continue to pursue economic growth through state-directed investment in heavy industry, but he would not do this at the cost of individual wages and family sustenance. Instead of “selective development,” Poland would pursue a wide range of programs for *both* development and consumption. Promises of material abundance, not autarchic discipline, served as the new glue for society.¹³⁸

In the past, Warsaw had depended primarily on Moscow for economic aid. During the early 1970s this also changed. Confronted with an economic slowdown and increasing demands throughout their empire, Soviet leaders believed that they could no longer carry the burden of supporting Poland and other ailing East European economies. A series of reforms within the East-bloc Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) encouraged member states to seek out opportunities for trade and financial assistance in the West rather than the Soviet Union. Moscow and its allies had already begun this process by pursuing increased East-West trade during the 1960s (see Table 2 in the appendix).¹³⁹

Under Gierek, Western loans replaced domestic sacrifice and Soviet assistance as the fuel for the Polish economy. The formerly closed state opened itself to trade and borrowing from the West. From 1970 to 1975 Polish citizens enjoyed the fastest rise in per-capita consumption among European communist societies. This increased standard of living was financed by the deepest foreign indebtedness in the Soviet bloc.¹⁴⁰

Before long Poland could barely pay the interest on its loans. Annual service requirements accounted for 30 percent of the country’s export income in 1975. To remain solvent each year, Gierek’s government borrowed more

money from the West. By 1980 Poland's annual debt servicing exceeded the total income from its exports. Only continued credit from capitalist countries allowed the communist state to keep its economy running.¹⁴¹

In retrospect, Soviet-bloc debt contributed to the economic and political bankruptcy of communism. Recurring Polish upheavals in 1976 and 1980-1982 emerged from the difficulties of servicing ballooning foreign liabilities. Loan repayment required eventual domestic sacrifices, often deeper in magnitude than those that had initially motivated leaders to look abroad for financial assistance. During the 1970s Poland and its communist neighbors lived on borrowed time.¹⁴²

This historical judgment does not match perceptions in the immediate aftermath of the December 1970 crisis. Faced with domestic unrest and limited government resources, large loans from the capitalist states looked very attractive for leaders such as Gierek and Brezhnev. Foreign assistance allowed them to promise both economic growth and increased consumption. Workers could enjoy more meat, better housing, and additional leisure time. Economic openness, rather than enforced autarchy, assured short-term domestic stability.

With the encouragement of their governments, western banks made large loans to the Soviet bloc. During a period of slow growth rates—and recession around 1973—East European markets offered alluring opportunities for expanding exports. Foreign loans financed communist purchases of capitalist goods and, as a consequence, contributed to short-term economic stability in the United States and Western Europe. The authoritarian nature of the Soviet-bloc states made them appear safe risks for large loans. In the eyes of many bankers and government officials, undemocratic figures such as Gierek could properly discipline their societies to service heavy debt burdens.¹⁴³

Detente, in this sense, buttressed the leadership in the Soviet bloc. Cooperating with Western officials, communist governments replaced autarchic models of development with international openness. They used foreign resources to meet rising domestic expectations. The capitalist states perceived an economic interest of their own in stabilizing the communist regimes through large loans and extensive market inroads. This arrangement could not last very long, but in the early 1970s it underpinned a period of cooperation between Cold War adversaries. President Nixon's improved relations with the Soviet Union were the most obvious fruit of East-West economic and political interdependence.

As was the case with China, Richard Nixon entered the White House possessing more firsthand knowledge of the Soviet Union than any of his im-

mediate predecessors. During his tenure as Eisenhower's vice president he had closely observed the making of American policy toward this Cold War adversary. In July 1959 he had visited Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk, Sverdlovsk, and other parts of the Soviet Union. On this trip Nixon held extensive discussions with leaders from the Kremlin, including a public debate with Nikita Khrushchev on the relative merits of capitalism and communism.¹⁴⁴

When the vice president traveled to the Soviet Union in 1959 he approached his hosts from a position of strength. The United States deployed a larger nuclear arsenal than its adversary. Recent uprisings in Hungary and Poland revealed that the Soviet bloc was much more fragile than the Western alliance. Nixon could speak confidently in Moscow of his desire to "extend this [Soviet-American] competition to include the spiritual as well as the material aspects of our civilization."¹⁴⁵

Ten years later, President Nixon was no longer quite so confident in his nation's capacity for spiritual and material competition. He recognized that circumstances had changed considerably in the last decade, largely to America's disadvantage. In 1969 Washington possessed more long-range bombers and nuclear submarines than Moscow. The Soviet Union, however, maintained a stockpile of 1,274 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), compared with 1,054 under American command. Around Moscow the Soviets had also built an antiballistic missile (ABM) defense system unparalleled in the United States. War between the superpowers had long promised mutual destruction, but in the early 1970s the Kremlin deployed an arsenal with some possible advantages over American capabilities.¹⁴⁶

Both superpowers confronted growing domestic dissent and resistance from former allies. The democratic societies in the West, however, appeared much more fragmented and divided than their Eastern counterparts. Citizens expressed their discontent throughout the Soviet Union, but they did not burn sections of their cities and besiege their leaders as protesters commonly did in the United States and Western Europe. The Kremlin's tyranny seemed to produce advantages in domestic discipline, as well as military capability.¹⁴⁷

Shadowed by these circumstances and the escalating protests against the Vietnam War, Nixon and Kissinger believed that they had inherited a weak position for their dealings with the Soviet Union. The latter contended, in his memoirs, that while the "absolute power" of the United States had grown during the Cold War, previous policymakers had failed to grapple with the evidence that "our relative position was bound to decline." America had achieved what Kissinger called a "position of strength," but it suffered in bilateral relations because "our adversary, instead of negotiating, concen-

trated on eroding [our position] or turning our flank." According to this prognosis, the Nixon White House needed quick and creative action to avert imminent decline.¹⁴⁸

Political trends gave every indication that current developments would increase Moscow's international standing at the cost of Washington's. William Hyland, one of Kissinger's close advisers on the National Security Council, recalls that the "strens" and "continuing commotion" outside the White House made it virtually impossible for policymakers to maintain a strong and unified negotiating position with foreign visitors. With each passing day the American government confronted more violence from its own citizens. "How could the United States preserve the credibility of its foreign policy in such an atmosphere?" Hyland asked.¹⁴⁹

In contrast to the more obvious chaos in the West, the Soviet Union looked strong and cohesive. This judgment grossly underestimated the internal difficulties of the communist superpower and the domestic resilience of democracy. For Nixon and Kissinger, however, the image of American weakness and Soviet strength was overpowering. It obsessed them.

From 1969 through 1971 they set out, as Kissinger has it, to rescue chance from unfavorable circumstances.¹⁵⁰ This meant deflecting attention from American weaknesses and connecting international issues to create new pressures for Soviet concessions. Arms control and European security had dominated the agenda for talks between the two states since the Eisenhower years. Now the White House refused to isolate these topics from the Vietnam War and relations with China. The United States demanded Soviet assistance in ending the Vietnam War before the conclusion of any arms control agreement. If Moscow was not forthcoming, Washington would seek to improve its relations with China at Soviet expense. Kissinger predicted that this strategy of "linkage" would induce a "more constructive attitude" from the Kremlin on issues of critical importance, and potential weakness, for the West.¹⁵¹

To insulate negotiations from bureaucratic and public difficulties, Kissinger opened a secret "back channel" with Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Meeting frequently over informal meals, the two men probed each other for areas of agreement and compromise on a wide range of topics. These discussions displayed the Soviet Union's commitment to engage the United States in meaningful deliberations, but they also showed how far both sides were from agreement on the issues most pressing to the Nixon administration. Kissinger recalls that on "about ten occasions" in 1969 alone, he "tried to enlist Soviet cooperation to help end the war in Vietnam." Dobrynin was consistently "evasive." The two states remained deadlocked

on arms control and other bilateral issues that Nixon and Kissinger linked to progress on a Vietnam settlement.¹⁵²

After two years of inconclusive discussions, the White House gained the leverage it had previously lacked in its relations with the Soviet Union. The sensation created in July 1971, when Nixon announced that Kissinger had completed a secret visit to Beijing, raised the Kremlin's fears of a Sino-American alliance against Moscow. Meeting with Kissinger for lunch in August, Dobrynin condemned China's aggressive behavior along the Soviet border and in other areas. Shaken by the recent progress in Sino-American relations, he expressed hope that Washington was not engaged in an "anti-Soviet maneuver."¹⁵³

Nixon and Kissinger used their "China card" to reacquire the negotiating strength they had lost in the late 1960s. Relations between Washington and Beijing raised the specter that the Soviet Union would soon find itself encircled by a coalition of adversaries in both the West and the East. One internal Soviet analysis advised that Sino-American rapprochement had "threatening consequences" but was "not inevitable." Moscow could design "major obstacles" to reconciliation between China and the United States by improving its own relations with Washington.¹⁵⁴

This was exactly the reaction that Nixon had hoped for. Kissinger recalls that Soviet leaders were "suddenly anxious to create the impression that more serious business could be accomplished in Moscow than in Beijing." Dobrynin sought to arrange a summit meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev before the president visited China. Turning the screws on the Kremlin, the White House accepted the idea of a Soviet-American meeting in Moscow, but Nixon made sure it occurred after his trip to Beijing.¹⁵⁵

Nixon and Kissinger placed Soviet-American relations in a new strategic context. Discussions became more secret, while the range of issues was now more global. The White House exploited its triangular connections with the Soviet Union and China to compensate for weaknesses in bilateral negotiations with Moscow. Creating closer contacts with these states than they had among themselves, the United States could play one side against the other. The president demanded that both Moscow and Beijing curtail their expansionist activities or risk triggering a U.S. coalition with the other communist state.¹⁵⁶

This strategy contributed, at least in part, to the settlement of the Vietnam War in January 1973. Moscow and Beijing recognized that prolonging the conflict only increased the possibility that the United States would seek an exit by allying more closely with one communist patron against the other. The Soviet Union and China had already become rivals for North Vietnam's

loyalty, and this state of affairs opened the way for Nixon and Kissinger's maneuverings. To limit their risks, both Brezhnev and Mao favored negotiations between Hanoi and Washington. During the early 1960s great-power rivalries had contributed to the escalation of conflict in Southeast Asia. A decade later, detente created new pressures for foreign disengagement from the region.¹⁵⁷

Most important from the perspective of the White House, Nixon and Kissinger gained political standing through their wide-ranging diplomatic contacts in the early 1970s. They appeared active and creative to an audience desperate for new initiatives in Vietnam and other areas. Without his triangular diplomacy, the president told his chief of staff, "We'd be collapsing now in Vietnam, and the Congressional resolutions on pullout would be passing." Instead, the White House exploited secret maneuvers to create "pragmatic" options. "The United States can't just stand by without trying to affect the world," Nixon asserted.¹⁵⁸

The leaders of the Soviet Union found that the president's pragmatism imperiled their international status. No longer privileged as America's most important foreign counterpart, Brezhnev's standing declined as Nixon and Kissinger's rose. Almost as frightening as Sino-American collusion for the Kremlin was the prospect of Soviet irrelevance. The Moscow summit of 1972 served as a forum where both the Soviet Union and the United States attempted to solidify their respective statuses as great powers in a world that had grown more multidimensional.

Between Nixon's visit to China in February 1972 and his scheduled trip to the Soviet Union in May, North Vietnam opened a massive offensive against American-supported positions in Southeast Asia. On 30 March approximately 15,000 of Hanoi's heavily armed troops attacked South Vietnam. The invading forces pushed the South's soldiers down the long neck of the peninsula. The old imperial city of Huế—around which the armies of both sides, as well as the United States, had fought fierce battles in early 1968—was soon in jeopardy of falling under Hanoi's control.

Angered by the force of the North Vietnamese attack and fearful that the government in the South might collapse under this renewed pressure, Nixon responded with a new round of bombing raids. On 16 and 17 April American air and sea forces launched their heaviest attacks around Hanoi since the president had taken office. General Creighton Abrams, the supreme American commander in Vietnam, had requested that U.S. planes support the defense of ground positions in the South. The White House,

however, ignored his advice. Nixon ordered a series of strikes designed to punish the North and to display American resolve.¹⁵⁹

Despite U.S. bombing, fighting conditions in Vietnam continued to deteriorate. General Abrams sent an alarming report to Washington, indicating that soldiers defending the South had "begun to bend and in some cases to break." Abrams warned that Huế and other areas might fall under North Vietnamese control in a matter of days.¹⁶⁰

Nixon took this news as a personal affront. He feared that the North Vietnamese would defeat the South before he could negotiate a deal for the honorable withdrawal of the last American soldiers and the return of prisoners of war. Hanoi's brazen attack made Nixon look as weak and ineffectual as his predecessor had during the Tet Offensive. The president now felt he had to abandon his recently acquired image as a statesman of peace, and return to his "madman" persona for the sake of frightening the North Vietnamese. He ordered Kissinger to tell Hanoi's representatives that he had "had enough." "Settle or else!" he warned.¹⁶¹

To reinforce his threat of American escalation, Nixon approved a plan to mine Haiphong. Hanoi imported more military supplies through this port, located on the Gulf of Tonkin, than any other. It was an important docking point for shipments arriving from the Soviet Union. American air strikes had already damaged four of Moscow's ships in other ports during the past month. In Haiphong, Nixon prepared to imperil additional Soviet personnel and equipment for the sake of weakening Hanoi.¹⁶²

Kissinger expected that the leaders in Moscow would retaliate by cancelling the Soviet-American summit meeting, scheduled for 22 May. Remarkably, they didn't. Events in Vietnam held far less importance for the Kremlin than the risk of closer Sino-American cooperation against the Soviet Union. Brezhnev needed a summit with the American president to restore his political standing at home and abroad. Instead of creating new tensions with the United States, he hoped to conclude a series of agreements that would stabilize the international system and eliminate the risks of triangular competition among the great powers.¹⁶³

Nixon understood Soviet aims, and he shared a similar outlook. He traveled to Moscow intent on creating a new superpower relationship that would not change the political status quo, but make it more stable and secure. The president sought to capitalize on the benefits of his recent opening to China, building what Kissinger called a firm "structure of peace."¹⁶⁴

Instead of recurring conflicts among the great powers, agreement on clear spheres of influence would ensure reduced tensions. The largest states would cooperate to limit the disruptive capabilities of small countries such

as North Vietnam and Czechoslovakia. Firmly established as the legitimate hegemons in a dangerous world, leaders would avoid undermining their counterparts' control over disorderly citizens—especially naive idealists seeking broad social and political change. Nixon and Brezhnev saw this as "realistic" policy.¹⁶⁵

The Moscow summit produced the first Strategic Arms Limitations Agreement (SALT I) and the ABM treaty. Together they established ceilings on future rocket construction and missile defense systems. Nixon and Brezhnev, however, gave these documents surprisingly little attention during their meetings. After all, SALT I and the ABM treaty did not actually reduce either side's nuclear arsenal; they only set relatively minor limits on later deployments. During the summit, Soviet and American leaders focused on ensuring common stability against spreading disorder. They recognized that political authority in North America, Europe, and Asia had begun to fragment. They met in hope of reducing uncertainty and uncontrolled change.¹⁶⁶

In previous decades the Soviet-American rivalry had provided a simple bipolar framework for both competition and cooperation. This inherited architecture now proved inappropriate for a world in which citizens besieged their leaders, small nations challenged the influence of larger states, and China acted as an independent great power. The international environment had grown multipolar, but the United States and the Soviet Union desired the continued power and standing they had possessed in the earlier bipolar setting. What Kissinger called a new "structure of peace" would protect the benefits of order and stability for the largest states despite the fragmenting trends in world affairs. This was the conservative core of detente, and the drive behind the central accomplishment of the superpower summit.¹⁶⁷

On the last day of Nixon's visit to Moscow, he and Brezhnev signed the declaration on "The Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." It began with a call for "mutual understanding and business-like cooperation" between the superpowers in order "to remove the threat of war" and "create conditions which promote the reduction of tensions." Instead of hostility, the two states pledged to pursue "peaceful coexistence" and to avoid any "dangerous exacerbation of their relations." Drawing on the momentum of SALT I, Moscow and Washington prepared to seek further agreements on arms control, trade, and scientific cooperation.¹⁶⁸

Nixon announced that this declaration rejected formal spheres of influence for the superpowers. He called it a "landmark" turn from the "military confrontation" of the Cold War to a new period of "constructive leadership and restraint." Kissinger explained that despite the profound differences in

their social systems, the United States and the Soviet Union would now "try to behave with restraint and with a maximum of creativity in bringing about a greater degree of stability and peace." The Declaration of Principles laid out what Kissinger called a "roadmap," establishing clear "rules of conduct" to govern an "age in which a cataclysm depends on the decisions of men."¹⁶⁹

The language of the document and its expositors was surely promising, but it was also deeply conservative. "Restraint" and "mutual accommodation" replaced earlier calls for progressive change in the international system. In no single clause did the signatories indicate how they would work together for any purpose other than reinforcing the status quo. The document recognized the "sovereign equality of all states," but only within a framework that gave priority to the "security interests" of the superpowers. The signatories rejected formal spheres of influence, as Nixon contended, but the provisions for assured boundaries and stability legitimized the current division of authority between the East and West blocs, especially in Europe.

Instead of empowering the United Nations or some other international body to mediate disputes between states, Nixon and Brezhnev spoke of their intent to "widen the juridical basis of their mutual relations." International conflicts had become more complex and multidimensional, the two sides acknowledged, but the superpowers asserted their dominant influence in most regional confrontations. While the leaders renounced the use of force against each other, they pledged to "exert the necessary efforts so that bilateral agreements which they have concluded and multilateral treaties and agreements to which they are jointly parties are faithfully implemented." The United States and the Soviet Union would, in essence, collaborate as freemen, putting out flames of conflict around the globe.¹⁷⁰

The declaration made no mention of the domestic unrest that had convulsed each of the great powers in the late 1960s. These were "internal problems," according to Kissinger, best left out of an international treaty. Claims to justice had, however, long served as central elements in both American and Soviet foreign policy. To exclude them from a general statement of principles might have been good Realpolitik, but it also sent a message that the leaders of the two superpowers wanted to insulate their activities from domestic debates about ideology and national purpose.¹⁷¹

The absence of ideals from the declaration indicated that principles would play little role in international behavior. Nixon and Brezhnev pledged to cooperate closely for the sake of global stability, confining the claims of protesters and dissidents within their respective national boundaries. Instead of containing each other through threats of force, as they had since the end of

World War II, the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union now included to contain their own citizens.

The Declaration of Principles codified a Soviet-American detente that reflected newfound trust between the superpowers, born of shared domestic and international difficulties. Through secret channels and summits, Kissinger explained to news reporters, Nixon and Brezhnev had come to understand each other better. They recognized a common interest in stability and order, and a common danger from crusading rhetoric and unregulated disruption. Washington and Moscow laid the foundation for unprecedented cooperation to strengthen the political status quo.¹⁷²

■ The "Postmodern" Legacy of Detente

Ostpolitik and Sino-American rapprochement marked the first steps toward a conservative world order after the global disruption of 1968. Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union was the last piece in the puzzle of detente. The leaders of the great powers created a process that balanced threats and boosted elites—particularly the men who made foreign policy in the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and West Germany. Detente ensured a safer status quo by discrediting domestic and international challengers.

The strength of detente derived from the fact that it addressed the fears and served the interests of the leaders in the largest states. Each of the great powers gained from stability when confronted with the prospect of widespread disruption. Detente assured that the international system would operate smoothly so long as policymakers adhered to their objective "national interests."¹⁷³

"National interests," however, are not objective laws, but instead contested ideas. Detente's fatal weakness grew from its inability to address the claims of citizens and small states that refused to accept the status quo because of its perceived injustice. From the day that Nixon and Brezhnev signed the Declaration of Principles through the end of the 1970s, the leaders of the great powers suffered repeated criticism for ignoring concerns about national self-determination, human rights, economic fairness, and racial and gender equality.¹⁷⁴

Agitation around these issues had triggered the global disorder in the 1960s that initially made detente appear necessary as a source of stability. Ironically, political leaders reacted to the criticisms of injustice voiced in the previous decade by isolating and containing dissent, rather than by creating new sources of popular consent. Detente reflected traditional balance-of-power considerations, but it also included a set of policies that delib-

ately constrained domestic dynamism. Instead of eliminating the suffering and dissatisfaction inherent in the Cold War, it tried to make it all seem "normal."

Excluded from policy influence and disillusioned by the consequences of their protests, many idealistic citizens turned away from politics. The secret channels and intricate maneuverings of detente locked dissent out of government deliberations. The reformist impulses of the 1960s did not disappear, but they moved from the now largely closed world of elite policy to the less political realm of culture and community. Former radicals, like their parents, became mothers, fathers, and homeowners, but few matured with the same faith in government exhibited by earlier generations.¹⁷⁵

Detente, in this sense, contributed to what many loosely call "postmodern" thought—the search for freedom *from*, rather than freedom *in*, the nation-state. Great-power politics in the early 1970s strengthened the stability of established governments while burying permanent weaknesses deep within. None of the great powers managed to mobilize its fragmented population for a united purpose or progressive policy in the next decade.¹⁷⁶

Skepticism toward authority is today a global phenomenon. It is also a legacy of the circumstances and decisions inherited from the late 1960s. Leaders are no longer loved or feared. In some of the largest democracies they are ignored by as much as half of the electorate, which refrains from voting. Leaders are frequently profaned by international media that play on public distrust of politicians. In this cynical environment, we are still living with the dissent and detente of a previous generation.