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Elusive Equality:

The Nuclear Arms Race in Europe and the History of the INF Treaty, 1969-1988

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This dissertation draws upon thousands of recently-available American, Soviet, and European documents to present a compelling narrative of the nuclear arms race in Europe and the history of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty from 1969-1988. It argues that although the United States, the Soviet Union, and the European members of NATO all claimed to support equitable arms control agreements, conflicting definitions of nuclear equality perpetuated the arms race in Europe and undermined efforts to achieve an arms limitation treaty. While exploring the complex history of US-Soviet arms control negotiations, the dissertation sheds new light on the Soviet view of the arms race from 1969-1976, Henry Kissinger's secret negotiations with Soviet leaders from 1969-1974, the logic behind the Soviet decision to begin deploying its SS-20 missiles in 1976, the reasons why NATO had such difficulty formulating a unified response to these new Soviet missiles at the start of Jimmy Carter's presidency in 1977, President Carter's bungling of the neutron bomb affair in 1978, the fragility of the NATO dual-track decision in 1979, Margaret Thatcher's role in the deployment of American missiles in Europe in 1983, the paradox at the heart of Ronald Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union from 1981-1988, the Soviet reaction to President Reagan's hard line policies from 1981-1984, and the importance of new ideas and personal relationships in Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to abandon the Soviet pursuit of nuclear equality and make numerous concessions to the United States in order to achieve the INF Treaty in 1987.

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INTRODUCTION

The Unexpected Treaty

Ronald Reagan stormed into office in 1981 pledging to rebuild America's military might and to wage the Cold War against the Soviet Union with renewed vigor. Shortly after becoming the 40th President, he called for massive increases in the American defense budget, authorized an aggressive program of psychological operations against the Soviet Union, decried the Soviet Union as the focus of evil in the modern world, announced plans to build a missile shield in outer space, and installed a new generation of nuclear missiles in Europe that could reduce Moscow to rubble within ten minutes of being launched.¹

Reagan's hardline policies greatly heightened tensions between the two Cold War antagonists, and many began to fear that nuclear war was a real possibility. French President Francois Mitterrand likened the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1983 to the face-off over Berlin in 1948 and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.² George Kennan, the architect of the doctrine of containment, feared that superpower relations were spinning out of control. He warned Reagan officials that he detected "the familiar characteristics, the unflinching characteristics, of a march toward war—that and nothing else."³

¹ David S. Painter and Thomas S. Blanton. "The End of the Cold War," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Cristophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 480-481.

² Benjamin B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1997), accessed January 1, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications>. Jeremi Suri similarly describes the final months of 1983 as the second most dangerous period in the entire Cold War. See, Jeremi Suri, "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Volume 4, Number 4 (Fall 2002): 63.

³ A series of events in 1983 also contributed to the increasing tensions between the two countries. On March 8, Reagan called the Soviet Union the evil empire. The Soviets were deeply unhappy with this characterization. On March 23 Reagan announced his plan to

Soviet leaders were extremely alarmed by the Cold War cowboy in the White House, and they blamed Reagan for pushing US-Soviet relations to the brink of nuclear war. The official Soviet news agency TASS declared that Reagan was full of "bellicose lunatic anti-communism" and warned that Reagan's inflammatory policies could trigger an accidental nuclear exchange.⁴ The chairman of the KGB was so convinced that Reagan might be planning to attack the Soviet Union that he designed a massive international espionage effort and sent hundreds of KGB agents around the world to look for evidence that the United States was preparing for a surprise nuclear strike against the USSR.⁵

build a defense shield in outer space. The Soviets believed that the goal of this plan was to make the United States immune to a Soviet counterattack after attacking the Soviet Union first. On September 1 the Soviet Union shot a Korean Airlines civilian jetliner out of the sky, killing everyone on board, including an American congressman. Soviet leaders believed that the aircraft was on a spying mission. Reagan described the destruction of the plane as an act of barbarism. On September 26, Soviet radar systems falsely reported that the United States had launched several nuclear missiles at the Soviet Union. An independent-thinking Soviet radar operator correctly concluded that the radar system was malfunctioning and overrode the radar computer systems. After the false alarm, Soviet leaders were faced with the realization that they would not know for sure whether or not their radars would be able to accurately detect an American first strike. On October 23, the United States invaded Grenada, an event which reinforced the Soviet belief that the Reagan administration represented a new form of aggressive American militarism. On November 2-11 NATO conducted a transatlantic war games exercise that simulated a conflict that gradually escalated from conventional war to nuclear war. Some Soviet leaders temporarily worried that the drill was a guise for an actual attack. At the end of 1983 the United States began deploying new nuclear missiles in Europe that were aimed at the Soviet Union. All of these events built upon one another, creating more and more volatility and hostility in the relationship between the two sides in 1983. See, Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum*; and Stephen J. Cimbala, "Revisiting the Nuclear 'War Scare' of 1983: Lessons Retro-and Prospectively," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 2 (2014): 234-253.

⁴ *New York Times*, "Soviet Says Reagan Has 'Pathological Hatred,'" March 10, 1983; and Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 9-15.

⁵ Report, Victor Chebrikov to General Secretary Yuri Andropov, "Report of the Work of the KGB in 1982," March 15, 1983, in ed. Nate Jones, *The 1983 War Scare: "The Last Paroxysm" of the Cold War*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 426, accessed January 15, 2014, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/>. Stephen J.

Anxiety over the possibility of nuclear war spread across Europe and the United States in the mid-1980s and repeatedly manifested itself in popular culture. In mid-1983 Nena, a German punk rock band, released an anti-war anthem titled, "99 Luftballons." The song began by describing a cluster of children's balloons floating harmlessly in the sky over West Berlin. But when the balloons drifted over the Berlin Wall and into sky over East Berlin, a faulty East German missile radar mistook the balloons for a NATO missile attack. This led to an immediate military response, which in turn triggered a flurry of nuclear exchanges between the East and West. When the bombs stopped falling and the song reached its conclusion, Europe lay in ashes, obliterated beyond recognition. "It's all over, and I'm standing pretty," Nena sang, "In this dust that was a city." The German song quickly reached number one on almost all the music charts across Europe. The English version, "99 Red Balloons," topped the charts in the United States, the UK, and Australia. A few months after Nena began warning the world of a possible nuclear holocaust in Europe, the ABC television network aired a made-for-television movie—*The Day After*—that depicted, in graphic detail, a Soviet nuclear attack on several small towns in eastern Kansas. One hundred million Americans shuddered together in front of their television sets as they watched mushroom clouds rise and radiation plumes fall across the Midwest. In the same year, another popular film, *War Games*, warned that America's rapidly-growing nuclear arsenal was becoming frighteningly linked to semi-autonomous computer systems and that a simple computer glitch could lead to "global thermonuclear war." In 1985 the British rock star Sting

Cimbala, "Revisiting the Nuclear 'War Scare' of 1983: Lessons Retro-and Prospectively." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 2 (2014): 234-253.

released a song titled, "Russians," in which he described "a growing feeling of hysteria" in Europe and America and condemned President Reagan's reckless flirtation with nuclear weapons—"Oppenheimer's deadly toy." "There's no such thing as a winnable war," Sting sang, "It's a lie we don't believe anymore / Mr. Reagan says, 'We will protect you,' / I don't subscribe to that point of view / Believe me when I say to you / I hope the Russians love their children too."

By the end of Reagan's first term in office, the situation looked bleak, and there was little hope that things would change for the better any time soon. In fact, almost everyone in the United States, Europe, and the Soviet Union expected that, if anything, US-Soviet relations would continue to deteriorate and the arms race would continue to intensify throughout the final four years of the Reagan presidency. Almost everyone expected this; but almost everyone was wrong. Even while car stereos and portable Walkman cassette players across the world blared Sting's chilling ballad, radical changes were already underway.

In November of 1985 President Reagan held a summit in Geneva with the new Soviet General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev. Sitting together in front of a roaring fire, the two men seemed to hit it off. During the course of extended one-on-one discussions, they agreed that war had to be avoided at all cost, and they emerged from their private meetings with a joint statement that nuclear war could not be won and must not be fought. A year later, the two leaders met a second time in Reykjavik, Iceland. During several electrifying meetings, Reagan and Gorbachev tabled, debated, and then accepted a proposal that envisioned completely eliminating both sides' entire nuclear arsenals over the next ten years. At the last

minute, disagreement over Reagan's plan to build a missile shield in space blocked this ambitious scheme, but the world marveled that the two men had come so close to such a sweeping disarmament agreement. Opposition within Reagan's inner circle to significant cuts in America's nuclear arsenal and the all-consuming Iran Contra scandal that erupted right after the summit prevented Reagan and Gorbachev from realizing the far-reaching proposals envisioned at Reykjavik, but in 1987 the two men did succeed in signing a landmark nuclear arms control treaty—the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

The INF Treaty was an entirely unanticipated and unprecedented achievement. Coming on the heels of one of the most dangerous periods in the entire Cold War, it was the first treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union to call for the destruction of existing nuclear weapons. The arms control negotiations of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter presidencies had sought simply to place limits on the future production of American and Soviet weapons, but the Reagan-Gorbachev INF Treaty called for the elimination of an entire category of nuclear missiles—all intermediate-range nuclear missiles, including American ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing II ballistic missiles in Europe that were targeted at the Soviet Union and Soviet SS-20 missiles in the USSR that were aimed at Europe.

The end of the Cold War was still a few years away, but the INF Treaty was an important first step in the monumental shifts that were down the road. The Soviet leadership concluded that if it was possible to negotiate a major disarmament treaty with such a stridently anti-communist Western leader, then it just might be possible to deal with the United States and Europe on a whole host of other issues. The INF

Treaty, numerous Soviet officials confessed later, helped embolden Gorbachev to initiate sweeping changes in Soviet foreign policy, changes that in turn facilitated the democratic revolutions that swept across Eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁶

The Reagan Victory School

Only a few years prior to the INF agreement, it seemed like the United States and the Soviet Union were trying to destroy each other. Then, suddenly, they were agreeing to destroy a significant portion of their nuclear arsenals. How did this surprising change come about? By far the most popular answer to this question comes from a group of former Reagan officials and a cohort of scholars whose work is based heavily on interviews with these officials. Collectively known as the “Reagan victory school,” these authors present the INF Treaty as an American victory made possible by Reagan’s defense build-up during his first term in office. They argue that this build up and the prospect of having to compete with the United

⁶ Soviet officials repeatedly made this assessment in a series of interviews conducted by Don Oberdorfer in 1990 and 1991. See the interviews with Soviet leaders in Don Oberdorfer Papers, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. See also, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Gorbachev—On My Country and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Anatoly S. Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Robert G. Patman. “Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of ‘New Political Thinking,’” *Review of International Studies*, Volume 25, Issue 04 (October 1999): 577-601; and William D. Jackson, “Soviet Reassessment of Ronald Reagan, 1985-1988,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 4. (Winter, 1998-1999): 617-644. For the link between Gorbachev’s policies and the revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989, see, Jacques Lévesque. *The Enigma of 1989: the USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Hans-Hermann Hertle, “The Fall of the Wall: The Unintended Dissolution of East Germany’s Ruling Regime,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13, (Fall/Winter 2001): 131-164; Jacques Lévesque, “Soviet Approaches to Eastern Europe at the Beginning of 1989,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 49-72; and Oldrich Tuma, “Czechoslovak November 1989,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 181-192.

States in a new arms race in outer space forced Soviet leaders to search for a way out of the arms race. The distinguished Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis, for example, writes, “The U.S. military buildup was launched with the intention of so straining an already inefficient economy that the Soviet leadership would have little choice but to make substantial concessions on arms control.” This, he concludes, is exactly what happened. “Strength,” Gaddis argues, “did lead to negotiations, bargaining chips did produce bargains, and ‘hanging tough’ did eventually pay off.”⁷ Based on this line of argumentation, the INF Treaty was the first manifestation of the potency of Reagan’s strategy of pursuing peace through strength.⁸

There are two main arguments at the core of the Reagan victory school’s interpretation of the INF Treaty: 1) that Reagan never wavered in his hardline policies and 2) that these policies caused the changes in the Soviet Union, including the Soviet acceptance of the INF Treaty.⁹ Scholars have attacked both these core arguments. Beth Fisher and Don Oberdorfer both dispute the first argument. They

⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, “Arms Control: Hanging Tough Paid Off,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 45. No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1989): 13-14.

⁸ For other examples of the Reagan victory school, see Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration’s Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Cold War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994); Jay Winik, *On the Brink: The Dramatic Behind the Scenes Saga of the Reagan Era and the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Richard Pipes, “Misinterpreting the Cold War,” *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (January/February 1995): 154–61; Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace* (New York: Warner Books, 1990); and Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Inside Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). More moderate versions of the Reagan victory school can be found in George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner’s, 1993); and Jack Matlock, Jr. *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995); and Paul Kengor, *The Crusade: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

⁹ For a detailed argument that Reagan remained consistent in his stance toward the Soviet Union throughout his presidency, see the first chapter of Jack Matlock, Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004).

claim that sometime between 1983 and 1985 Reagan realized that his hardline approach to the Soviet Union was not working and that this realization caused him to change course and begin seeking dialogue and peaceful relations with the Soviet Union. In *The Reagan Reversal* (1997) Fischer argues that this change took place in 1984 after Reagan watched a personal screening in the White House of *The Day After*.¹⁰ In *From the Cold War to a New Era* (1998) Oberdorfer locates the moment of change in 1983 when George Shultz had dinner with the Reagans and persuaded the president to make a turn in his policy toward the Soviet Union.¹¹ The shared view of both these works is that Reagan's willingness to negotiate with Gorbachev and to sign a disarmament agreement during Reagan's second term are incompatible with his first term military build up, and, therefore, that Reagan had to have changed his mind at some point. In both of these accounts, Reagan receives credit not for faithfulness to his original vision of peace through strength but for coming to his senses and abandoning his hardline policies in favor of dialogue and diplomacy.

While Fischer and Oberdorfer attack the first claim of the Reagan victory school—that Reagan remained consistent throughout his presidency—other scholars dismiss the second claim—that Reagan's hardline policies motivated the Soviets to make concessions in the disarmament negotiations and to agree to the INF Treaty. Numerous scholars with expertise in Soviet history have argued that Gorbachev's reforms, including his willingness to agree to the INF Treaty, were the product not of external pressure from the United States but of internal factors.

¹⁰ Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

¹¹ Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

These scholars disagree as to which domestic factors were most important, but they overwhelmingly agree that the primary catalysts for Soviet change came from within the Soviet Union.¹² They have explored the personality and policy of Mikhail Gorbachev,¹³ the transformation of elite mentalities,¹⁴ the changes that pervaded Soviet society,¹⁵ the instability caused by the numerous nationalities within the USSR,¹⁶ the state of the Soviet economy,¹⁷ the role played by the military and the KGB,¹⁸ and the importance of specific events that occurred in the Soviet Union during this period.¹⁹

¹² An example of this focus on causes within the Soviet Union can be seen in the two special issues that the *Journal of Cold War Studies* dedicated to the end of the Cold War. Of the eight articles in these two issues seven articles look at factors within the Soviet Union. Only one article looks at Western influences. See Vol. Issue 1 (Winter 2003) and Vol. 5 Issue 4 (Fall 2003).

¹³ Vladislav M. Zubok. "Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Perspectives on History and Personality," *Cold War History*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (Jan 2002): 61-100.

¹⁴ Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Paul Hollander. *Political Will and Personal Belief: The Decline and Fall of Soviet Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). See also the essays by William Odom and Jacques Levesque in Olav Njolstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

¹⁵ Walter D. Connor, "Soviet Society, Public Attitudes, and the Perils of Gorbachev's Reforms: The Social Context of the End of the USSR." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 4 (Fall 2003): 43-80.

¹⁶ Astrid S. Tuminez. "Nationalism, Ethnic Pressures, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 4 (Fall 2003): 81-136.

¹⁷ Geir Lundestad, "'Imperial Overstretch,' Michael Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000): 1-20. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Economic Constraints and the End of the Cold War," in *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates*, ed. William Wohlforth (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 273-312. Stephen Kotkin. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31-57.

¹⁸ Brian Taylor, "The Soviet Military and the Disintegration of the USSR," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, Num. 1 (Winter 2003): 17-66. Amy Knight. "The KGB, Perestroika, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter 2003): 67-93.

¹⁹ See "Special Issue: The End of the Cold War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001).

A Fresh Perspective on Reagan

Over the last five to ten years a sizeable body of new primary source material from the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe has become accessible for the first time to researchers interested in the history of the INF Treaty. Based on exhaustive research in this new material, this dissertation offers a fresh perspective on the history of the INF Treaty. It contends that the proponents of the Reagan victory school are correct in their claims that Reagan remained consistent in his policies but wrong in their assessment of the influence of these policies on the Soviet Union.

Newly-declassified materials from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library together with Reagan's recently-published diaries (2009) reveal that while Reagan was implementing a wide range of militaristic anti-Soviet policies around the world, he was also looking for ways to improve relations with the Soviet Union from the very beginning of his presidency. This included sending private letters to Soviet leaders, arranging clandestine meetings with Soviet officials, and making secret proposals in favor of improved relations—even during his first term in office. The paradox at the heart of Reagan's approach to the Soviet Union—aggressively pursuing policies that increased tensions with the Soviets while simultaneously looking for ways to improve US-Soviet relations—was especially evident when it came to nuclear weapons. Numerous sources reveal that Reagan loathed nuclear weapons and wanted to rid the world of them.²⁰ This did not stop him, however,

²⁰ Two recent books develop this thesis: Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2006); and James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009).

from significantly escalating the nuclear arms race by authorizing several new nuclear weapons systems and deploying new American nuclear missiles in Europe.

Reagan seems to have genuinely believed in both peace and strength and truly hoped that peace would come from strength. The problem was, from the Soviet perspective, that Reagan's public policies in support of strength completely contradicted and invalidated his secret overtures in support of peace. In the view of the Soviet leadership, one of these two Reagan faces had to be a mask, a deceit. They concluded, in fact, that Reagan's peace overtures were a smokescreen to hide secret preparations for war, and they reacted to this conclusion accordingly. A wealth of new sources, including letters between Soviet and East German secret police, Soviet Politburo minutes, and CIA intelligence reports, reveal that Soviet leaders genuinely feared Reagan and believed that he might launch a surprise attack against the Soviet Union. These sources also reveal that these leaders had absolutely no intention of backing down to the United States in any way. The Soviet assessment of Reagan's intentions led not to a greater willingness to make concessions in the arms negotiations but to increased Soviet intransigence in their dealings with the United States.²¹ The result of the combination of Reagan's hardline policies and Soviet concerns related to these policies was a toxic atmosphere of heightened tensions.

Although Reagan's policies in support of strength were leading toward increased tension and possibly even war, there is no evidence in the newly-declassified material from the Reagan Library or from Reagan's recently-published

²¹ Gerhard Wettig, "The Last Soviet Offensive in the Cold War: Emergence and Development of the Campaign against NATO Euromissiles, 1979-1983: Origins of the Second Cold War." *Cold War History* 9, No. 1 (2009): 79-110.

diaries that Reagan ever made this connection or fundamentally altered his policies toward the Soviet Union. From the beginning, he wanted peace but also pursued policies that made peace less and less likely. This is the Reagan paradox.

The Soviet leadership had two chances during Reagan's first term to pick a new General Secretary—at the end of 1982 and at the beginning of 1984. If they had wanted to fundamentally change course in their relations with the United States, these would have been two excellent chances to do so. Instead, in 1982 they picked the Chairman of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, who was deeply suspicious of the United States. Had Yuri Andropov lived for six more years, there would have been no transformation in US-Soviet relations. When Andropov died just fifteen months later, the Soviet leadership had another chance to change course. Instead, they picked Konstantin Chernenko—a pick that guaranteed continuity, not change. If Chernenko had lived just four more years, then US-Soviet relations would have continued on their predicted path, and Reagan's strategy of peace through strength would have been deemed a failure.²²

But, as fate would have it, Chernenko died just thirteen months later. This time the Politburo chose Mikhail Gorbachev. This third choice changed everything. Gorbachev, as Vladislav Zubok, Archie Brown, Robert English, and numerous others argue, had an entirely different way of viewing the Soviet Union's relationship with the West, and this view shaped his understanding of Soviet security needs.²³ These

²² Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-23.

²³ Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* Vladislav Zubok, "Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Perspectives on History and

beliefs were the product of Gorbachev's own personal history and had almost nothing to do with Ronald Reagan or his peace through strength strategy. Based on Gorbachev's new understanding of Soviet security, he was willing to make numerous "concessions" to the United States in the INF negotiations in order to secure a treaty. Gorbachev's rise to power gave Reagan the chance to pursue his aspirations to obtain peace with the Soviets and negotiate a nuclear disarmament treaty. Reagan should be credited for having this aspiration, for looking for ways to reduce nuclear weapons, and for seizing the opportunity when it came, but his hardline policies did nothing to create this opportunity. In fact, they made it considerably less likely.

Greater Breadth and Depth Based on New Sources

This dissertation, therefore, offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between Reagan's policies and the INF Treaty that he signed with Gorbachev in 1987. This is not, however, all that it does. It also provides, by far, the most comprehensive analysis of the INF Treaty to date.

For the most part, historians have written about the INF Treaty in a cursory way in the course of discussing other topics; only a handful of books have taken the INF Treaty as their principal subject. George L. Rueckert's book, *Global Double Zero* (1993), provides a solid, although highly technical, overview of the INF negotiations and the subsequent treaty based on publicly available sources.²⁴ In *Negotiating in the Public Eye* (1995), Marc Genest offers an engaging examination of efforts by the

Personality," *Cold War History*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (January 2002): 61-100. Vladislav Zubok, "Gorbachev's Nuclear Learning," *Boston Book Review* (April-May, 2000): 6-14.

²⁴ George L. Rueckert, *Global Double Zero: The INF Treaty from Its Origins to Implementation* (Westport, CTL Greenwood Press, 1993).

media to cover the INF negotiations.²⁵ Based also on public sources, Genest offers little insight into the secret deliberations and decision-making processes of the officials involved. Brian Frederking's treatment, *Resolving Security Dilemmas* (2000), is an arcane analysis geared solely toward international relations theorists.²⁶ It attempts to explain how "constructivist international relations theory" and "speech-act analysis" prove that the elimination of INF weapons and the associated intrusive verification measures would have been impossible in the context of the "social rules" that characterized the Cold War. Frederking's clashing models and competing constructs offer little of value to historians. Maynard Glitman's short book, *The Last Battle of the Cold War* (2006), offers an account of Glitman's own participation in the INF negotiations as Reagan's chief negotiator.²⁷ Its celebratory perspective falls squarely within the Reagan victory school and shares the same deficiencies. The most recent book on the INF treaty, David T. Jones' edited volume, *The Reagan-Gorbachev Arms Control Breakthrough* (2012) offers no new insights; the volume is simply a collection of anecdotal essays by INF participants that were previously published in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁸

All these books share common shortcomings. None of them attempts to provide a full history of the INF Treaty from the origins of the negotiations on

²⁵ Marc A. Genest, *Negotiating in the Public Eye: The Impact of the Press on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Negotiations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

²⁶ Brian Frederking, *Resolving Security Dilemmas: A Constructivist Explanation of the INF Treaty* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

²⁷ Maynard Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War: An Insider Account of Negotiating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

²⁸ David T. Jones, ed., *The Reagan-Gorbachev Arms Control Breakthrough: The Treaty Eliminating Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) Missiles* (Washington, DC: Vellum, 2012).

nuclear weapons in Europe in 1969 to the signing of the treaty in 1987. This is understandable, for tackling this entire span of history is a formidable task. It requires understanding the negotiations as they intersected with four American Presidents (Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan) and four Soviet General Secretaries (Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev). In addition, to properly tell the history of the INF Treaty and reveal its real significance, it is necessary to answer a number of difficult questions: Why were the US-Soviet arms control negotiations, which began in 1969, unable to resolve the question of nuclear weapons in Europe until 1987? Why did the Soviet Union feel compelled to deploy new intermediate-range missiles and aim them at Europe in 1976? Why did the members of the NATO alliance believe that they had to respond to these Soviet missiles, and why did they have so much trouble agreeing on a collective strategy? Why did they eventually formulate a plan in 1979 to deploy new American missiles in Europe, and how were they able to implement this decision successfully four years later in the face of massive opposition from a protest movement that engulfed Europe? How much credit (or blame) should Reagan receive for the deployment of these weapons in 1983, and what role did other European leaders like Helmut Schmidt of West Germany and Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain play in making this happen? How did Ronald Reagan view nuclear weapons, and how did Soviet leaders respond to his policies? Finally, how did Gorbachev's view of nuclear weapons in Europe differ from previous Soviet leaders, and why was he willing suddenly to make so many concessions in order to negotiate an INF Treaty? This dissertation offers new answers to all of these questions.

The current books on the INF Treaty also are quite limited in the sources that they use when compared with this dissertation. All of these current works are based heavily on publicly-available American sources or on research in just a handful of American government archives. This means that they are unable to shed much light on the behind-the-scenes decision-making processes of the two sides or the top-secret interactions between them. By contrast, this dissertation draws upon tens of thousands of recently-available documents and primary source materials from the United States, Russia, and Europe. The work on this project involved trips to universities and archives in several states in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia in a quest to locate new American, British, and Russian sources. In addition, this dissertation makes exhaustive use of dozens of major online archives—including the National Security Digital Archive, the Wilson Center Archive, the Parallel History Project, and the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive—to access additional, newly-declassified sources from Russia, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. The Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidential libraries and the archives of the CIA, State Department, and Defense Department also all have created large online primary source repositories. Together, all of these relatively-new, searchable, online archives make it possible to conduct research in American and international sources across a broad span of time with a level of depth and breadth that would have been unthinkable as little as five years ago.

An Interpretive Key—Conflicting Perceptions of Equality

From all of this research an interpretive key emerges that sheds new light on the history of the arms race in Europe, US-Soviet nuclear arms negotiations, and the history of the INF Treaty from 1969-1987. The key to understanding the failure of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT, 1969-1979) to produce a ratified treaty, the Soviet decision to deploy SS-20 missiles in 1976 and 1977, NATO's difficulty from 1976-1979 in formulating a unified response to these missiles, and NATO's eventual decision to deploy new American missiles in Europe in 1983 is that although the United States, the Soviet Union, and the European members of the NATO alliance all believed that the most stable and desirable security situation for all parties involved would be for the Soviet Union and the United States to have approximate equality in nuclear weapons, no one agreed on how to define this equality. The Soviet Union had one definition, the United States had a second definition, and America's allies in Europe had a variety of definitions that often conflicted with both the Soviet definition and the American definition. These definitions were shaped by how the different parties evaluated different weapons systems, which in turn were influenced by subjective perceptions and shifting politics.

Throughout the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (1969-1979) both sides seemed to genuinely favor nuclear equality, but this equality remained elusive because they could never agree on what equality would look like. Because the Soviet Union and the United States could not agree on how to define strategic nuclear equality, the SALT negotiations failed to address the question of nuclear forces in

the European theater in a way that satisfied the Soviets. This led to the Soviet decision to deploy its SS-20 missiles in Europe in 1976 and 1977. Although European leaders accused the Soviet Union of deploying these weapons in order to achieve nuclear superiority, the Soviet Union believed that these weapons would rectify an imbalance and create nuclear equality between the two sides. To the surprise and consternation of German and British officials, from 1976-1978 American leaders in the Ford and Carter administrations mostly supported the Soviet interpretation—that the Soviet deployment did not alter the strategic nuclear balance. This explains the inability of the NATO alliance to develop a unified strategy for responding to these weapons during the final year of the Ford presidency and the first two of the Carter presidency. After a grand fiasco related to the “neutron bomb,” Carter eventually recognized that for the sake of the cohesion of the NATO alliance, he needed to accept the European definition of nuclear equality and lead the alliance to develop a strategy for deploying new American missiles in Europe. When President Reagan and Margaret Thatcher led NATO to implement this decision and deploy these missiles in 1983, Soviet leaders immediately accused the United States of destroying the nuclear equilibrium that had existed between the United States and the Soviet Union, and they began deploying additional weapons to rectify this imbalance. The Soviet leadership seemed bent on matching Reagan weapon-for-weapon, but then Andropov died and his replacement, Chernenko, died thirteen months after that. Mikhail Gorbachev, the fourth General Secretary in less than three years, eventually decided that enough was enough; he rejected the whole paradigm behind Soviet participation in the arms race since 1969—the belief that

Soviet security depended on equality in strategic nuclear weapons with the United States. Gorbachev replaced the quest for equal security with a new security framework that he called “reasonable sufficiency.” Instead of increasing its nuclear arsenal to match the West, the Soviet Union would now reduce its armaments down to the lowest possible level. Instead of trying to have an equal number, it would have the lowest possible number that would still provide a reasonably sufficient amount of security. This new way of thinking allowed Gorbachev to make concession after concession in the arms negotiations with the Reagan administration, and these concessions eventually led to the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987.

SALT and the SS-20 Enigma, 1969-1976

The first four chapters of this dissertation examine the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union to define strategic nuclear equality during the SALT negotiations from 1969-1976 and the relationship between this struggle and the Soviet decision to deploy its SS-20 missiles. These chapters argue that the failure of the two sides to reach a shared definition of equality and negotiate a treaty based on a common understanding of nuclear equality played a central role in the Soviet decision to begin deploying its SS-20 missiles in 1976.

One of the most common views regarding the SALT negotiations is that the Soviet Union had obtained rough parity with the United States in strategic nuclear weapons by the start of the 1970s. American officials at the time believed this, and their belief has been repeated as fact again and again by scholars who study this period. In one of the earliest accounts of the SALT negotiations, *Cold Dawn* (1973), John Newhouse writes, “The Russians...have caught up with the United States in

strategic weapons”.²⁹ In two books written twenty years later, both Raymond Garthoff (1994) and Terry Terriff (1995) make the same claim.³⁰ And in the most recent examination of SALT, *The Transformation of American Power in the 1970s*, Barbara Zanchetta (2014) expresses the same thought, describing the early 1970s as “the age of parity.”³¹

Although scholars have widely accepted the American assessment of the state of the arms race in the early 1970s, Soviet officials did not share this view.³² An in-depth analysis of the SALT negotiations reveals that Soviet officials consistently rejected the American evaluation of the strategic nuclear balance because they did not agree with the way in which the United States defined “strategic” weapons. The United States defined strategic nuclear weapons as systems located in the United States and capable of reaching the Soviet Union or located in the Soviet Union and

²⁹ John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 3-4.

³⁰ Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994). Terry Terriff, *The Nixon Administration and the Making of U.S. Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

³¹ Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American Power in the 1970s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7, 21, 63. Other major works on SALT, include: Mason Willrich and John B. Rhineland, *SALT: The Moscow Agreements and Beyond* (New York: Free Press, 1974); Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Thomas W. Wolfe, *The SALT Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Pub. Co., 1979); Strobe Talbott, *Endgame: The Inside Story of SALT II* (New York, Harper & Row, 1979); Gerard C. Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of the SALT I by the Chief American Negotiator* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980); Gerard C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat: The Memoirs of Gerard C. Smith, Arms Control Negotiator* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1996); Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

³² Raymond Garthoff argues that Soviet leaders believed that they had achieved strategic parity by the start of the SALT negotiations. To support this claim, Garthoff cites numerous Soviet sources. The problem with these sources, however, is that almost all of them are from after 1976. This was the year in which the Soviet Union began deploying its SS-20 missiles. It was an aberration for Soviet leaders to speak of having nuclear equality with the United States prior to this time. See, Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 57-76.

capable of reaching the United States. When the United States counted up these intercontinental systems, they concluded that the two sides had strategic parity. Soviet officials, however, defined strategic weapons differently. They believed that any systems able to strike the territory of either side—regardless of where they were located or how far they could travel—should be defined as strategic weapons. Based on this definition, the Soviet Union considered American nuclear weapons in Europe that were able to reach the Soviet Union as strategic systems and concluded that these weapons, for which the Soviet Union had no parallel, gave the United States an advantage in the nuclear equation. They rejected the American claim that parity existed and called upon the United States to allow the Soviet Union to have extra intercontinental systems to make up for American nuclear weapons in Europe that could strike the Soviet Union. Taking these Soviet arguments seriously is the first step to understanding why they began deploying their SS-20 missiles in 1976.

The second step is to understand what transpired during the SALT negotiations and the way in which the Soviet leadership viewed these negotiations and their aftermath. For almost twenty years, the best two books on the SALT negotiations have been Gerard Smith's firsthand account, *Doubletalk: The Story of the SALT I by the Chief American Negotiator* (1980), and Raymond Garthoff's 1,226-page tome, *Defense and Confrontation* (1994). Smith was the head of the US SALT delegation, and Garthoff was the State Department's SALT representative. Both men provide detailed examinations of the official SALT negotiations that took place in Helsinki and Vienna, but they offer little insight into what transpired in backchannel negotiations that took place between Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador

Anatoly Dobrynin. As these backchannel negotiations took place, Kissinger kept them a secret from almost everyone in the US government except President Nixon, and even after Garthoff, Smith and others found out about these negotiations, Kissinger refused to share his records of the negotiations with them. When Smith wrote his book nine years later and Garthoff wrote his account twenty-two years later, both men still had not been able to gain access to these records. In 1996 Garthoff lamented that Kissinger's negotiations still "remained shrouded in mystery."³³ Shortly after Garthoff published his book, the US government began declassifying Kissinger's records of his clandestine negotiations with Dobrynin.³⁴ A few years later, scholars began incorporating these records into their research.³⁵ But these records, written by Kissinger himself after meetings in which he was almost always the only American representative, are not always completely accurate. This has led to several errors and omissions by historians who treat Kissinger's records as a transparent account of what actually transpired.³⁶ In 2007

³³ Garthoff, *Détente and Confirmation*, 181.

³⁴ The first records of these meetings were declassified as the result of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests made by William Burr at the National Security Archive. Burr published some of these records in William Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks With Beijing And Moscow* (New York: The New Press, 1999). Scholars of the Cold War are deeply indebted to Burr and his colleagues at the National Security Archive for their aggressive use of the FOIA process to get critical documents declassified in a timely way and then to make these documents available in their archive in Washington, DC, in publications, and on their website.

³⁵ Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁶ A common misperception that results from using only Kissinger's records is that the Soviet Union initiated the back channel between Kissinger and Dobrynin and requested that the American contact be someone outside the State Department (See, Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, 37.) In fact, Kissinger is the one who introduced this idea in order to ensure that he, and not the Secretary of State, would be Nixon's representative in the secret negotiations with the Soviets.

the State Department took a major step toward rectifying this situation when it persuaded the Russian government to publish, for the first time, Dobrynin's reports to the Soviet Politburo on his meetings with Kissinger.

This dissertation is the first work to draw upon both the American and Soviet records of the backchannel negotiations to examine the SALT negotiations in a detailed way. Comparing these Soviet and American documents side-by-side reveals that Kissinger frequently omitted critical pieces of information about what transpired in his dealings with Dobrynin and other Soviet leaders.

One completely new revelation from these new documents is that Kissinger explicitly told Soviet leaders that the United States would allow the Soviet Union to have more intercontinental nuclear systems than the United States as compensation to the Soviet Union for American nuclear systems in and around Europe that were able to reach the USSR. The SALT I agreement of 1972 embodied this understanding by establishing different ceilings on intercontinental ballistic missiles for the two countries—the Soviet Union was allowed a higher ceiling than the United States. The Soviet leadership was extremely happy with this arrangement, believing that the United States had accepted their definition of “strategic” weapons and their arguments for how the two sides could balance out their respective nuclear arsenals to achieve equal security. They hoped that the SALT I interim agreement would be converted into a permanent SALT II treaty. They were, however, quickly disappointed.

When Nixon and Kissinger announced the terms of the 1972 SALT I agreement, many in the United States immediately criticized its unequal ceilings.

Kissinger offered a variety of explanations for this apparent discrepancy, but he never admitted that he had specifically told Soviet leaders that these extra missiles were a compensation to them for American nuclear weapons in Europe. Moreover, to the bewilderment of many in both the United States and the Soviet Union, Nixon and Kissinger themselves also began criticizing their own agreement.

When Kissinger returned to his secret negotiations with the Soviets in the months that followed, he immediately sought to eliminate the unequal ceilings in the SALT I agreement. Soviet leaders did not appreciate this sudden transformation. They repeatedly asked Kissinger why he was now going back on his promise to compensate them. Had the two sides not come to a shared understanding of what would constitute nuclear equality? Kissinger blamed his new position on the strident opposition in the United States to the SALT I agreement, especially the opposition of Senator Henry Scoop Jackson.

Several historians have done an excellent job of detailing the domestic backlash against the SALT I agreement.³⁷ What these historians have missed, and what new Soviet and American documents reveal, however, is that Kissinger secretly embraced Jackson's opposition and developed a strategy to use it to educate Brezhnev about the limiting realities of American domestic politics, to convince the Soviet leader that the US Senate would never ratify a treaty that did not include equal limits of intercontinental nuclear weapons for both sides, and to extract a

³⁷ See, Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*; and Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*. For the domestic opposition to SALT II, see Dan Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Arms Control: The SALT II Treaty Ratification Debate* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

more favorable treaty from Brezhnev. In 1974, during a summit with President Gerald Ford, Brezhnev agreed to a treaty based on equal limits for both countries.³⁸

Soviet sources reveal that Brezhnev had to overcome considerable opposition in the Politburo to agree to a treaty based on equal limits. These sources also demonstrate that Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders never abandoned the hope that their own definition of nuclear equality would eventually prevail and that American nuclear weapons in Europe would be withdrawn or the Soviet Union would be compensated for them in a follow-on agreement. However, neither of these things happened. Instead, Senator Jackson and others in the United States attacked this new agreement—despite the fact that it met their demand for equal limits.³⁹ When this happened, new American and Soviet sources reveal, the Soviet leadership was exasperated. They had made a huge concession by agreeing to equal limits, but critics in the United States were still unhappy.

At this time, two things happened: the Soviet leadership concluded that it was highly unlikely that they would ever be able to sign an agreement with the United States that met their definition of nuclear equality, and the Soviet military successfully tested the SS-20 missile. Two years later, the Soviet Politburo decided to begin deploying this new weapon.

³⁸ For works on President Gerald Ford's foreign policy, see, Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenge of the 1970s* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005); James Cannon, *Gerald R. Ford: An Honorable Life* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013); Andrew Downer Crane, *The Ford Presidency: A History* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006); and Peter Rodman, *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009).

³⁹ Senator Jackson's opposition was due, to a considerable extent, to his presidential ambitions. See chapter four.

Western observers at the time frequently described this deployment as unjustified and unexplained, and many scholars since then have repeated this assessment. John Gaddis, for example, writes, “the SS-20 was a significant upgrade and the United States and its NATO allies were given no warning.”⁴⁰ This conclusion makes sense when one assumes that parity already existed between the two sides in the early 1970s and if one ignores what transpired in the secret negotiations for six years before the Soviet Union made this decision. But if one understands the way in which the Soviet Union defined nuclear equality, the arguments and agreements that they made in the SALT negotiations from 1969-1976, and the backlash in the United States to these agreements, the Soviet decision is both logical and predictable.

The NATO Response to the SS-20 Missile, 1976-1983

At the end of 1979 the NATO alliance agreed on a strategy to respond to these new Soviet weapons. The plan involved two components and was labeled the “dual-track decision.” The allies would pursue disarmament negotiations with the Soviet Union for three years with the goal of reaching an agreement that would remove the SS-20s (the first track), but if these negotiations failed, the United States would deploy new American intermediate-range missiles in Europe at the end of 1983 (the second track). Chapters five and six of this dissertation explore the process from 1976-1979 that produced the dual-track decision, and chapter seven examines a key figure in implementing this strategy from 1981-1983.

⁴⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 202. See also, Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War*.

Early accounts of the origins of the dual-track decision consistently emphasized the dominant role of the United States in leading a fractured alliance to adopt this decision.⁴¹ A second wave of studies began to explore how Europeans supported the American-driven process that led to the dual-track decision,⁴² and more recent works have given even greater weight to the European role. Leopoldo Nuti (2004) claims that the American influence was less dominant than previously assumed, Joachim Scholtyseck (2010) argues that West German officials drove the NATO response, and Kristina Spohr Readman expands this argument and gives primary credit for the decision to West Germany, Great Britain, and Norway (2011).⁴³ This dissertation draws upon a sizeable body of recently-declassified

⁴¹ See, for example, Richard K. Betts, ed., *Cruise Missiles: Technology, Strategy, Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1981); Raymond L. Garthoff, "The NATO Decision on Theater Nuclear Forces," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (1983): 197–214; ; David N. Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1983); Paul Buteux, *Strategy, Doctrine, and the Politics of Alliance: Theater Nuclear Force Modernization in NATO* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983); Hans-Henrik Holm and Nikolaj Petersen, eds., *The European Missiles Crisis: Nuclear Weapons and Security Policy* (London: Pinter 1983); James A. Thomson, "The LRTNF Decision: Evolution of U.S. Theater Nuclear Policy, 1975–9," *International Affairs (RIIA)*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 1984): 601–614; Susanne Peters, *The Germans and the INF Missiles: Getting Their Way in NATO's Strategy of Flexible Response* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1990); Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Ivo Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response: NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); George L. Rueckert, *Global Double Zero: The INF Treaty from Its Origins to Implementation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993); and Dana H. Allin, *Cold War Illusions: America, Europe and Soviet Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

⁴² For an examination of the views of Helmut Schmidt and the German role, see Peters, *The Germans and the INF Missiles*. For an analysis of German and British cooperation, see Christoph Bluth, *Britain, Germany and NATO's Nuclear Strategy* (Oxford, UK: The Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁴³ Leopoldo Nuti, "Italy and the Battle of the Euromissiles: The Deployment of the US BGM-109 G 'Gryphon,' 1979–83," in Olav Njølstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 98–115. Joachim Scholtyseck, "The United States, Europe, and the NATO Dual-Track Decision," in *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, eds. Matthias Shulz and Thomas A. Schwartz (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 333–354.

American documents in the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, British documents in the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, and German, Dutch, and Italian documents in the Wilson Center Digital Archive to provide a new, more nuanced interpretation of the process that led to the dual-track decision.⁴⁴ These documents reveal that in the complex, transatlantic diplomacy that produced the dual-track decision, Helmut Schmidt and European leaders took the lead to call for a response to the SS-20 missile. The United States, who did not believe that the SS-20 posed a significant new threat, resisted European pressure to formulate a response for as long as it could. However, when the United States eventually concluded that European political realities required an American response and then decided to embrace European calls for deploying cruise missiles in Europe, Schmidt began vacillating. British leaders then played a critical role in rallying Germany and the other European members of NATO to support the dual-track decision of 1979.

When Europeans learned in 1976 and 1977 that the Soviet Union had started deploying SS-20 missiles aimed at Europe, they did not share the Soviet perspective that these missiles simply corrected a pre-existing imbalance in the nuclear forces of the Soviet Union and NATO. Europeans saw these missiles as a qualitative new threat and as undeniable evidence of a Soviet desire to achieve nuclear superiority. Many in Europe called for the United States and NATO to respond in some way to

Kristina Spohr Readman, "Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics: Western Europe, the United States, and the Genesis of NATO's Dual-Track Decision, 1977-1979," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 39-89.

⁴⁴ Most government sources related to the dual-track decision remained classified until around 4-5 years ago, when the 30 year anniversary of these events was reached and the countries involved began declassifying related documents. The Carter Library has generally been late in declassifying its collections. Consequently, many of the documents used in this study did not become available until just a couple of years ago.

these weapons—either by removing them through arms control or countering them with new American missile deployment in Europe.

European leaders were quite surprised, however, when they discovered that the United States was not worried about the SS-20. When Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, Carter's main focus when it came to nuclear weapons was on negotiating a new treaty with the Soviet Union that included sweeping reductions on strategic nuclear weapons. Since the Carter administration did not view the SS-20 as a strategic weapon, it was barely on the administration's radar. When Europeans called on the US to respond to this new missile, Carter officials assured them that European security was guaranteed by American intercontinental missiles and that the SS-20 missile did not upset the strategic nuclear balance, which was determined by intercontinental systems, not intermediate-range ones. But European leaders persisted, and in 1977 the Chancellor of West Germany gave a widely-publicized speech calling on the West to respond to this new threat.

While Carter was trying to figure out how to calm European anxieties over a problem that he did not believe was real, another crisis erupted. An article in the *Washington Post* announced that Carter had approved a budget that included a new nuclear weapon that could kill people by intense amounts of radiation but leave buildings and infrastructure undamaged. The article labeled the eerie weapon the neutron bomb. A firestorm of opposition to the neutron bomb broke out in Europe and the United States.

Faced with two crises, Carter came up with an ill-fated solution to solve both problems by combining them together.⁴⁵ He told his European allies that he would only build the weapon if they announced that they wanted to deploy it in Europe and that he would tell the Soviets that he would be willing to forgo deployment of the neutron bomb if they were willing to withdraw their SS-20 missiles. Almost no one in Europe liked the plan or believed that it could work. Nevertheless, they grudgingly decided to go along with their senior partner, and Schmidt and others expended political capital to convince their governments to support deployment of the neutron bomb. At the last minute, however, after some European leaders had already gone on record as supporting deployment of the neutron bomb, Carter changed his mind and cancelled the whole scheme. Europeans, led by Schmidt, were furious. The Soviets, by contrast, were exultant, believing that their extensive public diplomacy directed against the neutron bomb had forced the West to cancel deployment.

The reaction from European leaders after Carter cancelled the neutron bomb helped convince the American president that he needed to do a better job of managing the alliance. Carter spent a good part of the second half of 1978 repairing relations with Europe and listening to their concerns. However, after extensive consultations with European leaders and additional American studies into the balance of nuclear weapons in Europe, Carter still did not believe that there was any

⁴⁵ The argument outlined here, and presented in detail in chapter 5, that Carter attempted to solve two problems (the SS-20 and the neutron bomb) by combining them together is entirely new. For previous treatments of the neutron bomb affair, see, Sherri L. Wasserman, *The Neutron Bomb Controversy* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1983); and Vincent A. Auger, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Analysis: The Carter Administration and the Neutron Bomb* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996).

imbalance or that the United States should deploy new weapons. Nevertheless, although this was his real view, he realized that European perceptions—how ever exaggerated they might be—created political problems for European leaders, and that he should do his part to help them. Thus, Carter decided that the United States would deploy new American intermediate-range missiles in Europe.

Then, to Carter's surprise and frustration, the European leaders, for whom his decision had been made, began to vacillate on deploying cruise missiles. In particular, Helmut Schmidt of Germany raised numerous conditions and qualifications that would have to be met before the United States could deploy missiles in the FRG. Carter, with encouragement from his top cabinet officials, pressed ahead, believing that the alliance critically needed decisive leadership from the United States at this time. When Carter took a strong stand in favor of a unified alliance response to the European concerns about the SS-20, the new British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, strongly supported him. Carter and Thatcher then led the alliance to adopt a two-pronged strategy for dealing with the SS-20 missile—they would pursue arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union in the hopes that these negotiations could remove the SS-20 missiles, and they would prepare to deploy new American missiles in Europe if these negotiations failed. At the end of 1979, NATO voted unanimously in favor of this dual-track strategy.

To vote on a plan is one thing; to bring that plan to fruition is a whole different matter. NATO's unanimous vote in favor of the dual-track decision masked deep tensions between the United States and Germany and significant reservations about the decision on the part of Belgium and the Netherlands. Moreover, Carter's

poor handling of two international crises at the end of 1979—the Iran hostage crises and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—further strained transatlantic relations. By the end of 1980, it seemed questionable whether the alliance would be able to muster the unity necessary to deploy American missiles in Europe if arms control negotiations with the Soviets failed. But three years later the missiles started arriving in Europe and were being deployed in Britain, Germany, and Italy. Chapter six of this dissertation seeks to understand how this happened—how was the fragile alliance able to implement the dual-track decision?

In the literature on the deployment of American missiles in Europe in 1983, Ronald Reagan looms large. In some portrayals, he is the hero; in other portrayals, he is the villain; but in almost all of these accounts, he has the leading role.⁴⁶ This dissertation seeks to provide some corrective to this inordinate focus by shedding

⁴⁶ For examples of Reagan as hero, see, Andrew E. Busch, “Ronald Reagan and the Defeat of the Soviet Empire,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 27, Issue 3 (Washington, Summer 1997): 451-466; William C. Wohlforth, “Realism and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter 1994/95): 91-129; Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Inner Circles: How American Changed the World*. (New York: Warner Books, 1992); Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Autopsy of an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995); Caspar W. Weinberger, *In the Arena: A Memoir of the 20th Century* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of the Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993); and Maynard W. Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War: An Inside Account of Negotiating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006). For examples of Reagan as villain, see, Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control* (New York: Knopf, 1984); and Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). For more balanced accounts in which Reagan still plays a leading role, see, Beth A. Fischer, “Toeing the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Ending of the Cold War,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No. 3. (Autumn, 1997): 477-496; Lee Sigelman, “Disarming the Opposition: The President, the Public, and the INF Treaty,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1. (Spring, 1990): 37-47.

light on the influence of a European leader on the implementation of the dual track decision—Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain.

Over the past four years the British National Archives have been declassifying tens of thousands of documents from Margaret Thatcher's time as UK Prime Minister. These documents, together with recently-declassified files from the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, reveal that Thatcher often played a decisive role in the process that led to the deployment of American missiles in Europe.⁴⁷ When Reagan officials divided over whether to pursue negotiations with the Soviets or whether deploying new American missiles in Europe was truly warranted, Thatcher visited Reagan in Washington and helped convince him to do both. In the face of an international Soviet public relations campaign against possible deployment of American missiles in Europe and a growing peace movement in Europe, Thatcher urged Reagan to seriously pursue arms control negotiations and to make a bold disarmament proposal. Later when some leaders in Europe seemed to be vacillating about deploying American missiles, she orchestrated a strong display of alliance security by convincing European leaders to issue a security

⁴⁷ On Thatcher's foreign policy, see, Paul Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy: The Revival of British Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997); Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*. (London: Macmillan, 1994); Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (London: Little, Brown, 2003); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993); George Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusionment at the Court of Margaret Thatcher: An Insider's View* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996). For Thatcher's relationship with Reagan, see, Alan Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: Of Friendship, Conflict and the Rise and Decline of Superpowers* (London: Routledge, 1995); John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After* (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 2001); Tim Hames, "The Special Relationship," in *A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher-Reagan Decade in Perspective*, eds., Andrew Adonis and Tim Hames (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Robert M. Hathaway, *Great Britain and the United States: Special Relations since World War II* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990); Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher* (London: Bodley Head, Ltd., 1990).

statement in favor of deployment after an economic summit. In 1983 she became the first European leader to receive American missiles, having overcome a large protest movement in the UK.

Old Thinking, New Thinking, and the INF Treaty, 1981-1988

When American missiles began arriving in Europe at the end of 1983, the Soviet Union announced that it would cancel all arms control negotiations with the United States until the weapons were removed. After Soviet negotiators gathered their papers and walked out of the disarmament talks, the two sides had no ongoing negotiations on nuclear weapons for the first time since 1969. The final two chapters of this dissertation examine how the two countries went from no negotiations at the end of 1983 to a breakthrough disarmament treaty in 1987.

Although Reagan seemed troubled at the end of 1983 by the direction of US-Soviet relations, he did not alter his policies in a fundamental way during his final term in office. The change would have to come from the Soviet Union, but this also seemed unlikely. From 1981-1985 Soviet General Secretaries Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko had responded to Reagan's policies with deep suspicion and retrenchment.⁴⁸ Then Gorbachev came to power, and radical changes ensued. The debate over what caused this change has been fierce. As discussed at the beginning

⁴⁸ For more on the Soviet response to Reagan from 1981-1985, see, Jeremi Suri. "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 4 Issue 4, (2002): 60-92; John W. Parker, *Kremlin in Transition* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991); Benjamin B. Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare," Central Intelligence Agency Publications, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#rft48> [accessed 12/15/13]; and Nate Jones, ed. "The 1983 War Scare: "The Last Paroxysm" of the Cold War Part I," May 16, 2013, The National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/> [accessed 02/01/14].

of this introduction, a vocal group of former Reagan officials and conservative scholars have argued that Reagan's policies in pursuit of American strength eventually bore fruit during his second term in office and led to transformations in Soviet foreign policy.⁴⁹ A more nuanced version of this argument comes from a group of scholars who contend that material factors, primarily strains to the Soviet economy due to the demands of the global Cold War, prompted Gorbachev's reforms.⁵⁰ Some scholars dismiss the primacy of material causes and assert that new ideas produced Gorbachev's new policies;⁵¹ others focus more on Gorbachev's unique personality, which seemed inclined toward experimentation and dramatic initiatives;⁵² and still others argue that change came from the bottom up.⁵³

⁴⁹ See footnotes #6 and #7.

⁵⁰ Geir Lundestad, "Imperial Overstretch,' Michael Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000): 1-20. William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter 1994/95): 91-129; Mark Kramer. "Ideology and The Cold War." *Review of International Studies*. Vol. 25 (1999): 539-576; Mark Kramer. "Realism, Ideology, and the End of the Cold War: A Reply to William Wohlforth," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 1 (2001): 119-130. William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Robert D. English. "Sources, Methods, and Competing Perspectives on the End of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 283-294; Robert D. English, "The Road(s) Not Taken: Causality and Contingency in Analysis of the Cold War's End," in *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates*, ed. William C. Wohlforth (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 243-272; Robert D. English, "The Sociology of New Thinking: Elites, Identity Change, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring 2005): 43-80; Robert D. English, "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End: A Reply to Brooks and Wohlforth," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Spring 2002): 70-92; Robert G. Patman. "Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of 'New Political Thinking,'" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, Issue 04 (October 1999): 577-601; Vladislav M. Zubok, "Gorbachev's Nuclear Learning: How the Soviet Leader Became a Nuclear Abolitionist," *Boston Review* (April/May 2000):): 6-14.

⁵² Vladislav M. Zubok, "Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War: Different Perspectives on Historical Personality," in *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates*, ed. William C. Wohlforth (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003): 207-242. Kotkin. *Armageddon Averted*; Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵³ Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Walter D. Connor. "Soviet Society, Public

Over the last ten years, a wealth of new primary source material related to the Gorbachev era has become available to researchers. The Gorbachev Foundation has released the records of key Politburo meetings,⁵⁴ numerous former Soviet officials have published memoirs,⁵⁵ Gorbachev's main foreign policy advisor, Anatoly Chernyaev, has released his diaries,⁵⁶ and the American and British governments have declassified almost all the letters and meetings between Gorbachev and American and British officials.⁵⁷ Based on these sources, this dissertation examines the development of Gorbachev's new thinking about nuclear weapons after he became General Secretary. It argues that Gorbachev did not arrive

Attitudes, and the Perils of Gorbachev's Reforms: The Social Context of the End of the USSR." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 5 Issue 4 (Fall 2003): 43-80.

⁵⁴ The Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow, Russia, http://www.gorby.ru/en/archival/archive_library/. Many of the documents from the Gorbachev Foundation are now available in the collections of the National Security Archive in Washington, DC, due to the work of Svetlana Savranskaya, the National Security Archive's Director for cooperative projects with Russian archives and institutes. The author is deeply grateful to Savranskaya for her assistance with finding Russian sources at the National Security Archive and for giving the author access to her personal collection of Soviet sources from this period.

⁵⁵ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995); Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996); Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, Inc., 1991); Valery Boldin, *Ten Years that Shook the World: The Gorbachev Era as Witnessed by His Chief of Staff* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Andrei S. Grachev, *Final Days: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Colorado: WestView Press, 1995); Andrei Gromyko, *Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); Igor Korchilov, *Translating History: Thirty Years on the Front Lines of Diplomacy with a Top Russian Interpreter* (New York: Scribner, 1997); and Yegor Ligachev, *Inside Gorbachev's Kremlin: The Memoirs of Yegor Ligachev* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

⁵⁶ Chernyaev's diaries are available in the collections of the National Security Archive and on their website as several electronic briefing books. See, Anatoly Chernyaev, *The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev*, trans., Anna Melyakova, ed., Svetlana Savranskaya, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/index.html>.

⁵⁷ The best source for the letters and memoranda of conversation between Reagan and Gorbachev and Thatcher and Gorbachev is the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, which is available online at <http://margaretthatcher.org/>.

at the top position in the Soviet hierarchy with a clearly defined idea about how he would approach the nuclear arms race with the West; his ideas evolved gradually over time after he entered office. In fact, Gorbachev's early arms control proposals were strikingly similar to those of his predecessors. He argued that any arms control agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States that claimed to provide equal security for both sides would have to allow the Soviet Union to have more intercontinental nuclear missiles than the United States in order to compensate the Soviet Union for American missiles in Europe and the nuclear weapons of Britain and France—almost the identical argument that was made by Soviet leaders for the previous fifteen years. Gorbachev wanted to explore new alternatives to this approach, but he needed some assurance regarding the intentions of American and European leaders before he would be willing to make any radical new proposals. This assurance came through his personal encounters with Western leaders, including Margaret Thatcher of Britain, President Francois Mitterrand of France, US Secretary of State George Shultz, and President Reagan. These human interactions helped to assure Gorbachev that previous Soviet presumptions were no longer valid, and he concluded that the United States, Great Britain, and France had no intention of using nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's thinking concerning nuclear weapons was shaped further by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Gorbachev's experiences with Western leaders and his first-hand observations of the effects of a nuclear accident spurred him to find a way to extricate the Soviet Union from the arms race. Eventually, he concluded that the quest for nuclear parity was a fallacy and that the search for equal security had produced only "equal danger" for all

countries involved. Gorbachev then decided that the Soviet Union would no longer try to match the West bomb-for-bomb in the arms race; instead, the Soviet Union would seek to lower its nuclear arsenal to the lowest possible levels. Based on this radical new security paradigm, Gorbachev became willing to make numerous concessions in the arms negotiations with the West in order to secure the INF Treaty.

During the era of US-Soviet nuclear arms negotiations from 1969-1987, strategic nuclear equality was an elusive objective for both superpowers. Although both sides repeatedly claimed that all they wanted was to be equal, that rough parity would produce the most stable security situation and would put a cap on the arms race, they could not agree on what parity would look like. In particular, for fifteen years, they could not agree on how to categorize and count nuclear weapons in Europe. Were these weapons “strategic” systems that should be included in the *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*, or were they inconsequential to the strategic nuclear balance? The failure to find an answer to this question that would satisfy all parties involved—the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe—fuelled the arms race and thwarted efforts to reach an arms control treaty. Only when Mikhail Gorbachev rejected the quest for equality and overthrew this entire security paradigm were the two sides able to resolve the question of nuclear weapons in Europe and sign a landmark disarmament treaty.

CHAPTER 1

**COMPETING DEFINITIONS OF
EQUALITY, 1969-1971**

When the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) began at the end of 1969, the United States and the Soviet Union had very different expectations regarding the kind of treaty that the talks might produce. Both sides claimed to support an agreement that would grant the competing superpowers equality in their nuclear arsenals, but they completely disagreed as to how “equality” should be defined. This disagreement, the two sides quickly discovered, was due to incompatible views regarding which nuclear weapons should be included in the talks and defined as “strategic” arms. The United States defined strategic weapons as those capable of traveling intercontinental distances and of reaching from the United States to the Soviet Union and from the Soviet Union to the United States. Based on this definition, American officials expected the SALT negotiations to focus on producing a treaty that granted both countries approximately the same number of intercontinental nuclear systems. They described the security situation that would result from such a treaty as *strategic parity*. In addition, most senior American officials also believed that the Soviet Union would enter the talks with the same expectation—that the primary thrust of the negotiations would be to produce a treaty that established strategic parity, equal numbers of intercontinental nuclear systems for both sides.

But Soviet negotiators had a very different objective for the talks, one based on an entirely unexpected definition of *strategic* weapons. At the outset of the SALT negotiations, Soviet officials argued that the American definition of strategic weapons was overly narrow. They argued that strategic weapons should include not only weapons capable of traveling intercontinental distances but also all nuclear

weapons capable of striking the homeland of either the Soviet Union or the United States, regardless of how far these weapons were able to travel or how these weapons were labeled by the country that owned them. Soviet negotiators contended that in order to guarantee equality for both countries, a SALT agreement would have to take into consideration all nuclear systems capable of reaching either the United States or the Soviet Union. Based upon this view, Soviet officials declared that the goal of the talks should not be the American notion of parity—equal numbers of intercontinental systems—but another principle that they called “equal security”—a view of the nuclear equation that took into consideration *all* nuclear threats to either side and that substantially broadened the definition of strategic weapons.

American SALT negotiators were completely surprised by the Soviet introduction of the concept of equal security. They had expected the talks to focus on how and where to set numerical limits on comparable intercontinental nuclear arms, but they quickly discovered that the chief battle in the talks would be over competing principles and conflicting definitions. Which principle—*parity* or *equal security*—would govern the talks, and how would the two sides define “strategic” nuclear weapons?

This chapter highlights the disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union related to principles of equality and definitions of strategic weapons during the first four rounds of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. It argues that this disagreement was the most important area of contention in the negotiations and the source of complete deadlock. Unless one of the two countries would modify

their view of equality or adjust their definition of strategic weapons, the negotiations had little hope of ever producing an agreement.

The American Expectation—Legalized Parity

When the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks began in November of 1969, American government officials and arms control experts widely believed that the Soviet Union had achieved (or would achieve in the very near future) parity with the United States in strategic nuclear weapons. Several top secret Central Intelligence Agency reports from the period described how the Soviet leadership had achieved this feat by tripling its spending on strategic nuclear weapons following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. One 1969 CIA report estimated that the Soviet government had spent over 16 billion rubles on nuclear weapons during the 1960s, with over eighty percent of this money being used to bring the Soviet stockpile of strategic nuclear missiles up to American levels. In early 1970 the Director of the CIA concluded that any remaining gap between the United States and the Soviet Union in strategic nuclear weapons had been erased. “Equality, for all practical purposes, has been substantially achieved,” he wrote.⁵⁸

When the CIA Director and other US arms control experts concluded that the Soviets had achieved strategic equality, or parity, with the United States, what exactly did they mean? How did they define “parity,” and what weapons systems did they have in mind when comparing the strategic arsenals of the two sides? Both the

⁵⁸ Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate, Number 11-8-69: Soviet Strategic Attack Forces*. September 9, 1969. Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room [hereafter, FOIA ERR], Central Intelligence Agency, <http://www.foia.cia.gov>. See also, Director of Central Intelligence, *National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack*, November 24, 1970, Digital National Security Archive.

United States and the Soviet Union possessed thousands of nuclear weapons, and these weapons came in many different sizes and were designated for a wide variety of purposes. Which of these weapons did American officials categorized as strategic weapons? Declassified US government documents from the late 1960s and early 1970s reveal that the American government most often defined strategic weapons as those capable of traveling intercontinental distances and of reaching from the Soviet Union to the United States or from the United States to the Soviet Union.⁵⁹ Based on this definition, US government officials focused primarily on three weapons systems when comparing the strategic arsenals of the two superpowers—intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and long-range nuclear-capable aircraft (bombers). Since Soviet versions of these three intercontinental weapons systems were not designed in exactly the same way as American versions, American officials took into consideration a variety of factors when comparing the strategic arsenals of the two sides, including things like the weight of the nuclear warheads delivered by various missiles (throw-weight) and the accuracy of different weapons systems. But the most common American method for comparing the strategic nuclear arsenals of the two parties was simply to count up the number of intercontinental nuclear systems owned by each side. When the CIA Director and his colleagues in the American government concluded that the Soviet Union had achieved parity with the United States in strategic nuclear weapons, they meant that the Soviet Union now possessed roughly the same number of intercontinental nuclear devices as the United States. One CIA

⁵⁹ Director of Central Intelligence, *National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-8-69: Soviet Strategic Attack Forces*, September 9, 1969, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

report from late 1968, for example, warned that the Soviets were close to achieving parity with the United States, explaining, “[T]he Soviets are now approaching the US in numbers of operational intercontinental ballistic missile launchers and are also building a submarine force similar to Polaris,” the American submarine force.⁶⁰

The belief that the Soviets had achieved “strategic parity”—approximately the same number of intercontinental nuclear devices as the United States— influenced US expectations regarding the SALT negotiations. American officials believed that the likely outcome of the talks would be to negotiate a treaty that officially recognized parity between the two sides. Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor to President Richard Nixon, summarized this view in his memoirs when he wrote, “An agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States to limit strategic weapons would inevitably ratify strategic equality. There could be no other basis for negotiation.”⁶¹ In addition, most American officials in the Nixon administration believed that the Soviets had the same expectation for the talks. Since the Soviet Union had spent so much effort to catch up with the United States in intercontinental systems, American intelligence analysts and arms control experts widely believed that the primary Soviet goal for SALT would be to gain US recognition of Soviet parity in these weapons. According to a top-secret US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency report published in December of 1968, US Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earle

⁶⁰ Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate, Number 11-16-68: The Soviet Approach to Arms Control*, November 11, 1968, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶¹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 404.

Wheeler both believed that the Soviet goal for arms negotiations would be “to bring about numerical equality.”⁶² A secret CIA report issued at the same time projected:

The Soviets will approach negotiations with one basic criterion in mind: they will want their right to equality in strategic forces acknowledged in principle. In fact, one motive they had for accepting the US invitation to negotiate was probably the belief that the US move tacitly conceded this right, or at least could be so construed by them.”⁶³

A year later Henry Kissinger’s comments to the German Ambassador to Washington also reflected this belief about Soviet intentions. Kissinger told the German Ambassador that “the only realistic outcome to expect is one of ‘legalized parity.’”⁶⁴ And another top-secret CIA national intelligence report issued shortly after the talks began made the same conclusion:

It has been evident for some time that an important Soviet objective has been the achievement of a position of acknowledged strategic parity with the U.S. Soviet acceptance of strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) was intended in part to secure US recognition of this parity.⁶⁵

The Soviet Goal—Equal Security

Although US officials widely believed that Soviet negotiators would use SALT to seek US recognition of Soviet parity (equal numbers) in strategic (intercontinental) systems, Soviet negotiators had something else in mind. Time and time again throughout the negotiations, Soviet officials made clear that the Soviet goal for the talks was not mutually recognized “parity” in “strategic” systems (as

⁶² Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, “Strategic Arms Limitations, 1968,” dated 1968/12/00, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶³ Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate, Number 11-16-68: The Soviet Approach to Arms Control*,” November 11, 1968, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, “German Ambassador’s Call on Mr. Kissinger,” October 28, 1968, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶⁵ Director of Central Intelligence, *National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack*. November 24, 1970, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

defined by the US), but a new concept—something that they called “equal security.” The Soviets first introduced the phrase “equal security” at the end of 1968 when US and Soviet officials exchanged documents setting forth their respective views on SALT objectives, and, once the official talks began, Soviet negotiators repeated this expression again and again. During one of the opening sessions of the negotiations, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov, Head of the Soviet SALT Delegation, explained what the Soviets meant by equal security: “Agreements on the basis of equal security,” Semenov argued, “had to deal with threats as perceived by each side.” What this meant, he continued, was that “all nuclear delivery systems which could hit targets in the other country should be covered in SALT, regardless of whether their owners called them strategic or tactical.”⁶⁶ Based on this view, Soviet negotiators rejected the US definition of strategic weapons as being too restrictive and argued that additional American systems should be defined as strategic weapons. Although these weapons could not travel intercontinental distances, they too should be counted as strategic systems and included in the talks since they were capable of reaching Soviet soil.⁶⁷

American Forward-Based Systems

During the first sessions of the SALT negotiations, Semenov identified the additional weapons that the USSR had in mind—a group of nuclear weapons related

⁶⁶ In the context of the Cold War, tactical weapons were generally defined as weapons intended for use within a particular theater of battle (i.e., Europe or Asia), rather than for long-range strikes against the enemy’s homeland.

⁶⁷ Telegram, American Embassy Helsinki to Secretary of State in Washington, “Thinkpiece Re Present Position of Preliminary SALT,” December 1, 1969. Published in William Burr and Robert Wampler, *“The Master of the Game:” Paul Nitze and US Cold War Strategy from Truman to Reagan*. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 139.

to American bases in Europe and Asia that he called “forward-based systems” (FBS). Forward-based systems, Semenov, explained were American weapons located at US bases or on aircraft carriers that were in “forward” positions—geographic locations close to Soviet territory. Although these weapons were not traditionally defined as strategic systems, their close proximity to the USSR enabled them to reach Soviet soil. Any weapons capable of striking the Soviet Union, Semenov argued, had to be labeled as *strategic* weapons.⁶⁸

At the beginning of the SALT negotiations, Soviet officials estimated that the United States had 400 major military bases and 3,000 auxiliary bases around the world. These bases, according to Soviet observers, gave the United States the unmatched ability to wage war “thousands of kilometers from its own shores.”⁶⁹ Many of these bases were located quite close to the Soviet Union and were used to station or support American and NATO nuclear weapons systems. Soviet officials estimated that the United States had over 7,000 nuclear weapons at bases in Europe alone and another 5,000 with the Atlantic fleet. US negotiators argued that most of these weapons were smaller scale and should be categorized as “tactical” or “theater” weapons—weapons designed for use within a defined theater of battle outside the enemy’s homeland—and not as “strategic” weapons—weapons designed for direct strikes against the enemy’s territory. But Soviet negotiators pointed out that the location of these weapons at bases or on carriers close to the USSR gave some of them the same capabilities as strategic systems. Because of their

⁶⁸ Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I by the Chief American Negotiator* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 91.

⁶⁹ N. N. Inozemtsev. *USA: Economy, Politics, Ideology*. No. 1, January 1970, 6-14. Published in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (hereafter, CDSP).

“forward” locations, these weapons could in fact reach Soviet soil, and this made them strategic weapons.

In particular, the Soviets argued that two specific types of forward-based systems should be given special consideration in the SALT negotiations: 1) American nuclear-capable aircraft stationed at bases in Europe and Asia and on aircraft carriers near Soviet borders, and 2) the nuclear missiles on American submarines that were supported by bases in Europe.⁷⁰ Soviet analysts estimated that the United States had at least 750 aircraft with nuclear capability stationed in Europe and Asia and on aircraft carriers within striking distance of the USSR. Approximately 600 of these planes were in Europe.⁷¹ At this time, the United States also had two nuclear submarine bases in Europe—at Holy Loch, Scotland and Rota, Spain. Soviet negotiators contended that these were strategic systems for which the Soviet Union had no parallel weapons. The Soviet Union did not have any forward bases close to American soil with affiliated nuclear-capable aircraft or nuclear submarines. Thus, in the opening round of negotiations, Soviet officials argued that in order for the two sides to reach an agreement that recognized the principle of “equal security,” these systems had to be withdrawn or the Soviet Union had to be compensated for them in some way

⁷⁰ Soviet negotiators initially focused on aircraft at US bases and on aircraft carriers. They argued that the Soviet Union had no comparable nuclear delivery vehicles and called for these aircraft to be withdrawn. Later in the negotiations they included American submarines within the designation of “forward-based systems,” arguing that the location of US submarine bases in Spain and Scotland gave the US a geographic advantage, for which the Soviets should be compensated. At times, they also included American nuclear missiles in Europe in this category, pointing to 3,000 American nuclear warheads in Europe that formed a ring around the Soviet Union.

⁷¹ *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)*, May 13, 1970.

British and French Nuclear Weapons

The idea that an equitable agreement between the two sides should include American FBS was a completely unexpected insertion into the SALT negotiations; American officials were completely caught off guard by it. But Soviet officials did not stop there. They also contended that an equitable agreement “should take into account all the factors that define the Soviet-American balance,” including strategic weapons owned by America’s allies that would complement American strategic forces.⁷² Based on this belief, Soviet SALT negotiators argued that British and French nuclear systems also should be counted as part of US strategic totals. During the first year of the negotiations, Britain had 3 submarines with nuclear weapons and approximately 50 “Vulcan” bombers that could deliver nuclear weapons to Soviet soil. France had 45 bombers and was in the process of building 5 nuclear submarines and 18 intermediate-range nuclear missiles. Both countries also had smaller nuclear-capable fighter planes able to reach the USSR. Using the Soviet definition of strategic weapons, the two countries had a total of 375 strategic launchers and had plans to build up to 250 more over the next few years. Soviet officials insisted that since these weapons would be brought to bear in support of

⁷² Nikolay N. Detinov and Alexander' G. Savel'yev, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher, 1995), 9-10. Smith, *Doubletalk*, 91. Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 211. Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate, Number 11-16-70: Soviet Attitudes Toward SALT*, February 19, 1970, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

the United States and against the Soviet Union in a nuclear confrontation, they had to be included in a SALT agreement that guaranteed equal security for both sides.⁷³

The American Reaction—Surprise, Suspicion, Rejection

American officials were completely surprised by the Soviet view of equal security and doubted the sincerity of Soviet arguments. Prior to the start of SALT, the Nixon administration had prepared four possible arms control packages to present to the Soviets. These packages discussed a wide-range of different weapons systems and considered several different potential US positions. In a meeting in the White House Situation Room on June 12, 1969—five months before SALT began—senior members of the Nixon administration discussed these four packages and concluded that “the mix of the four packages raised most items for examination one way or another.”⁷⁴ But despite the wide range of topics included and the assumption that the four packages covered “most items,” none of them said anything about the weapons systems that the Soviets called forward-based systems. According to John Newhouse, Assistant Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1977-1979, “It never occurred to anyone in Washington at any time, whether then or in the Johnson days, that these weapons, which the United States regarded as tactical, not strategic, would figure in SALT.”⁷⁵ Raymond Garthoff, a member of the US SALT negotiating team, concurred. According to Garthoff, the Soviet idea that

⁷³ Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons in Europe, 1969-1987* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 32-33. Smith, *Doubletalk*, 132. Barry Schneider, “Big Bangs from Little Bombs,” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* (May 1975): 24-25.

⁷⁴ Minutes of a Review Group Meeting, June 12, 1969, The White House, National Security Council Files. Published in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume 32, “SALT I, 1969-1972” (hereafter, FRUS 69-76 Vol. 32 SALT I), document 17.

⁷⁵ John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 175.

“strategic offensive arms should include all weapons capable of nuclear attack on territories of the Soviet Union and the United States...did not figure in the American conception.”⁷⁶ Gerard Smith, Head of the US SALT delegation, adds, “the way the Soviets inserted the FBS issue in SALT came as a surprise.”⁷⁷

Nixon administration officials, already deeply distrustful of the Soviets and now caught by surprise by their unexpected positions, questioned the sincerity of the Soviet concept of equal security and its corollary definition of strategic weapons. Prior to the start of SALT, the CIA had published an intelligence report titled, “The Soviet Approach to Arms Control” that illustrated the administration’s profound distrust of Soviet negotiating tactics. The report concluded that the Soviets treated “arms control and disarmament primarily as a field of political warfare.”⁷⁸ The fact that the Soviet proposals related to the principle of equal security and the definition of strategic weapons came as such a surprise added to these American suspicions, and most Nixon administration officials concluded that the Soviet positions were not serious proposals at all. Gerard Smith asked, “What did the USSR expect to gain by raising this issue? Did the Soviets really believe that FBS were so significant to the strategic balance as to require limitation in a first SALT agreement? Or was FBS more of a ploy to keep a safe negotiating position until it could be seen more clearly where SALT would lead?”⁷⁹ The US Ambassador to Moscow, Lewellyn Thompson, agreed with this assessment, concluding that these unexpected Soviet positions

⁷⁶ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 153.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 91.

⁷⁸ Director of Central Intelligence, Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-16-68, “The Soviet Approach to Arms Control.” November 7, 1968, Digital National Security Archive.

⁷⁹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 92.

were not serious proposals and were “advanced merely for later bargaining purposes.”⁸⁰ According to Smith, “The US delegation never reached any conclusion as to how serious Soviet FBS protestations were.”⁸¹ Furthermore, the notion that a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union should cover weapons owned by Britain and France—independent countries not involved in the talks—seemed even more far-fetched to US government officials. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, member of the US National Security Council and advisor to Kissinger, concluded, “‘Equal security’ as defined by the USSR is a fraud.”⁸²

The Logic Behind the Soviet Positions

Although most Nixon administration officials doubted the sincerity of the Soviet notion of equal security and Soviet efforts to include US FBS and British and French systems in the talks, Soviet officials—both at the time of the talks and in later years—insisted that these were serious negotiating positions based upon legitimate Soviet concerns. According to General Nikolay N. Detinov and Aleksandr G. Savelyev, Soviet arms control experts during the SALT negotiations, the Soviet positions on equal security and the definition of strategic weapons were developed jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense and were based on “a

⁸⁰ Telegram, American Embassy Helsinki to Secretary of State in Washington, “Thinkpiece Re Present Position of Preliminary SALT.” December 1, 1969. Published in William Burr and Robert Wampler, *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and US Cold War Strategy from Truman to Reagan*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 139.

⁸¹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 129.

⁸² The majority of the American arms control establishment maintained this belief throughout the SALT negotiations. Memorandum, Helmutt Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, “SALT: The Shaker is Running Out.” FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 116.

unanimous view within the Soviet leadership.”⁸³ Detinov and Savelyev claim that demanding an accounting for US FBS was in fact the “central issue” of the Soviet SALT position and that receiving “some sort of compensation for American forward-based systems and British and French nuclear forces” was the “general Soviet negotiating goal.” These were not specious or even secondary positions. Rather, as Detinov and Savelyev assert, the Soviet leadership was “both serious and consistent” in pursuing these objectives.⁸⁴

What then were the factors that shaped the Soviet position? While the influences were many, an examination of a variety of Soviet sources reveals that three twentieth century crises played important roles in shaping the thinking of Soviet leaders when they were formulating the Soviet positions for the SALT negotiations. These three crises were World War II, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War. Examining the Soviet understanding of these three events and their connection to Soviet security helps us to understand the logic behind and the sincerity of the unexpected Soviet positions in the SALT negotiations.

World War II—The Threat from Europe

It is impossible to understate the importance of World War II in shaping Soviet threat perceptions. Nearly every member of the Soviet Politburo in the 1970s had participated in World War II. According to Detinov and Savelyev, the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet Union’s name for World War II) was “a defining event for

⁸³ Detinov and Savel’ev, *Big Five*, 34. General Detinov was a representative of the defense industrial sector in the Soviet party apparat during the SALT negotiations. He was a member of a five-agency group staffing the ultimate decision-makers during SALT and was eventually the number-two man in the Soviet delegation to the intermediate-range nuclear forces talks.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 10, 34.

that country and one which burned its imprint on the Soviet soul.” To a large extent, Detinov and Savelyev argue, “the Soviet leaders’ ideas about security were based on their personal war experience and the lessons they took from that war.”⁸⁵

One of the most indelible lessons that Soviet leaders took from World War II was that the primary threat to Soviet security came from Europe. This had been the case in World War II, and, from the Soviet perspective, it remained the case in the 1970s. Soviet leaders concluded that since the United States was now the European hegemon, American weapons in Europe and nuclear weapons in the hands of European countries aligned with and dominated by the United States were the biggest threat to Soviet security. Soviet leaders believed that a war with the United States would likely begin in Europe and that the presence of 7,000 American nuclear weapons in the European arena almost guaranteed that a conventional war in Europe would precipitate a nuclear war. Moreover, Soviet military analysts were deeply fearful that the United States was prepared to use a conflict in Europe as the excuse, and nuclear weapons located in Europe as the means, to launch a first strike nuclear attack on the Soviet Union itself. A 1966 secret report produced by the Soviet Ministry of Defense argued that NATO, “one of the largest and most aggressive blocks of imperialism,” was “operating under the influence of the US” and “preparing its armed forces for an attack against the countries of the socialist commonwealth.” “The basic means of unleashing a war in Europe,” the report asserted, “is considered to be a surprise nuclear attack.”⁸⁶ Throughout the early

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁸⁶ Colonel S. Sokolov, “The Preparation and Conduct of An Operation by the Armed Forces in a Theater of Military Operations in the Initial Period of War,” *Collection of Articles of the*

years of the SALT negotiations, the Soviet press promoted this belief again and again, describing NATO as “an aggressive military machine” and accusing NATO military leaders of devising “far-reaching military and political schemes” for “a lowering of the nuclear threshold” and “the use of nuclear weapons at the earliest stage of possible conflict in Europe.”⁸⁷

These Soviet sources also make clear that when the Soviet leadership considered the threat from the European theater, they made very little distinction between weapons owned by the United States and weapons owned by America’s European allies. In the Soviet estimation, the United States dominated its allies. An article published in the Soviet journal *USA: Economics, Politics, and Ideology* right after the start of the SALT negotiations expressed this perspective. “The U.S.A. heads the entire system of imperialist military blocs,” the article asserted. “It occupies the commanding position in NATO, the most important of those blocs.” Because of America’s dominance over the NATO alliance, the article concluded, “the Pentagon has at its disposal an enormous military machine, both within the country and abroad.”⁸⁸ American officials pointed out that the United States had no control over the weapons in the British and French arsenals, reminding the Soviets that France was not even a member of NATO. But the Soviets were unmoved by these arguments. In the words of one Soviet official, “France, although it has left the NATO

Journal of Military Thought, A Publication of the USSR Ministry of Defense, 1966. Reproduced in a May 10, 1976 CIA memorandum: “Intelligence Information Special Report.” FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

⁸⁷ *Pravda*, March 10, 1969, 4. *Izvestia*, April 24, 1969, 3. *Pravda*, June 19, 1969, 5. *Pravda*, June 26, 1969. *Pravda*, December 5, 1969. The American military doctrine of “flexible response” significantly exacerbated these Soviet concerns.

⁸⁸ *Ekonomika, Politika, Ideologia*, January 1970, 6-14.

military structure, is still an ally of the United States and does not conceal the fact that its nuclear arms are targeted on the Soviet Union.”⁸⁹ Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister from 1957-1985, further underscored this Soviet view when he asked members of the international press core to “imagine that a ghastly tragedy occurred: an English missile with nuclear warheads is in flight.” Gromyko then asked, “Would it, perhaps, carry the label: ‘I am English?’ ...or a French missile is in flight. Perhaps it will also fly bearing the label: ‘I am French, there is no need to count me?’”⁹⁰ When Soviet leaders applied the lessons of World War II, they concluded that nuclear weapons in Europe (owned by the United States and its allies) posed the greatest threat to Soviet security. This conclusion, in turn, directly informed the Soviet concept of equal security.

The Cuban Missile Crisis—The Value of Forward Bases

The second event that shaped Soviet thinking about the strategic value of US forward-based systems was the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1962 the Soviet Union attempted to install nuclear missiles in Cuba. This attempt was made with the full consent of Cuba, a Soviet ally, and was entirely in keeping with international law and fully consistent with American practice. In the minds of Soviet officials, if the United States could deploy its nuclear missiles in bases close to the Soviet Union in Europe and Asia, the Soviets should be allowed to place their missiles in Cuba. The Kennedy administration, however, objected, taking the world to the brink of nuclear war to prevent the Soviets from placing their missiles in Cuba. When the USSR was forced

⁸⁹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Soviet Union*, May 10, 1982. vol. 3, 91.

⁹⁰ *Pravda*, April 2, 1983. Quoted in Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 33.

to withdraw its missiles, this was a stinging defeat for the Soviet leadership, producing within them what Detinov and Savelyev call “the Cuban missile crisis syndrome.” The Cuban missile crisis, Detinov and Savelyev argue, was a “powerful factor behind the accelerated Soviet military buildup in the latter half of the twentieth century.”⁹¹ According to Raymond Garthoff, it was also “the most glaring, and, to the Soviets, painful” example of a double standard in the Cold War arms race. “From Moscow’s standpoint,” Garthoff writes, “the US had long enjoyed rights that the Soviet Union had not been able to fully exercise. A double standard had been applied that allowed the United States—but not the Soviet Union—the right to ply the world’s oceans and seas, to have military bases up to the very borders of the other power.”⁹² The American reaction to the Soviet attempt to deploy missiles helped convince the Soviets of the strategic importance of forward-based systems and motivated them to use the SALT negotiations to get these systems removed. According to Gerard Smith, the Soviets brought up the Cuban missile crisis again and again as justification for their concern over US FBS. In the words of one Soviet negotiator, “the Cuban missile crisis had shown the extreme American sensitivity to forward-based missile systems.” Why then, Soviet leaders wondered, would the US be surprised when the Soviets showed similar sensitivity to having hundreds of these systems targeted on the Soviet Union?⁹³

⁹¹ Detinov and Savel’yev, *Big Five*, 1.

⁹² Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 59.

⁹³ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 184. See also 93.

The Vietnam War—The Potency of American Aviation

The third international crisis that influenced Soviet thinking regarding US FBS was the Vietnam War, which continued to rage throughout the first five years of the SALT negotiations. Robert Haslam, Professor of International Affairs at Cambridge University and author of numerous books on the Soviet Union, does an excellent job of linking Soviet FBS concerns with the Vietnam War. In particular, Haslam points out that the extensive use of carrier-based aviation during the Vietnam War intensified Soviet concerns about the possible use of similar planes against the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ Although American military planners were often focused on the losses that US forces were sustaining in air assaults over Vietnam, Soviet military leaders were awed by the increasing effectiveness of these attacks and their sheer volume. From January 20 to March 31, 1968 the United States launched, in Haslam's words, "a veritable waterfall of destruction" against the Vietnamese city of Khe Sahn. Haslam points out that more than a decade later, Soviet military leaders were still marveling at this assault. In 1981 Major-General Viktor Starodubov of the Soviet General Staff remarked, "During the battles near Khe Sahn, more than 100,000 bombs were dropped in 55 days in 25,000 sorties from aboard US aircraft carriers."⁹⁵ These terrifying displays of American aerial power were deeply troubling to the Soviets, especially in light of the fact that hundreds of American nuclear-capable aircraft were located at bases in Europe and on carriers in the Atlantic that allowed them to reach the Soviet Union. Members of the US SALT delegation tried to persuade the Soviets that these aircraft were intended for

⁹⁴ Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 20-27.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

missions in Europe and not for strikes against Soviet territory, but Soviet officials were not placated by these assurances. According to some accounts, Soviet delegates viewed these planes with as much alarm as the B-52, the main American long-range nuclear bomber, because these planes were so close to Soviet territory and had such short striking times.⁹⁶ In a report published in the top-secret Soviet publication, *Journal of Military Thought*, Soviet military leaders argued that the United States had made detailed preparations to use these planes for a surprise nuclear offensive. “The basic means for conducting the nuclear offensive,” the report contended, “is tactical and carrier-based aviation”—the very planes that Soviet officials were attempting to include in SALT. This report warned that “the strategic aviation of the US, Great Britain, and France...are in a status in which at least 70 percent of the organic aircraft are constantly ready for flight.” The report also projected that up to 15 percent were kept on “alert status,” which made them available for use within 15 to 20 minutes of receiving orders to attack.⁹⁷ The Soviet military journal, *Red Star*, supported these conclusions in an article published on May 13, 1970. In this article Colonel Alexandrov argued that American “tactical” aircraft were, in fact, assigned for strategic purposes:

...the fighting capability of American tactical and carrier strike aircraft, the actual regions in which they are positioned and the constantly high state of readiness for the use of nuclear weapons indicate that, like strategic bombers, they are assigned mainly to accomplish strategic

⁹⁶ Stephen M. Millett, “Forward-Based Nuclear Weapons in SALT I,” *Political Science Quarterly*. Vol. 98, No. 1 (Spring 1983): 87.

⁹⁷ Colonel S. Sokolov, “The Preparation and Conduct of An Operation by the Armed Forces in a Theater of Military Operations in the Initial Period of War,” *Collection of Articles of the Journal of Military Thought*, (Moscow: A Publication of the USSR Ministry of Defense, 1966). Reproduced in a May 10, 1976 CIA memorandum: “Intelligence Information Special Report,” FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

objectives by means of delivering nuclear strikes directly against targets on the territory of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.⁹⁸

Vladimir Semenov, Head of the Soviet SALT delegation, recounted the experience of a Soviet general who was lying wounded in a hospital during World War II when the hospital was bombed. It had given the general no comfort, Semenov, explained, that the bomb had been dropped by a short-range fighter-bomber rather than a long-range heavy bomber.⁹⁹ These Soviet concerns about the potency of American nuclear aviation, concerns elevated by the Vietnam War, help to explain the Soviet efforts to include in the SALT negotiations American nuclear-capable aircraft in Europe and on aircraft carriers in the Atlantic Ocean.

Although many senior American officials doubted the sincerity of the Soviet notion of equal security with its expansive definition of strategic weapons, it is clear that these were serious Soviet negotiating positions based upon deeply held beliefs. The Soviet experience in World War II amplified traditional Soviet concerns about the threat from Europe; the Cuban Missile Crises showed Soviet leaders how much the United States feared Soviet forward-bases, leading them to conclude that American forward-bases gave the United States a huge strategic advantage; and the massive displays of American aerial power during the Vietnam War exacerbated Soviet concerns about American nuclear aircraft that were able to reach Soviet soil. Together these three international crises went a long way toward convincing Soviet leaders that US forward-based systems and British and French nuclear weapons

⁹⁸ Quoted in Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 19.

⁹⁹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 91.

were a genuine strategic threat to the USSR and explain why they were so adamant about including these weapons in the SALT negotiations.

The frequency with which Soviet negotiators argued in favor of the idea of equal security and called for the inclusion of American FBS in the talks is a testimony in itself to the importance of these positions to the Soviet leadership. Again and again, over the course of many years and hundreds of hours of negotiations, the Soviets defended their notion of equal security, describing it as “an objective geographical concept of security,” and called for the inclusion of US FBS and British and French systems in the negotiations with the US.¹⁰⁰ Smith writes in his memoirs that the Soviets brought up equal security so often that he wondered if Soviet negotiators were attempting to use psychological manipulation techniques on US negotiators. “Sometimes I had the feeling,” Smith writes, “that we were being exposed to a mild brainwash. ‘Repetition is the mother of learning’ is a well-known Russian saying, and we did hear some arguments over and over again...One curious repetition throughout the negotiation was the phrase ‘equal security.’”¹⁰¹ Smith also contends that the Soviets raised the issue of US forward-based systems “more than any other subject” in the negotiations. Although the US SALT delegation rejected the Soviet view of equal security and Soviet calls to include US FBS in the talks, the

¹⁰⁰ Telegram, American Embassy Helsinki to Secretary of State in Washington, “Thinkpiece Re Present Position of Preliminary SALT.” December 1, 1969. Published in William Burr and Robert Wampler, *“The Master of the Game:” Paul Nitze and US Cold War Strategy from Truman to Reagan*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 139.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 84.

Soviets were unrelenting. Smith recalls: “there FBS was, and there it remained through hundreds of hours of argumentation.”¹⁰²

**Conflicting Definitions Produce Stalemate in SALT
November 17, 1969—May 26, 1971**

Throughout the first four rounds of the official Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Helsinki and Vienna, the battle over competing principles of equality (*parity* vs. *equal security*) and conflicting definitions of “strategic” dominated the negotiations and produced unbreakable deadlock. Time and time again the Soviet Union argued in favor of including American FBS in the talks, and just as often American negotiators rejected these arguments. Eventually, Gerard Smith, the chief American SALT negotiator, began pressing Nixon and Kissinger to give greater consideration to Soviet arguments and to grant Smith some room to compromise on this issue. But Nixon and Kissinger were unequivocal in their instructions for Smith to rebuff the Soviet concept of equality and to reject the Soviet definition of strategic weapons. By the end of the fourth round of negotiations, Smith had grown increasingly frustrated and the talks were at a complete impasse.

**ROUND ONE
November 17-December 22, 1969**

The first round of SALT began on November 17, 1969 in Helsinki, Finland. Located fewer than 120 miles from the Soviet border and rumored to be crawling with KGB agents, Helsinki had been the Soviet choice for the site of the opening of the talks. The American SALT delegation flew to Helsinki aboard Air Force II. The Soviet delegation arrived by train, debarking at the same station from which Lenin

¹⁰² Smith, *Doubletalk*, 91.

left for Petrograd in 1917 to launch the Bolshevik revolution. Almost 500 journalists from around the world gathered in Helsinki to witness the commencement of this historic event—the first major effort by the two Cold War antagonists to limit the nuclear arms race.

The official talks began at the Smolna Palace, a small neoclassical building that had served as the headquarters for the Red faction during the Finnish Civil War. The American SALT Delegation was led by Gerard Smith, a former New York City lawyer and current head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Henry Kissinger describes Smith as follows: “Dedicated, indefatigable, and shrewd, Smith was one of those talented executives who serve successive administrations and epitomized the ideal of public service.” “Withal,” Kissinger observes, “he was always cheerful and honorable, a stolid warrior for a good cause.”¹⁰³ Smith’s opposite on the Soviet side was Vladimir Semenov. Semenov had played a central role in the Soviet administration of East Germany during the Soviet occupation after World War II and then served as the Soviet Ambassador to East Germany. Since 1955 he had held the position of Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union. Smith described him as a man “accustomed to lots of authority” who had a propensity for speaking from prepared note cards for several hours at a time without interruption.¹⁰⁴

The US SALT delegation entered the first round of the talks with the expectation that the two sides would haggle over how to determine numerical limits that would produce approximate parity between the two sides in relation to

¹⁰³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 147.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

intercontinental nuclear systems. Based on this expectation, in the months before the talks began, US officials had put together four different arms control packages that set various numerical limits on American and Soviet intercontinental nuclear weapons. These packages, they argued, would produce approximate parity between the two sides in strategic nuclear weapons.¹⁰⁵ American negotiators came to the first round of SALT ready to present specific numbers and to discuss the comparability of the main strategic US and Soviet strategic weapons, but they soon discovered that the Soviets were not interested in discussing detailed proposals and specific numbers. The Soviets, by contrast, wanted to establish the principles that would govern the talks and to determine how the two sides would define strategic weapons. A CIA report published immediately after the first round of negotiations titled "Soviet Attitudes in SALT" observed that Soviet statements "reflected primarily a concern to lay the groundwork, at least for bargaining purposes, for definitions which would include or exclude weapons systems to the Soviet advantage."¹⁰⁶ Gerard Smith echoed this analysis, writing, "They insisted on agreement in principle first as to which systems were to be limited, and only then would they give details."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ American negotiators often used the expression "rough parity" or "approximate parity." They explained that *exact* parity could not be achieved because the two sides had different types of intercontinental weapons (with different ranges, throw-weights, and accuracies), but approximate parity, they argued, could be realized by attempting to establish roughly equal numerical limits for the two sides on their comparable intercontinental, strategic systems.

¹⁰⁶ Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-16-70: Soviet Attitudes Towards SALT*, February 19, 1970, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 129.

Although American negotiators had not anticipated that the Soviets would dispute their definition of strategic or take issue with their assumptions about parity, they quickly realized that the first battle in SALT would be over the principles that would govern the talks and concerning the definition of strategic weapons. Would the goal of the talks be the US-supported principle of parity—roughly equal numbers of certain intercontinental systems for the US and USSR—or the Soviet principle of equal security? And whose definition of strategic weapons would prevail? Would the talks focus on American and Soviet intercontinental systems, or would the Soviets succeed in including US FBS and British and French weapons? At a meeting of the National Security Council on January 28, 1970, National Security Advisor Kissinger told President Nixon that “the key problem is the definition of strategic weapons. “In the next phase of SALT,” Kissinger concluded, “the definition question will be crucial.”¹⁰⁸ A Central Intelligence Agency report issued a few weeks later observed that a primary challenge for the talks moving forward would be to agree on how to define equality, concluding that “even in a fairly simple agreement, the standards of equivalence will be difficult to establish.”¹⁰⁹

ROUND TWO **April 16-August 14, 1970**

After a four-month pause, the second round of negotiations began on April 16, 1970. For this round the two sides met in Vienna, Austria, a location chosen by

¹⁰⁸ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, January 28, 1970, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-109, NSC Minutes Originals 1970, National Archives of the United States.

¹⁰⁹ Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-16-70: Soviet Attitudes Towards SALT*, February 19, 1970, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency.

the American side. The opening sessions of the second round took place at the Belvedere Palace, a beautiful estate with an early-eighteenth-century baroque palace surrounded by tiered fountains, graceful cascades, manicured gardens, and imposing wrought iron gates. Between April 16 and early May, both sides presented their formal opening positions for the negotiations.

During this time, the United States offered two possible “comprehensive” arms limitation packages. These two packages reflected the American concept of strategic weapons, but contained major inconsistencies. The first provision of both packages called for placing limits on launchers for intercontinental ballistic missiles and sea-based ballistic missiles (SLBM). Under the terms of the US proposal, both sides would be allowed an aggregate total of 1,710 nuclear missile launchers from these two categories. Under the terms of the second American package, the initial ceiling of 1,710 would be reduced by 100 launchers each year over seven years. Thus, after January 1, 1978 the ceiling would be 1,000 total ICBM and SLBM launchers. Both American packages also called for limits on anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defensive systems. In both packages, the US called for either destroying all ABM defensive systems or for allowing both sides to have one ABM system surrounding their capital city.

Although long-range nuclear-capable aircraft (bombers) fell within the American definition of strategic weapons, the two American packages differed in how they treated these weapons. In the first package, there would be no limits placed on bombers. In the second package, “heavy strategic bombers” would be

limited to the numbers currently operational.¹¹⁰ This proposal clearly violated America's own view of parity and was an attempt by the American side to preserve an existing advantage in the strategic arms race. In early 1970 the United States had 516 planes in this category, and the Soviets had only 195. American negotiators made this proposal without any justification for the disparity in numbers.¹¹¹

Moreover, the American proposals related to strategic bombers were not the only aspect of the American packages that seemed to contradict the US concept of strategic parity. Both American packages called for placing limits on Soviet intermediate-range missile (IRBM) launchers. The American packages proposed that the number of IRBM launchers be frozen at the number currently operational. The Soviets had 650 launchers in this category; the United States had none. What is puzzling about these American positions is that these weapons—intermediate-range ballistic missiles—did not qualify as strategic weapons according to the American definition. Soviet MR/IRBM missiles were targeted at Europe and Asia and were unable to reach the United States. Based on the limited range of these systems and the American argument that only intercontinental systems should be defined as “strategic,” these weapons should not have been included in the American proposals, but they were. Why was this the case? There were two reasons. The first reason that the US included these systems in their opening SALT proposals

¹¹⁰ The United States used the phrase “heavy strategic bombers” to make it clear that they were not including the smaller aircraft that the Soviets claimed were strategic weapons.

¹¹¹ For additional information about the opening American proposals, see FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32 SALT, documents 14, 27, 68, and 80.

was to account for European concerns.¹¹² European leaders were worried that an agreement that established parity between the United States and the Soviet Union would make Europe more vulnerable to Soviet attack. Many European leaders believed that the US superiority in intercontinental systems had been a necessary balance to superior Soviet conventional forces in the European theater and Soviet IRBMs aimed at Europe. In 1969 Joseph Luns, Dutch Foreign Minister (1952-1971) and eventual Secretary General of NATO (1971-1984), told President Nixon that “the prospect of parity was one of the most shocking things he had heard.”¹¹³ Thus, while US negotiators argued for strategic parity, and Soviet leaders called for equal security, some European leaders pushed for American strategic superiority. Assuaging European concerns was one reason for the American inclusion of Soviet MR/IRBM launchers, but it was not the main one.¹¹⁴

The primary American concern related to Soviet MR/IRBM launchers was that these launchers could be secretly refitted and used for intercontinental

¹¹² A report commissioned by President Nixon to work out US positions in advance of SALT explained, in part, the logic behind including Soviet IRBMs in the American SALT proposals. The NATO allies, the report asserted, “will be primarily concerned with those elements of a possible agreement directly affecting their security interests; e.g., its effect on the U.S. deterrent, the restrictions it places on Soviet IR/MRBM’s (frozen under all packages), and its effect on third-country nuclear forces and U.S.- controlled tactical nuclear weapons in Europe (none under any package). The Soviets have about 700 MRBM’s and IRBM’s, and we have none. We want to freeze further construction and prevent them from being further hardened, made mobile, or converted to ICBM’s. This is clearly in NATO’s interest as well as our own, since it would limit a targetable threat.” Source: National Security Study Memoranda: “Summary of NSSM-28 Report,” Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files, FRUS 69-76 Vol. 32, SALT I, document 14.

¹¹³ Minutes of a Review Group Meeting, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files, published in FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 17.

¹¹⁴ For more about European concerns, see Kissinger, *White House Years*, 404.

missiles.¹¹⁵ In moments of candor behind closed doors, US officials acknowledged that Soviet MR/IRBMs were not strategic weapons according to the US definition,¹¹⁶ but American officials distrusted the Soviets and believed that once strict limits were set on ICBMs, the Soviets might be tempted to modify MR/IRBM launchers and load them with ICBMs. American officials feared that this could be done in a hidden way. “We have no real confidence that we could detect it,” one top-secret US government report concluded.¹¹⁷ American concerns were exacerbated by the fact that the Soviets were already putting SS-11 missiles—a missile with intercontinental range—into their IRBM launchers. The Soviets were not trying to do this secretly, and they were targeting these SS-11 missiles at intermediate-range targets in Europe, not on intercontinental targets in the United States, but American military planners knew that targets could change. US military leaders feared that if the targets were adjusted and the launchers retrofitted, the Soviets might be able to disguise ICBMs as IRBMs and gain a strategic advantage over the United States. Thus, American negotiators called for limitations on a non-strategic system because of its potential to be used in a strategic way. Initially, they made this argument

¹¹⁵ Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, *Special National Intelligence Estimate Number 11-16-70: Soviet Attitudes Towards SALT*, February 19, 1970, FOIA ERR, Central Intelligence Agency. Memorandum, Seymour Weiss to Under Secretary of State Elliot L. Richardson, “SALT: Luncheon Discussion with Paul Nitze and Gardiner Tucker,” January 15, 1970, in National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book 139.

¹¹⁶ National Security Study Memoranda: “Summary of NSSM-28 Report,” Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files, FRUS 69-76 Vol. 32, SALT I, document 14. Summary of Response to National Security Study Memorandum 62, SALT Steering Committee, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 873, SALT, Volume II, June–July 1969, in FRUS 69-76 SALT I, Vol. 32, document 27. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 161.

¹¹⁷ National Security Council Staff Paper, “Summary of Key Issues in Verification Report,” undated but likely September 27, 1969, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 33.

without any awareness that this was almost the exact same logic that the Soviets were employing when calling for limits on American forward-based systems—that systems labeled as non-strategic could be used for strategic purposes. In time, as we will see in the sections that follow, American negotiations realized this contradiction and dropped their efforts to include IRBMs in SALT. But for the moment, they argued aggressively for the inclusion of this non-strategic system in the *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*.

Soviet negotiators were quick to point out the inconsistencies in the American proposals and just as quick to reject the two American packages. They argued that these “comprehensive” proposals were not comprehensive at all; one American package left out long-range bombers and both packages left out American forward-based systems. According to Smith, the “main Soviet objection to the American approaches was that they made no provision to limit FBS.” The Soviets also rejected US efforts to include Soviet IRBMs, claiming that since these weapons could not reach the United States, they were not strategic weapons. These weapons could not reach the United States and were needed for defense against third countries, Soviet negotiators argued.¹¹⁸

On April 20 Semenov began presenting the first official Soviet arms limitation proposal of the SALT negotiations. This proposal was detailed in a document titled, “Basic Provisions for Limiting Strategic Armaments.” Semenov claimed that the Soviet plan was a “broad” approach that took into account “all aspects and factors” of the strategic arms competition. Similar to the American proposals, the Soviet plan

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 126, 129.

called for a numerical ceiling on the aggregate total of ICBMs, ballistic missile launchers on nuclear submarines, and strategic bombers, although no numbers were offered for this ceiling. And like the American packages, the Soviet proposal called for “agreed limits on ABMs.” But there the similarities ended. The Soviets once again sought to establish their definition of strategic weapons as the definition that would govern the talks. Semenov argued that strategic weapons had to include all systems capable of striking targets within the territory of the other side, regardless of where these armaments were deployed. Based on this view, he argued that a mutually acceptable SALT agreement must provide for “a radical solution” to the question of bases beyond limits of national territories and forward-deployed nuclear weapons. This “radical solution,” Semenov proposed, was for all forward-based delivery vehicles whose geographic location allowed them to reach the other side’s homeland to be returned to the national territory of their owner, withdrawn beyond range, or destroyed. Semenov claimed that, according to Soviet estimates, the flight times for US aircraft stationed at bases in Europe and Asia were the same as the flight times of American ICBMs—about thirty to forty minutes—and that US FBS could deliver as many nuclear weapons as American ICBMs. These weapons, Semenov asserted, were of “paramount importance” and “the real danger in the strategic balance.”¹¹⁹

The final element of the Soviet “Basic Provisions” proposal was another attempt to prevent the US from having nuclear weapons in countries close to the Soviet Union. This element stipulated that no strategic weapons owned by the US or

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 127.

USSR be deployed in or transferred to third countries. Semenov argued that the deployment of American strategic systems in countries close to Soviet borders gave the United States an unfair advantage (since the Soviet Union had no allies that were located next to the United States). These weapons should be returned to the United States. In addition, Semenov asserted that transfers to third countries should be prohibited because mutual limitations on strategic arsenals would have no meaning if the US could simply transfer its strategic weapons to its NATO allies to avoid having them counted against US totals.¹²⁰

There was much in the Soviet proposal that American negotiators disliked. Kissinger and Smith both took issue with the “sweeping definition of ‘strategic offensive weapons’” in the Soviet plan. In a memorandum for President Nixon, Kissinger wrote, “The heart of the Soviet approach...seems to be based on their broad definition of *strategic*, so as to include most of our forward deployments and carrier based aircraft.”¹²¹ This expansive definition was unacceptable from the American perspective, and Nixon instructed the SALT delegation to “take the position that U.S. tactical nuclear forces, strategic forces of other nations and U.S. practices with respect to ballistic missile submarines and strategic aircraft operations should not be included in these talks.”¹²² Based on these instructions, Smith unequivocally rejected the Soviet proposals related to FBS. “I concluded one formal statement,” Smith recalls, “by saying flatly that the United States would not

¹²⁰ Ibid., 123-124, 127.

¹²¹ Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, April 23, 1970, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 72.

¹²² Richard Nixon, National Security Decision Memorandum 51, April 10, 1970, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 68.

agree to include FBS and my instructions on this point were firm.” When Semenov argued that FBS were a real threat to the strategic balance, Smith called his arguments “extravagant and implausible” and summarily dismissed them.¹²³

Another major American criticism of the Soviet proposal was that it was, in Kissinger’s words, “quite vague on details.”¹²⁴ Unlike the American plan, which gave specific numbers for proposed ceilings, the Soviet document did not include any numbers. When Smith pressed Semenov to offer numbers (or at least to respond to American numbers), Semenov countered that agreeing on principles should come before haggling over numbers. Prioritizing principles was a deliberate Soviet strategy, one that they pursued throughout the negotiations. Smith recalls in his account of SALT that the Soviets “never budged from the position that numbers would be disclosed and discussed only after agreement on principles.” “They insisted,” Smith continues, “on agreement in principle first as to which systems were to be limited, and only then would they give details.”¹²⁵

From April 16 until May 7, 1970 the two sides presented formal opening positions for the negotiations. Both sides offered proposals based on their own conceptions of strategic weapons, and both sides swiftly rejected the other’s proposals. The result of this early stage of the negotiations was complete deadlock. Without consensus on the definition of strategic weapons, which in turn would determine which systems would be included in the talks, it would not be possible to negotiate a mutually-acceptable agreement. Thus, on May 8 Soviet negotiators

¹²³ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 127. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 545.

¹²⁴ Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, April 23, 1970, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 72.

¹²⁵ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 124, 129.

began putting out feelers, exploring possible ways to break the logjam. In a private conversation with Raymond Garthoff, a member of the US SALT delegation, Oleg Grinevsky, a Soviet SALT negotiator, suggested that since both US approaches were “quite unacceptable to the Soviet side,” it might be necessary to “get away from packages on both sides” and consider seeking a narrow agreement. A few days later, in another private conversation with Garthoff, Grinevsky developed this thought further. A narrow agreement, he indicated, might focus on limiting ABMs only or ABMs plus ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers. Speaking unofficially and in an exploratory manner, Grinevsky suggested that the Soviets might consider such an agreement if there was first an “understanding” between the United States and the Soviet Union that the US would not augment its FBS in any way or transfer any FBS to third countries.¹²⁶

Over the next couple of weeks, US officials discussed Grinevsky’s unofficial proposal for an “understanding” related to US FBS in classified memoranda and National Security Council meetings. Their conclusion was that this Soviet probe was an effort to get the United States to “make the first concession” in the negotiations by “accepting the principle behind the Soviet proposal that forward-based aircraft are indeed part of the strategic balance and thus subject to some kind of limitations.” Based on this conclusion, Nixon again decided to reject the Soviet suggestion.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, May 20, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 77.

¹²⁷ Minutes, Verification Panel Meeting, May 26, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 79, 272. Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, May 20, 1970,

But the Soviets persisted. On May 26 they made another effort to find a solution in the talks for American FBS. Semenov informed Smith that the Soviet Union would drop its demand for limits on forward-based systems on the condition that the USSR would be “compensated” for US FBS. Semenov explained that the Soviet Union would allow the US to keep its FBS if the Soviets would be allowed to have more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States as a form of compensation. Such an arrangement would allow the two sides to reach an agreement that recognized the principle of equal security.¹²⁸ Smith once again rejected the new Soviet proposal, arguing that the United States still favored a comprehensive agreement and that American FBS were not strategic weapons and should not factor into SALT into any way.

By June 15 both sides recognized that the talks were not going anywhere, and the Soviets began talking about ending the second round of negotiations early. Over the next several weeks, Smith petitioned Washington for new instructions that would allow him to pursue a more limited agreement with the Soviets.¹²⁹ On July 9 President Nixon responded, issuing a new National Security Decision Memorandum with a new proposal for the SALT negotiations. But the new proposal did not authorize Smith to pursue a limited agreement. On the contrary, Nixon’s new plan, dubbed the Vienna Option, retained nearly all of the elements of the original American packages—it continued to call for equal limits for ICBMs, SLBMs, and

FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 77. Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, June 6, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 80.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Anatoly Dobrynin and Henry Kissinger, June 23, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 83.

long-range bombers, and it repeated the proposal to limit ABMs to capital cities or to ban them completely. The main new feature of the Vienna Option was that the United States now agreed to leave Soviet IRBMs out of the SALT negotiations.¹³⁰ US officials privately recognized that IRBMs were not truly strategic weapons, but publicly they described this new initiative as a major US concession. Of course, the US did not offer this “concession” for free; they expected something in return. Under the terms of the Vienna Option, the United States would drop its calls for including IRBMs only if the Soviets would abandon their efforts to include US FBS. Nixon also instructed the American delegation to take the position that “any form of ‘compensation’ for excluding forward-based aircraft in the form of permitting the Soviets additional missiles of intercontinental range, sea-based ballistic missiles or strategic heavy bombers is wholly and absolutely unacceptable to the United States.”¹³¹ The United States officially tabled the Vienna Option proposal in the SALT forum on August 4. The Soviets accepted the US offer to exclude IRBMs from the talks but rejected the call to drop their insistence on including US FBS. According to Smith, “Their central objection, or pretext, [for rejecting the Vienna Option] was the continued absence of any United States move to meet their FBS position.”¹³²

On August 14 the second round of negotiations ended. After more than eight months, two rounds of intensive negotiations, and countless hours of debate, the

¹³⁰ The proposal did still include a provision to prevent IRBM launchers from being used for intercontinental missiles. The provision stated that new IRBM silos not distinguishable by national means from silos for ICBMs of any type would not be counted against the limit on launchers for modern, large ballistic missiles.

¹³¹ Richard Nixon, National Security Decision Memorandum 69, July 9, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 94.

¹³² Smith, *Doubletalk*, 148.

United States and the Soviet Union were at an impasse. This is surprising because the two sides actually agreed in principle on several major items. Both agreed that limits should be placed on intercontinental ballistic missile launchers, sea-based missiles, and long-range bombers. They also agreed that anti-ballistic missile systems should be regulated. These points of consensus were significant, and yet the two sides were far from an agreement. The “central block to progress,” according to the head of the US SALT delegation, was “the FBS issue.” The Soviets had proffered three compromise initiatives, but, from the American perspective, “All Soviet-proposed solutions—withdrawal, destruction, or compensation—were equally unattractive.”¹³³ The United States had offered to drop its inclusion of Soviet intermediate-range missile launchers in exchange for keeping American FBS out of the talks, but the Soviets were completely uninterested in trading what they viewed as a non-strategic system for strategic ones. And so the negotiations stalled. Discouraged, the delegates left the Belvedere Palace on August 14, 1970, and returned to their respective countries.

Senate Hearings on US Nuclear Weapons Abroad

Just when it seemed that the negotiations could not get worse, external events conspired to exacerbate Soviet concerns about American nuclear weapons in Europe. During the break between the second and third rounds of negotiations, Soviet officials began receiving briefings on Senate hearings that had taken place in Washington during the second round of the SALT talks.¹³⁴ The goal for these Senate

¹³³ Ibid., 149.

¹³⁴ The Soviet records of these briefings are unavailable, but references to these US Senate hearings by Soviet SALT negotiators and in *Pravda* and other Soviet media sources starting

hearings had been to examine “US security agreements and commitments abroad.” Several lengthy sessions had been devoted to American nuclear weapons and bases in Europe—the very forward-based systems that the Soviets were seeking to have limited in the SALT talks. From May 25 through July 15, 1970, a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations asked American military leaders to justify the presence of American nuclear forces in Europe. The Soviet leadership was appalled at the information that came out in these hearings.

Throughout the hearings, US officials depicted American nuclear forces as a growing “worldwide network” of weapons and bases. The hearings revealed that the United States had over 7,000 nuclear warheads in Europe alone and that “over the past few years the overall level or number of warheads maintained” in Europe by the United States had increased.¹³⁵ General David Burchinal, Deputy Commander in Chief of the United States European Command, testified that the US Air Force was phasing new F-111 and F-4 nuclear aircraft into Europe “to improve...overall combat capabilities” and provide a “significant increase in operational capability” for American Air Forces in Europe.¹³⁶ These were the very planes that the Soviets wanted withdrawn or destroyed, but now the United States was placing more of them in Europe. Even more troubling to Soviet officials was the fact that the

in August 1970 allow us to infer that the Soviet leadership began receiving these briefings by August 1970.

¹³⁵ Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, *Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1970), 13.

¹³⁶ *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad. Hearings before the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Part 10*, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1970).

Senators conducting the hearings concluded that American nuclear forces seemed to be spreading across the globe with a life of their own (most certainly without any Congressional oversight). The hearings revealed, for example, that the US Naval base in Rota Spain had started out as a marginal facility in the 1950s but by the late 1960s had grown to become a hub for American Polaris nuclear submarines. How and why did this happen, the Senators asked? Clear answers were not forthcoming. The committee also discovered that in many countries where American nuclear warheads were located, the American Ambassador and high-ranking military officials in that country did not know where these nuclear weapons were located or “what understandings with the host country had been arrived at with respect to their possible use.” In fact in many countries where US nuclear missiles were deployed, “the ranking American officer in that country was not even aware whether or not nuclear weapons were located in that country.”¹³⁷

Despite this troubling lack of knowledge, a theme that emerged in the hearings was that there was a high likelihood that these nuclear weapons would be used against the Soviet Union if war were ever to occur. In one question-and-answer session on May 25, Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, asked General Burchinal the following question: “The chairman said a moment ago that we had 7,000 or 8,000 nuclear weapons under NATO’s control...Could there be any doubt that it [the Soviets] really moved toward serious attack upon Western Europe that the nuclear weapons would be used?” General Burchinal answered, “I don’t believe so.” Senator Fulbright then added, “I

¹³⁷ Ibid.

think they know very clearly if they move in Western Europe, we would use them.” A few minutes later, Senator Stuart Symington, Chairman of the Subcommittee conducting the hearings, chimed in, “If there is a determined attack from the Soviet Union—presumably across the plains of Northern Prussia...then don’t we have to go to nuclear weapons? Otherwise, why would we have 7,000 nuclear warheads in Europe? They cost a lot of money, and certainly they are not there for peaceful purposes.” General Burchinal agreed, responding, “They are not there for propaganda value.”¹³⁸ In another session on July 15, General Andrew Jackson Goodpaster, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, testified that there was “a very high probability that within a short period” after war started with the Soviets in Europe that the Western Allies would have to move beyond conventional forces and “look for additional weapons” for use against the Soviets. To clarify the General’s meaning, Senator Symington asked, “You mean nuclear weapons?” Goodpaster replied tersely, “I do.”¹³⁹ Soviet leaders, who followed these hearings closely, were in effect being told that the very weapons that the US refused to include in the SALT negotiations would very likely be used against them if war ever broke out in Europe.

At several moments in the Senate hearings, American Senators seemed to voice the same arguments that the Soviets were making in the ongoing SALT negotiations, especially arguments comparing US FBS to the weapons that the Soviets had attempted to place in Cuba in 1962. In its concluding report, the committee noted that the United States had “nuclear weapons in countries far closer

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

to [the Soviet Union's] borders than Cuba is to ours." The committee described these weapons as "a nuclear ring that had been drawn around [the Soviet Union]." In one session, Senator Symington seemed to echo the Soviet view of the relationship between American FBS and the Cuban Missile Crisis when he asked:

I wonder why we feel that we have the right to ring them with nuclear weapons and yet threaten war if they come anywhere near us with nuclear weapons? ...I just do not understand how you can ring the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons, whether you ring them one way or ring them another and, at the same time, expect them to want to work out arrangements with us, or expect them not to be apprehensive along the same general lines that we were when they put their missiles into Cuba.

Burchinal countered that the Soviet Union's intermediate-range missiles were "ringing NATO with a substantial nuclear threat." Symington, unconvinced of the relevance of the comparison, replied, "NATO is the heartland of many countries but is not the heartland of the United States."¹⁴⁰ Soviet leaders could not have made the argument more succinctly.

One can only imagine how Soviet officials reacted to these Senate hearings. While American SALT negotiators told them that US FBS would not be included in SALT, American Senators and military leaders were discussing how these very same weapons actually were being improved during the negotiations. Soviet leaders learned that American nuclear weapons were spreading across the globe, seemingly with a life of their own, and that these weapons would be used against them if a conventional war ever broke out in Europe. In addition, while US SALT negotiators rejected the comparisons of US FBS to the weapons that the Soviets had attempted to deploy in Cuba in 1962, American Senators accepted this comparison, pointing

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

out that the US had placed nuclear missiles in countries far closer to the Soviet Union than Cuba is to the United States.

ROUND THREE
November 2-December 18, 1970

When the SALT negotiations resumed in Helsinki on November 2, the Soviets vented their frustration. Semenov immediately accused the United States of improving its forward-based systems, and the Soviet press supported his accusations with several articles that quoted directly from the US Senate hearings.¹⁴¹ Caught off-guard, Smith looked to Washington for instructions on how to respond. On November 13 he received a memorandum from Lieutenant General Royal Allison, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Allison informed Smith that the United States had in fact added six new nuclear aircraft to Europe over the past year. In addition, the United States had increased its Pershing nuclear missiles in Europe by 24 over the past year and that 38 new launchers would be installed in West Germany by June 1971. General Allison was quick to add, however, that all of these changes were simply the result of “routine modernization” and should not be viewed as improvements.¹⁴² This explanation did not placate the Soviets one bit. Throughout the month of November, the Soviets were unrelenting in pressing their case for the inclusion of US FBS in SALT. The Soviet delegation,” Smith writes, “kept on repeating FBS arguments...FBS infected the atmosphere and set a discordant

¹⁴¹ See, for example, *Pravda*, February 4, 1971. *Pravda*, July 7, 1971.

¹⁴² Washington National Records Center, RG 383, OSD Files: FRC 383-98-0089, Director's Files, Smith Files, Smith/Allison Correspondence, April- December 1970 (As quoted in an editorial note before FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 114).

note for the whole round.” Smith calls this time in the negotiations “the nadir of SALT I.”¹⁴³

With the negotiations at a new low, the Soviets tabled a new FBS proposal. It was the toughest Soviet proposal of the negotiations so far. In the past the Soviets had asked for either the withdrawal of American FBS or some kind of compensation for these systems. Now they asked for both. In early December, Semenov informed Smith that the Soviet Union now proposed a partial withdrawal of US FBS combined with a unilateral reduction of America ICBMs, submarine launched missiles, or heavy bombers.¹⁴⁴

Smith rejected the plan immediately, and Washington was incensed that the Soviets would even table such a proposal. In a lengthy memorandum to Kissinger, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, National Security Council staff member, wrote, “By no stretch of the imagination can the latest Soviet SALT proposals be construed as a serious effort to bridge the growing gap in our positions in Helsinki. The two propositions are so patently unacceptable that they raise important questions about Soviet motives in presenting them.” Sonnenfeldt’s recommendation to Kissinger was to “reject out of hand the FBS question on the legitimate grounds that we will not negotiate our Alliance commitments with the USSR, and that ‘equal security’ as defined by the USSR is a fraud.”¹⁴⁵ Kissinger agreed with Sonnenfeldt’s assessment,

¹⁴³ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 182.

¹⁴⁴ Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, December 5, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 116. Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, December 10, 1970. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 118.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), December 5, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 116.

calling the Soviet proposals “patently absurd,” and US SALT negotiators followed Sonnenfeldt’s recommendations.¹⁴⁶ Time and time again Smith and his colleagues informed the Soviets that the United States would never “compensate” the Soviets for US FBS by giving them more strategic missiles and bombers than the United States.¹⁴⁷ Thus, once again the negotiations stalled over the conflicting definitions of strategic weapons, the competing principles of equal security and parity, and the Soviet efforts to include American forward-based systems in the negotiations.

Toward the end of the third round of negotiations, the US SALT delegation began urging the Nixon administration to give greater consideration to Soviet concerns regarding the strategic potential of American FBS. Smith requested a study from the National Security Council staff on possible ways to assure the Soviets that the United States would not attempt to circumvent agreed limits to strategic systems by increasing its FBS numbers or enhancing FBS for use in a strategic capacity. The NSC staff developed six policy options ranging from a complete refusal to discuss FBS (the current position) to a US statement that it would not make substantial changes in FBS deployments in the future except in response to changes in Soviet forces that threatened the US or its allies. Smith informed Washington that the US SALT delegation favored such a statement.

On December 8 senior representatives of the US National Security Council, State Department, Defense Department, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Justice Department, and the National Security Council met

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum, President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, December 10, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 118.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 183-184.

in the White House Situation Room to discuss Smith's proposal. Kissinger, who chaired the meeting, began the discussion by proposing that the US government drop the moniker "forward-based systems" and replace it with "non-limited nuclear systems" to emphasize that these systems were not subject to limitation within SALT. He then presented three options for responding to Soviet FBS concerns:

1) stick with our present position; 2) indicate in a general way that, assuming everything else were agreed, we would be prepared to reassure them that we would not use the non-limited systems to evade the central focus of the negotiations; and 3) the Delegation's position—to consider a specific proposal...that no numerical augmentation of non-limited nuclear delivery systems would be undertaken except in response to changes or increases in theirs.¹⁴⁸

The members of the panel almost immediately agreed that option three, the US SALT Delegation's position, was too forthcoming and should be rejected. Initially, most of the meeting participants seemed to favor the first option—maintaining the current US position and refusing to discuss these systems at all. Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that making even a mild statement to assure the Soviets regarding American FBS would be "treading on very dangerous ground." "If we start to waffle," Moorer argued, "every time we send a carrier into the Mediterranean or switch our aircraft around we will get into an argument with the Russians." "We can only lose by easing up our position," Moorer concluded. Philip Farley, Deputy Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, agreed. Farley argued that even discussing US FBS would create problems: "if we are willing to discuss it or contemplate being willing to discuss it, we have a tactical problem." Richard Helms, CIA Director, and David Packard, Deputy Director

¹⁴⁸ Transcript, Verification Panel Meeting, December 8, 1970, Digital National Security Archive.

of the Defense Department, also argued in favor of maintaining the current US position. John Irwin, a State Department official, agreed, but then added a new consideration to the discussion. Irwin suggested that it might be beneficial to the negotiations to give the Soviets the impression that the US might be willing to discuss US FBS in the future (although the US had no intention of doing so). Irwin reminded the panel members that the Soviets would hold a Party Congress in the near future and that the Soviet leadership would be making decisions about future defense spending. “They might make their decisions on the basis that the US is standing firm on the forward-based systems,” Irwin warned. “If we could avoid this by some phrasing which was not vital to us, it might be worth doing.” Lewellyn Thompson, former US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, agreed with this line of thought, adding, “With the Party Congress coming up, we shouldn’t reject this out of hand.” Based on this argument, the panel began to consider ways to deceive the Soviets. In the long run, the panel agreed, the US would refuse to negotiate limits of any kind on US FBS, but, in the short run, the US would try to give the impression that they might be willing to do so. “It is in our interest not to tell them we refuse,” advised John Mitchell, the US Attorney General. Kissinger then summarized the panel’s discussion—everyone agreed to reject the Delegation’s recommendation, and the US would look for a way to “reject [the Soviet] proposal in ways that do not look like rejection.” This might include making a general statement that “might look like a deferral, with an indication of consideration at a later time.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The December 8 meeting of the SALT Verification Panel, with its decision to offer the Soviets some sort of hollow assurance regarding FBS, became the basis for the next US proposal at the SALT negotiations. On December 12 Nixon instructed the US Delegation in Helsinki to inform the Soviets that “only after all the main elements of an initial agreement on central strategic systems have been worked out, would [the US] consider it possible to assess mutually satisfactory ways in which actions by either side relating to other nuclear delivery systems could be prevented from upsetting the strategic balance.”¹⁵⁰ The US dubbed this new proposal the “Helsinki Formula” and presented it as a major US concession and a way to break the logjam in the negotiations. But the Soviets saw through the US ploy and swiftly rejected it. “The [Helsinki] formula,” Smith writes, “was of no interest to the Soviets.”¹⁵¹

Soviet officials then countered with a new proposal. Since the United States was unwilling to negotiate an agreement on offensive nuclear systems that recognized the principle of equal security and included US FBS, Semenov and other Soviet SALT negotiators argued that the two sides should postpone their negotiations on offensive systems and focus on signing an agreement on defensive systems alone—namely, anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems. US negotiators were not interested in an ABM-only agreement, however, and continued promoting the Helsinki formula, despite unrelenting Soviet opposition to it.

At the end of the third round of negotiations, the question of US forward-based systems still remained the main barrier to progress. In his memoirs, Smith

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, etc., December 12, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 120.

¹⁵¹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 186.

describes FBS as “the SALT problem of the year 1970.” “This subject,” Smith writes, “was drilled into us *ad nauseum*.” In one session Semenov told Smith that the American position on FBS was similar to the case of an American farmer “who when shown a camel remarked that there was no such animal.” From the Soviet perspective, forward-based systems were clearly strategic systems, so “the Soviet delegation continued to hammer away at the FBS question” until the third round of negotiations ended in stalemate on December 18, 1970.¹⁵²

ROUND FOUR
March 15, 1971—May 26, 1971

Over the next several months, Smith petitioned Nixon and Kissinger to reconsider the American position on FBS and to show some flexibility related to Soviet demands. On March 8, 1971, Smith expressed his concerns during a National Security Council Staff meeting in which President Nixon and his senior advisors discussed the current state of the nuclear arms race with the Soviets. The meeting began with a report by CIA Director Helms that summarized the latest American intelligence findings related to the strategic nuclear balance between the two sides. In keeping with the American definition of strategic weapons, Helms focused on three intercontinental systems—intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and long-range aircraft (bombers). Helms reported that the Soviet Union had now surpassed the United States in the number of its ICBMs and would catch up with the United States in nuclear submarines by 1975. The United States, however, still had more bombers than the Soviet Union. After hearing this report, Smith pointed out that intercontinental

¹⁵² Smith, *Doubletalk*, 186-187, 198, 184.

systems did not tell the whole story in the strategic nuclear competition. "In calculating the strategic balance," Smith argued, "we have to remember our forward-based systems in Europe. They add a great deal to our capability." Smith's comments, which closely mirrored Soviets arguments in the SALT negotiations, triggered a lively debate during the NSC meeting over the significance of FBS. Secretary of Defense Laird took issue with Smith's view and minimized the value of FBS as strategic weapons. "We should not believe that all our forward-based aircraft with nuclears [sic.] could hit the Soviet Union. They could hit the Pact area but not necessarily the Soviets unless they're one-way missions." Smith then reminded Laird that recent studies showed that US FBS could in fact serve as an effective strategic weapon. "We have a calculation of producing 20% casualties in the Soviet Union by an attack with the forward-based aircraft. We have to take this as a plus," Smith argued. Laird was still doubtful. "We have to be a little pessimistic in our assumptions," he countered. Admiral Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then added that the United States could not negotiate FBS with the Soviets because doing so "would have a major effect on NATO." Negotiating the American FBS posture, Moorer explained, would "cause serious doubt among our allies. The nuclear capability we provide has been the cohesion to keep the Alliance together." David Packard, Deputy Director of Defense, argued that FBS were important but that they equated more to Soviet intermediate-range missiles than to strategic systems and should be kept in this context. Nixon agreed with this assessment, concluding that whenever the Soviets raised the question of FBS, the US should "suggest that their IRBM's be discussed." Before the meeting ended, Smith made one final appeal

to his colleagues to allow him to negotiate FBS in the SALT talks. "I believe we should talk about our forward-based aircraft," Smith pleaded. But Smith was isolated. Everyone else at the meeting agreed that American FBS should be kept out of SALT.¹⁵³

When the SALT negotiations resumed in Vienna on March 15, 1971 for the fourth round of talks, Nixon's instructions to Smith were for Smith to continue to refuse to discuss American forward-based systems. Nixon also charged the US SALT Delegation to make clear to the Soviets that the US would not accept a separate ABM-only agreement and that "offensive and defensive systems must be linked" in a comprehensive agreement.¹⁵⁴

The American positions were non-starters for the Soviets, and as the negotiations in Vienna went in circles, Smith became increasingly frustrated. On March 30 he expressed his dissatisfaction in a letter to Kissinger. Smith complained of the difficulty of conducting negotiations when surrounded by so many "uncertainties about how much latitude Washington wants the delegation to have in probing/negotiating." And, once again, Smith pointed to American inflexibility on FBS as the main barrier to progress: "I do not see how we can learn very much about what can be done on offensive limitations," Smith told Kissinger, "until we can

¹⁵³ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, "NSC Meeting on SALT," March 8, 1971, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 137.

¹⁵⁴ National Security Decision Memorandum 102: "Instructions for Strategic Arms Limitation Talks at Vienna (SALT IV)" March 11, 1971, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, Virtual Collection (hereafter, Nixon Presidential Library VC) http://nixon.archives.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/nsdm/nsdm_102.pdf [accessed 03/01/14].

negotiate more on FBS, something I don't feel free to do under present instructions."¹⁵⁵ But despite Smith's protests, Washington refused to budge on FBS.

The Soviets also showed no inclination to modify their positions regarding FBS or to abandon their definition of equal security. At the end of March, Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet General Secretary, defended the principle of equal security in a six-hour report at the 24th Communist Party Congress. Brezhnev declared with pride that the Soviet Union had achieved a level of strength that now allowed it to deal with the capitalist world and the United States "on a basis of equality." This meant that the Soviets would not accept a SALT agreement unless it was "based on equal security."¹⁵⁶ In early May, Smith recalls, Semenov "reviewed FBS arguments for the nth time." Semenov informed Smith once again that although the US "may think forward-based systems a normal situation, to the Soviets it didn't look like equal security for the United States to continue to have all these bases and weapons deployments." Although Smith had become increasingly sympathetic to Soviet concerns, his orders from Washington were clear, and once again he rejected the Soviet calls to include American FBS in the talks. Once again, the negotiations stalled.

Conclusion—Sixteen Months of Stalemate

After sixteen months and four rounds of intensive negotiations, the two SALT negotiating teams were nowhere near reaching an agreement. Although both sides

¹⁵⁵ Backchannel Message From the Chief of the Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (Smith) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), March 30, 1971, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT, document 144.

¹⁵⁶ Leonid Brezhnev, *24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, stenographic report*, US Joint Publications Research Service, 1971.

believed that the arms race could be constrained by an agreement that established approximate equality between the nuclear arsenals of the two countries, the two superpowers completely disagreed on how to define equality. The US supported an agreement that would establish “rough parity” in “central strategic” systems. Such an agreement would set approximately equal numerical limits on the intercontinental nuclear systems of the two countries. Prior to the commencement of the talks, US arms control experts had widely believed that the Soviets shared this view and would use the negotiations to gain legal recognition of Soviet parity with the United States. The Soviets, however, came to the talks with a very different objective, one that was based on a completely unexpected view of equality. From the first days of the talks, Soviet negotiators argued that any SALT agreement must be governed by the principle of equal security. An agreement based on equal security, they explained, would take into consideration all systems capable of striking the homeland of either party regardless of whether the owner of such systems called them strategic or not and even if these systems had less than intercontinental range.

Once the talks were underway, the Soviets had spent more effort on trying to convince the United States to accept the principle of equal security than on arguing for specific arms limitation packages with precise numerical limits. During the second round of the talks, for example, Soviet negotiators called upon the United States to destroy or withdraw all American forward-based systems capable of reaching Soviet soil. These systems, they argued, were the primary barrier to reaching an agreement that gave both sides equal security. When the US rejected this proposal outright, the Soviets had offered a compromise plan—the United

States could keep its FBS if the US would compensate the Soviets for these systems by giving the USSR more ICBMs or SLBMs than the United States. If the US insisted on keeping its FBS, Soviet officials argued, then the only way for a SALT agreement to produce equal security would be for the Soviet Union to be given an unequal number of intercontinental systems. To American ears, this proposal sounded like the Soviets were not seeking equality but superiority, and American officials immediately rejected this idea. Negotiations reached a low point when the Soviets discovered that the US actually had been strengthening its forward-based systems in Europe while the talks were taking place. Faced with this revelation, the Soviets had tabled an even tougher proposal that would require the US to withdraw a portion of its FBS and also to compensate the Soviets for the remaining FBS by giving the Soviets extra intercontinental systems. When the US expressed even greater dislike for this scheme than for earlier plans, the Soviets declared that since the United States would not accept the principle of equal security and allow American FBS to be included in the talks, it would be impossible to ever reach an agreement on offensive nuclear weapons. Since this was the case, the two sides should abandon the talks on offensive weapons and focus on negotiating an agreement limiting anti-ballistic missile shields alone.

In contrast to the Soviet side, US negotiators had presented several arms limitation packages at the opening of the talks that focused on setting specific numerical limits on intercontinental nuclear systems—ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. These American packages were in keeping with the American notion of strategic parity. But the American side had not anticipated that SALT would begin as

a battle over competing principles of equality and conflicting definitions of strategic weapons. Consequently, the US was far less consistent in its promotion of the notion of parity than the Soviets were in promoting the principle of equal security, and early American proposals contained elements that contradicted their own principles and definitions. American negotiators initially called for setting constraints on Soviet intermediate-range systems—weapons that could not travel intercontinental distances and were not capable of reaching the United States. American negotiators eventually dropped their attempts to regulate Soviet IRBMs, however, when the Soviets pointed out that including these systems contradicted America's own definition of strategic weapons. The US then argued that since the United States had given up its efforts to set limits on Soviet IRBMs, the Soviets should drop their calls to include American FBS in the talks. In doing so, it is important to note, US negotiators were the first to introduce the idea that Soviet IRBMs and American FBS were comparable systems, an argument that Soviet officials would adopt years later to justify deploying Soviet SS-20s. During the third round of negotiations, the US offered a possible solution to the impasse surrounding US FBS. But this solution, dubbed the Helsinki Formula, turned out to be nothing more than a non-binding American promise to discuss limitations on FBS after the two sides had reached an agreement on strategic intercontinental systems. The Soviets saw through this ploy, and the negotiations stalled again. In early 1971 Smith increasingly pushed for greater flexibility to negotiate with the Soviets on FBS, but his pleas fell on unsympathetic ears in Washington.

During a televised interview in January of 1971 President Nixon summarized the state of the SALT talks after four rounds at the negotiating table. “There is a basic disagreement,” Nixon stated, “with regard to what strategic weapons—what that definition is.”¹⁵⁷ Throughout the first sixteen months of negotiations, fundamental disagreement over how to define strategic nuclear weapons and over which principle—parity or equal security—should govern the talks had put a stranglehold on the negotiations. Unless the Soviets were willing to give up their idea of equal security and drop their insistence that US FBS were strategic weapons or the Americans were willing to change their definition of strategic weapons to include US FBS or abandon their demand that a SALT agreement establish equal limits for both sides’ intercontinental systems, it would be impossible to reach an agreement.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 201.

CHAPTER TWO

**KISSINGER'S DUPLICITOUS
DIPLOMACY,
1969-1972**

The Inexplicable Breakthrough

By the start of 1971, Gerard Smith, the head of the American SALT delegation, had become exceedingly frustrated by this total lack of progress. Smith realized that an agreement between the two sides to limit nuclear weapons would be impossible unless one of the two countries was willing to show some flexibility in the way that it defined strategic weapons. The Americans generally argued that strategic nuclear weapons should be defined as weapons capable of traveling intercontinental distances and of reaching from the USA to the USSR or vice-versa. They believed that an equitable agreement would be one that established rough parity between the United States and the Soviet Union in strategic weapons, granting each side roughly the same number of intercontinental nuclear systems. But the Soviets had an entirely different view. Soviet officials spent countless hours during the first sixteen months of negotiations arguing that strategic weapons should be defined as all systems capable of striking the homeland of either country, even if these weapons could not travel intercontinental distances and were not called strategic weapons by their owner. In particular, Soviet negotiators argued that American forward-based systems (FBS) located at bases in Europe and Asia or on aircraft carriers in the Atlantic Ocean were strategic nuclear weapons. Soviet officials insisted that only by defining American FBS as strategic weapons and including them in the talks would the two sides be able to reach an agreement that guaranteed both sides *equal security*—a balance of nuclear systems that took into consideration all nuclear threats to both sides. After listening for months to Soviet arguments concerning equal security and the strategic value of American FBS, Smith

concluded that “the main obstacle to working out offensive limitations continued to be FBS.”¹⁵⁸

Sixteen months of fruitless negotiations demonstrated that the American and Soviet positions were irreconcilable. In December of 1970, at the end of the third round of negotiations in Helsinki, the Soviets had declared that it would be impossible to negotiate a treaty on offensive limitations and had proposed that the two sides instead focus on an agreement that dealt with defensive systems—namely, anti-ballistic missile (ABM) shields. This remained the Soviet position when the talks resumed in Vienna in March of 1971. By this time, Smith had become exceedingly pessimistic about the prospects for an agreement. He repeatedly appealed to Washington to give him room to negotiate and permission to explore new avenues for compromise. But his requests were consistently denied.

And then something entirely unexpected happened. On May 4, 1971 Vladimir Semenov, the chief Soviet SALT negotiator, informed Smith that if the two sides were able to work out an agreement on limiting ABM systems, the Soviet Union would be willing to stop building new inter-continental ballistic missiles.¹⁵⁹ Smith was elated. This was a major Soviet initiative, and it seemed to come completely out of the blue. Perhaps, Smith hoped, all of his hard work had paid off. The following day Smith sent an enthusiastic letter to Nixon in which he described Semenov’s surprising offer.¹⁶⁰ Smith was sure that Nixon’s response would be swift and positive—this was the kind of breakthrough that the Americans all had been

¹⁵⁸ Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk*, 215.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

working toward and hoping for. Smith waited for a reply from Washington. He waited a day, and then two days, and then four days. There was no response. This was very perplexing. “Here was a major negotiating signal,” Smith writes, “and Washington was silent.”¹⁶¹

On May 9 Smith met with Semenov again, this time aboard a steamer on an alpine lake in the southern Austrian state of Carinthia. The trip to the lake had been originally envisioned as a recreational outing for the negotiators from both countries—a much-needed respite from months of exhausting polemics—but Smith and Semenov ended up spending several hours in intense negotiations. Once again Semenov repeated his May 4 proposal. This time Semenov explained that his proposal was actually a response to a similar proposal from the American side. Smith had no idea what Semenov was talking about. He had never made such a proposal.¹⁶²

On May 10 Smith returned to Washington to get clarification. Rumors were swirling that something was happening behind the scenes regarding the SALT negotiations, but Smith could not get any clear answers. On May 13 he sent another letter to Kissinger to describe Semenov’s unexpected offer, but still neither

¹⁶¹ Memorandum for the Record (US), Meeting Between Deputy Presidential Assistant Haig and Ambassador Dobrynin, May 5, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 491, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 6 [Pt. 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive. (Document 149 in United States Department of State, *Soviet American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, Edward C. Keefer, ed. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007 (hereafter, Document #, SAR)). Transcript, Telephone conversation between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin, May 11, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 27, Dobrynin File. (Document 151, SAR). Smith, *Doubletalk*, 219.

¹⁶² Smith, *Doubletalk*, 220.

Kissinger nor Nixon gave him instructions regarding how to respond to the Soviets. More than two weeks had passed since Smith had received Semenov's breakthrough concession, and still Smith had not received any guidance from Nixon or Kissinger.¹⁶³

The silence from the Nixon inner circle was finally broken when Kissinger invited Smith to his office in Washington on May 19.¹⁶⁴ Over breakfast Kissinger informed Smith that he had been meeting secretly with the Soviets and conducting confidential SALT negotiations with them for more than a year.¹⁶⁵ The proposal that Semenov had made to Smith, Kissinger explained, was actually the product of Kissinger's secret negotiations. In fact, Kissinger added, he had already worked out an agreement with the Soviets along the lines described by Semenov, and President Nixon and the Soviet leadership were planning on announcing the details of this agreement to the world the next day.

Smith was shocked by this news. For sixteen months he had worked tirelessly to represent American positions and to follow his narrow instructions in the SALT negotiations. Now he discovered that his negotiations had been hollow. Almost the entire time, Kissinger had been conducting the real negotiations with the Soviets by himself in secret. "For months the White House had carried on one line of

¹⁶³ Editor's Note on p. 342, SAR.

¹⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ambassador Gerard Smith and Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, May 19, 1971, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972* (hereafter, FRUS 69-76 Vol. 32), document 157.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

SALT policy while directing the delegation to take another,” Smith wrote. “Was it necessary to pursue such a duplicitous diplomacy?” he asked.¹⁶⁶

Smith’s consternation was shared by William Rogers, the American Secretary of State, who also had been kept in the dark regarding Kissinger’s covert dealings with the Soviets. Rogers learned about Kissinger’s secret negotiations during a meeting with Nixon the same day. According to Bob Haldeman, Nixon’s Chief of Staff, Rogers was “clearly very upset.” “Why didn’t you tell me what you were doing?” Rogers protested.¹⁶⁷

When Smith learned the details of the preliminary agreement that Kissinger had reached with the Soviets, he was even more flabbergasted. The Soviets had agreed to a mutual freeze on the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in exchange for an agreement limiting ABM systems, but there would be no limits placed on Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). The Soviets were building new SLBMs at an alarming rate, so the failure to place limits on these systems would mean that the Soviet Union would soon have more SLBMs than the United States. In addition, a mutual freeze on land-based ballistic missiles would freeze in place a sizeable Soviet numerical advantage in these missile systems. Smith could not understand why Kissinger would do this, and he pressed Kissinger to make the records of the back channel negotiations leading to the May 20 agreement available for Smith’s review. Kissinger assured Smith that he wanted him “to have

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 223.

¹⁶⁷ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House*, The Complete Multimedia Edition. As quoted in editor’s note 4 of Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ambassador Gerard Smith and Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, May 19, 1971, (FRUS 69-76 Vol. 32, document 157).

the whole background of his recent direct involvement in SALT” and that “the whole record would be made available” to Smith.¹⁶⁸ Kissinger also promised both Smith and Rogers that he would not negotiate with the Soviets anymore in secret and that both men would be kept in the loop regarding any future developments. These assurances, however, all proved to be false. Smith never received access to the complete records of Kissinger’s secret negotiations, and Kissinger continued to negotiate with the Soviets in secret.¹⁶⁹ His ongoing confidential negotiations eventually led to the SALT I interim agreement, signed a year later on May 27, 1972 between President Nixon and Secretary Brezhnev.

Smith believed that an “autopsy [was] in order to see how the May 20 agreement was reached,” but this was not possible at the time because Kissinger refused to make all of the records of the talks available, and the records that he did disclose were often written by Kissinger himself and were not always entirely accurate.¹⁷⁰ Even nine years later, when Smith wrote his memoirs, he was still

¹⁶⁸ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 226.

¹⁶⁹ On June 30, 1971 Kissinger informed Dobrynin that Smith had received only limited access to the records of their negotiations. According to Dobrynin, Kissinger said, “Pentagon leaders and Smith, as head of the U.S. delegation at the negotiations, were made aware of the content of the exchange of confidential letters between the two governments. They were not, however, in any way privy to the confidential exchange of views that preceded and accompanied the exchange of letters. President Nixon is still the only one who knows of the conversations between the Soviet Ambassador and Kissinger” (FRUS SALT, document 172).

¹⁷⁰ Kissinger was often the only American representative in his negotiations with the Soviets. His desire for secrecy was so great that he chose to take his own notes and he refused to use an American translator when speaking with Soviet leaders who did not speak English, relying instead on the Soviet translator. When Kissinger’s records were the only ones available, it was impossible to access their accuracy. Now that Dobrynin’s reports of his meetings have been published, it is possible to compare Kissinger’s reports against Dobrynin’s and to identify possible areas of inaccuracy.

lamenting the meagerness of the available record related to Kissinger's secret negotiations.¹⁷¹

Raymond Garthoff, a member of the US SALT delegation, argues that Kissinger refused to release the records of his dealings with the Soviets for a reason. "The record of the Kissinger-Dobrynin exchanges," Garthoff wrote in 1994, "has remained shrouded in secrecy and subject to confusion for a very good reason: Kissinger came to realize that he had not negotiated the substance of the offensive limitations advantageously, or even satisfactorily, and sought to conceal this fact. It was all the more important for him to do so as he had allowed no participation of sharing of responsibility for those negotiations with the rest of the government."¹⁷²

Although Smith and Garthoff both had grave reservations about what may have transpired in Kissinger's private negotiations with the Soviets and strong reservations about the agreements that issued from these confidential talks, without full access to the records of these negotiations, neither man was able to explain fully what happened in the Kissinger-Dobrynin channel.

Lifting the Veil on Kissinger's Secret Negotiations

In 2007 the US State Department published a large body of documents related to the Kissinger-Dobrynin negotiations, including both Kissinger and Dobrynin's transcripts of their discussions. These records make it possible for the first time for historians to gain a detailed understanding of what transpired in these

¹⁷¹ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 225.

¹⁷² Garthoff, *Détente and Confirmation*, 181.

confidential negotiations.¹⁷³ Drawing upon these recently-released transcripts, this chapter lifts the veil on the Kissinger-Dobrynin channel, following the negotiations in this secret forum from its origins in 1969 to the SALT I interim agreement in 1972. The chapter demonstrates that Nixon and Kissinger, driven primarily by political considerations, made concession after concession in the confidential channel in order to secure an agreement with the Soviets and arrange a high-profile summit for Nixon in Moscow. Despite the fact that nearly all American arms control experts were arguing against accepting the Soviet principle of equal security, Nixon and Kissinger accepted this principle. And while Nixon repeatedly instructed the official SALT delegation not to grant the Soviet Union any compensation for American FBS, Nixon and Kissinger did this very thing in their secret talks with the Soviets.

Origins of the Secret Channel

The early rounds of the SALT talks between the United States and the Soviet Union exposed serious inconsistencies in the American negotiating positions and a profound lack of consensus among Nixon administration officials regarding basic US strategy for the talks. Raymond Garthoff was highly critical of the US proposals, concluding that “the opening positions of the United States...were not serious negotiating proposals” and that “the US approach to reductions...had serious

¹⁷³ A less complete collection, publicized by the National Security Archive, became available in 2004. In 2007 the State Department, working together with the Russian government, made the complete records of these negotiations available in US Department of State, *Soviet American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, Edward C. Keefer, ed. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2007. This collection publishes together both Kissinger and Dobrynin’s records of their conversations.

flaws.”¹⁷⁴ According to Henry Kissinger numerous meetings of the National Security Council and the SALT Verification Panel could not harmonize the competing positions. “There was no consensus; there was a babble of discordant voices,” Kissinger writes.¹⁷⁵

This lack of accord was due in part to serious disagreement within the US government regarding Soviet intentions and US strategy, but these differences in opinion do not explain the abiding inconsistencies in the American positions that remained throughout the talks. Something more fundamental was at the root. President Nixon himself was the cause. Although Nixon commissioned intelligence briefings and conducted strategy sessions with his senior advisors, the President actually had very little interest in the details of the SALT negotiations or in the opinions of most of his advisors. According to Kissinger, although various factions within the US government attempted to win Nixon’s support for their positions, these efforts were futile given the President’s lack of interest in the details. “All of this feinting and posturing was performed before a President bored to distraction,” Kissinger explains. “His glazed expression,” Kissinger continues, “showed that he considered most of the arguments esoteric rubbish.”¹⁷⁶ Garthoff agrees with Kissinger’s evaluation of the President, concluding that Nixon “displayed a remarkable indifference.”¹⁷⁷

Nixon’s primary concerns related to SALT appear to have been personal and political. The records of Nixon’s exchanges with Kissinger reveal that Nixon viewed

¹⁷⁴ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 156, 161.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 157.

¹⁷⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 542.

¹⁷⁷ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 163.

SALT largely as an opportunity for a high-profile political victory, and he personally wanted all the credit for this victory. As his advisors argued the details, Nixon, in Kissinger's words, "was trying to calculate the political impact and salability of the various options, of which only the broad outlines interested him."¹⁷⁸ Nixon frequently limited the freedom of American SALT negotiators because he did not want them to get credit for a breakthrough in the talks. The classified records of the talks reveal, and Kissinger confirms, that whenever it seemed like an agreement might emerge from the official negotiations in Geneva and Vienna, "Nixon was seized by the fear that Gerard Smith, rather than he, would get credit."¹⁷⁹

Nixon's fear that someone else would get the credit for a SALT agreement and his desire for a quick political success led him to place all of his hope in a confidential negotiating channel with the Soviets. Although Nixon continued to preside over meetings of the SALT Verification Panel, he had no intention of allowing the members of this panel to have a real say in the American negotiating position or in the carrying out of the negotiations. In addition, although Nixon continued to issue instructions for the official US SALT delegation, he did not want the SALT delegation to succeed in working out an agreement with the Soviets. Openly, he supported their efforts, but, secretly, he undermined their work. And Kissinger was more than happy to support this approach. Kissinger eagerly fostered the President's paranoia and actively supported Nixon's efforts to sabotage the work of the US Secretary of State and the official SALT team. Kissinger undermined Nixon's confidence in the Secretary of State by repeatedly warning Nixon about

¹⁷⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 542.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 166.

State Department leaks, and he fed Nixon's suspicions of the Head of the SALT delegation by telling him that Smith had his own agenda for the talks. These efforts paid off for Kissinger, and he became Nixon's sole representative in the confidential channel with the Soviets. In this capacity, Kissinger negotiated a SALT agreement with the Soviets almost entirely on his own. While Smith and other members of the official US SALT delegation spent hours every day negotiating with the Soviets on behalf of the Nixon administration, Nixon and Kissinger secretly instructed the Soviets to disregard what they heard from the official US SALT delegation. Nixon and Kissinger informed the Soviet leadership that Kissinger alone represented the President and that the real US negotiating positions would be presented by Kissinger through the confidential channel. Nixon even went so far so far as to give conflicting instructions to the official US SALT delegation and to Kissinger. Officially, Nixon instructed the SALT delegation to push for a comprehensive agreement on offensive nuclear weapons and to reject Soviet calls to count US FBS and British and French systems. Secretly, however, Nixon instructed Kissinger to push for a limited agreement and to do whatever necessary to achieve a breakthrough.

The entire official US SALT negotiating team had no idea that Kissinger was secretly conducting talks with the Soviets. Nixon and Kissinger also colluded to keep these negotiations a complete secret from the Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and all senior US government officials. The result was that the official SALT negotiating positions—the ones tabled by US officials in Geneva and Vienna—were often at odds with the positions secretly advocated by Kissinger through the confidential channel. This created considerable confusion in the talks,

and the Soviets took advantage of this confusion. While Nixon and Kissinger attempted to work out a treaty using only the confidential channel, the Soviets used both the official channel and the confidential channel and often played these channels against each other. In addition, while Soviet negotiators (in both channels) had the support of the entire Soviet leadership and could draw upon the expertise of Soviet arms control experts, Kissinger acted as a one-man show, formulating positions on his own and conducting the negotiations entirely by himself. In the end, Nixon got what he wanted—an agreement for which he alone could claim the credit. But the Soviets clearly got the better of Nixon and Kissinger. The interim agreement that Kissinger negotiated with the Soviets and that Nixon signed with Brezhnev in May 1972 favored the Soviet Union. In this preliminary agreement, the Soviets would freeze production of their ICBMs with more of these systems than the United States, and they would have the freedom to press on with their aggressive SLBM build-up. Kissinger would have to spend the next year trying to obtain a more favorable agreement with the Soviets, one that placed limits on the Soviet SLBM force.

**Background:
The Secret Channel Becomes the Kissinger-Dobrynin Channel**

President Nixon broached the idea of a confidential channel with the Soviets at the very beginning of his presidency. Initially, Nixon imagined that both Henry Kissinger and William Rogers would represent him in secret meetings with Anatoly Dobrynin, the affable yet shrewd Soviet Ambassador to Washington. Less than a month after Nixon had been sworn into office, Nixon explained his plans for the confidential channel in a meeting with Dobrynin in the White House on February 17,

1969. Nixon told Dobrynin that Kissinger would be his main representative in the private channel but that Rogers would also participate, delivering “private, confidential messages [intended] for the Soviet Government.” Nixon explained that Rogers was his “closest aide for foreign policy affairs” and a “long-time personal friend...from whom there will be no secrets in the area of relations with the Soviet Government.”¹⁸⁰

Although Nixon originally envisioned that both Kissinger and Rogers would represent him in the confidential channel, Kissinger immediately took steps to undermine the President’s confidence in Rogers. After a meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin on February 14, Kissinger told Nixon that Dobrynin had said that he “would like to conduct his conversations in Washington with some person who has your confidence, but who was not part of the diplomatic establishment.”¹⁸¹ But in Dobrynin’s account of the same meeting, there is no indication that Dobrynin ever said this. According to Dobrynin’s records, Kissinger was the one who introduced this thought into their discussion. In Dobrynin’s account, Kissinger told Dobrynin that the President desired to establish “good, confidential contacts with the Soviet Government” and that for these purposes a State Department official would not be “particularly reliable” because “too many people [in the State Department] have access to the materials.” In the US State Department, Kissinger explained, “there are

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and Richard Nixon, February 17, 1969. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 53, p. 399, d. 5, l. 53–69. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 6, SAR).

¹⁸¹ Memorandum, Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon, February 15, 1969. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 340, Subject Files, USSR Memcons, Dobrynin/President, 2/17/69. Secret; Eyes Only. (Document 2, SAR).

occasional leaks of information to the press, which are hard to control.” Thus, in order to achieve “the most confidential exchange of views with the Soviet leadership,” Kissinger told Dobrynin, Nixon would “utilize a confidential channel between Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador.”¹⁸² Clearly, Kissinger was seeking to instill doubt in the minds of both the President and the Soviet leadership regarding the ability of the Secretary of State to maintain the confidentiality of a private US-Soviet channel. In fact, Kissinger repeatedly warned the President of leaks in the State Department and consistently urged Dobrynin to view Kissinger as the President’s only trustworthy confidante.¹⁸³ Within a short time, Kissinger had succeeded in his efforts, and Rogers was completely excluded from the confidential channel. Kissinger began referring to the confidential US-Soviet channel as simply the “Dobrynin-Kissinger channel.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Presidential Assistant Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin, February 14, 1969, US Department of State, *Soviet American Relations*, document 3. Dobrynin’s records of his conversations with Kissinger are consistently more detailed and accurate than Kissinger’s records of the same conversations. Kissinger frequently confuses dates and leaves out key information. Dobrynin’s records of his conversations with Kissinger are routinely 2-3 times longer than Kissinger’s records of the same conversations. Frequently, one gets the impression that Kissinger claims that Dobrynin introduced a topic that Kissinger himself introduced.

¹⁸³ On March 3, 1969 Kissinger urged Dobrynin to “go directly” to Kissinger whenever he heard “conflicting information on a particular position of President Nixon.” In Washington, Kissinger told Dobrynin, “There are quite a few generally prominent individuals who, in an effort to underscore how close they are to the President, express various opinions of their own, pretending that those opinions come from the White House. Sometimes, too, State Department officials are ‘honestly mistaken,’ unaware of the President’s true intentions.” If there was ever any uncertainty about a US position, Kissinger advised Dobrynin to come to him “directly” and “privately” for clarifications. Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), March 3, 1969, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, Fond 0129, Opus. 53, Papka 399, Delo 5, Listy 105–119. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 11, SAR).

¹⁸⁴ Memorandum, Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon, “Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, Lunch, March 3,” March 6, 1969. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Pt. 2. Secret; Nodis. (Document 10, SAR).

Soviet Strategies for Using the Confidential Channel

Nixon and Kissinger hoped to use the channel to secure a limited agreement with the Soviets and to sign this agreement at a highly-publicized summit in Moscow. The Soviets had a very clear understanding of Nixon's objectives, and, after a few meetings between Kissinger and Dobrynin in the confidential channel, the Soviet leadership developed several strategies to "exert appropriate influence" on US policy toward the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁵ Each of these strategies would depend upon effective use of the confidential channel for its success. The first strategy was to use Nixon's longing for a summit with the Soviets to put pressure on the President. The Soviet leadership believed that Nixon strongly desired a summit meeting with the Soviets during his first term. Based on this belief, they decided to delay such a summit for as long as possible. They would use the confidential channel to hint at the possibility of a summit and to heighten the President's desire for a summit, but they would hold off on making any specific commitments regarding a summit date. Soviet documents reveal that by adopting this strategy, the Soviet leadership hoped that the "the pressure of this issue" would build, making Nixon more willing to make concessions to the Soviets in order to get a summit meeting. In Dobrynin's estimation, "Nixon's personal interest in a meeting with Soviet leaders and the sort of promissory notes he has given public opinion in this regard...could be important as a restraining factor that could have a positive effect on U.S. Government positions

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, March 3, 1969, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, Fond 0129, Opus. 53, Papka 399, Delo 5, Listy 105-119. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 11, SAR).

on issues of interest to us.”¹⁸⁶ The second Soviet strategy was to play on Nixon’s fear that someone else might get credit for an agreement with the Soviets and to take advantage of Kissinger’s ambitions to be the main player in US foreign policy. In a confidential report to the Soviet leadership, Dobrynin discussed this strategy when he wrote, “It is our observation that confidential contacts with Kissinger represent one of the most effective practical channels for us to influence the President and his policy at this time. Kissinger’s obvious personal interest in being the President’s principal foreign policy adviser is also helpful in this respect.”¹⁸⁷ The Soviets played on Nixon’s fears and Kissinger’s ambitions by frequently criticizing the effectiveness of the confidential channel and by subtly threatening to abandon the confidential channel in favor of the official SALT negotiations in Geneva and Vienna if the confidential channel did not produce tangible results. In addition, periodically the Soviet leadership purposely bypassed the confidential channel by introducing key Soviet initiatives to US SALT negotiators in Helsinki and Vienna and by leaking information discussed in the confidential channel into the official SALT negotiations. The Soviet leadership believed that if they created the impression that an agreement was likely to be reached in the official SALT forum that Nixon and Kissinger would be willing to make concessions in the confidential channel in order to guarantee that an agreement would be achieved via this channel, thus assuring that only Nixon and Kissinger would receive the credit for this agreement. The ultimate goal of both of these strategies was to win American acceptance of the principle of equal security and to get US forward-based systems and British and French nuclear weapons

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

included in a SALT agreement. As the following discussion will show, both Soviet strategies were effective in extracting concessions from Kissinger through the confidential channel, and the Soviets were ultimately successful in reaching most of their objectives in SALT I.

Negotiations in the Confidential Channel February 18, 1970-May 20, 1971

The SALT talks began in Helsinki, Finland on November 17, 1969. After a brief first round of talks, the two sides returned to their respective countries on December 22, 1969 for a four-month break in the official negotiations. During this break, Kissinger and Dobrynin began meeting for confidential negotiations related to the nascent talks. In these early meetings, Kissinger made it clear to the Soviets that Nixon hoped to use the confidential channel to sidestep the official negotiations and work out a limited agreement that could be signed by Nixon and Soviet leaders at a summit meeting before the end of the summer. Such an agreement could be possible, Kissinger argued, because a rough parity already existed between the two sides. The Soviets used these early meetings to pursue their strategy of gaining US acceptance of the principle of equal security by hinting at the possibility of a summit while refusing to commit to one and heightening Kissinger and Nixon's fears that the two men might be relegated to a secondary role in the treaty negotiations.

The first of the Kissinger-Dobrynin meetings to discuss SALT matters in detail took place on February 18, 1970.¹⁸⁸ Kissinger invited Dobrynin to the White House at noon and had lunch served in the downstairs Library "in order to avoid the

¹⁸⁸ Kissinger and Dobrynin met before this on December 22, and January 10 and 20, but this was the first meeting of the confidential channel to discuss SALT in substance.

press' seeing Dobrynin coming in and to avoid staff members' asking questions."¹⁸⁹ During this meeting, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that Nixon wanted to use the confidential channel as the primary negotiating forum with the Soviets for a SALT agreement. This forum, Nixon explained, would be used, "bypassing Vienna," for discussion on "fundamental issues" so that afterwards, "without detailed explanations to the delegations themselves, they would simultaneously be sent instructions which had been agreed upon through this channel."¹⁹⁰ During this meeting Kissinger also informed Dobrynin that although Nixon would instruct the US SALT Delegation to pursue a comprehensive agreement, the President was considering using the confidential channel to pursue a limited agreement because this would make it possible to "achieve real results somewhat more quickly."¹⁹¹

Three weeks later Kissinger and Dobrynin met again, this time in the Military Aide's Office in the White House. During this meeting Dobrynin pushed for a comprehensive agreement based on the Soviet principle of equal security, and Kissinger argued for a limited agreement based on the American view of strategic parity. Dobrynin told Kissinger that the Soviets preferred to seek a comprehensive agreement that covered all strategic weapons, rather than a limited agreement that would cover only some of them. "We believe," Dobrynin said, "that a solution that encompasses all aspects of this problem would be preferable, because in that case all the factors relating to the problem and affecting the overall situation that exists

¹⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ambassador Anatoliy [sic] Dobrynin and Mr. Henry Kissinger, February 18, 1970, Digital National Security Archive.

¹⁹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, February 18, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 19-31. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 50, SAR).

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

in the relations between our countries would be taken into consideration to the maximum extent.”¹⁹² “All the factors relating to the problem” would certainly include US FBS. Kissinger countered that Nixon’s desire to pursue a limited agreement before pursuing a comprehensive one was based on his belief that “a certain strategic balance currently exists...between the U.S. and USSR.” Although the US had advantages in some systems and the USSR had advantages in other systems, “there is approximate equality,” Kissinger concluded.¹⁹³

On April 7, 1970 Dobrynin and Kissinger met again, this time at eight o’clock in the evening at the Soviet Embassy. In addition to discussing SALT, the two men watched a film selected by Dobrynin. Kissinger did not leave the embassy until after midnight. During their discussions about SALT, Dobrynin began playing on Kissinger’s fears that the Soviet leadership might prefer to conduct negotiations through the official SALT channels, thus sidestepping the confidential channel. Dobrynin informed Kissinger that although the Soviet government “was serious about these negotiations,” Kissinger’s suggestion that they “settle the matter in our confidential channel presented a difficulty.” The difficulty was that Semenov, the head of the Soviet SALT delegation, was a Deputy Foreign Minister, a position that outranked Ambassador, Dobrynin’s title. Dobrynin indicated that the Soviet leadership in Moscow were deliberating regarding how to deal with this difficulty. It would “help their deliberations in Moscow,” Dobrynin said, if Kissinger would give Dobrynin a greater “feel for what [the US] position was likely to be.” In other words,

¹⁹² Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, March 10, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 32–41. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 52, SAR).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Dobrynin made it clear to Kissinger that Kissinger would have to divulge more information about the US position if he wanted the Moscow leadership to give primacy to the confidential channel. Dobrynin also began dropping hints that the Soviet leadership might be interested in a summit, without making any direct statements or specific commitments. Dobrynin told Kissinger that he had noticed that at the beginning of each new US Administration there was a great reluctance to make progress. At the end of an Administration, the willingness for progress increased, but by then the time had run out. As an example of this trend, Dobrynin remarked that “Johnson had tried to have a summit in the last six months of his Administration when it no longer made sense.” “It would have been easier,” Dobrynin observed, “to arrange one several years earlier.”¹⁹⁴

During the next Dobrynin-Kissinger meeting on April 9, Kissinger took Dobrynin’s bait, promising to provide through the confidential channel additional information about American plans for the talks and proposing a summit meeting between Nixon and the Soviet leadership in the near future. Kissinger informed Dobrynin that while the formal negotiations discussed a wide range of issues, the confidential channel could focus on negotiating a more “limited strategic arms agreement.” Using this approach, the President was optimistic that a SALT agreement could be achieved as early as the summer (just a few months away) and that “the President and the Soviet Prime Minister could then meet to ratify it at a

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, April 7, 1970, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 711, Country Files, Europe, USSR, Vol. VII. Top Secret; Sensitive. (Document 55, SAR).

summit.”¹⁹⁵ Once again, Kissinger “strongly requested” that Soviet negotiators in Vienna refrain from saying anything about the confidential channel to the members of the U.S. delegation, who were, in Kissinger’s words, “totally out of the loop.”¹⁹⁶

After his time with Dobrynin, Kissinger called Nixon to report on the meeting. When Kissinger informed Nixon that he had proposed to Dobrynin that the confidential channel focus on working out a limited agreement that would be signed at a summit in the near future, Nixon could not contain himself. “You make the deal,” he enthusiastically charged Kissinger.¹⁹⁷

Kissinger Considers Compensation

While Kissinger waited for Dobrynin to respond to his proposals through the confidential channel, the Soviet SALT delegation introduced the idea of pursuing a limited agreement in the official SALT talks in Vienna. This would be the first of several instances in which the Soviet leadership chose to respond to Kissinger’s proposals through the *official* SALT channel rather than through the private Dobrynin-Kissinger channel. On May 8 Soviet negotiators in Vienna informed their American counterparts that the Soviets might consider a limited agreement if the United States was willing to accompany the agreement with some an “understanding” that the United States would not augment its FBS in any way or

¹⁹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, April 7, 1970, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 1, Pt. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. (Document 57, SAR).

¹⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, March 10, 1970. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 32–41. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 58, SAR).

¹⁹⁷ Transcript, Telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 4, Chronological File, (SAR, 145).

transfer any FBS to third countries.¹⁹⁸ Nixon, as we know, was not interested in exploring a limited agreement through the negotiating forum in Vienna; he wanted these discussions to occur only in the private channel. Consequently, he instructed the US SALT delegation to reject these Soviet overtures.¹⁹⁹

But the Soviets persisted. On May 26 the head of the Soviet SALT team, Valdimir Semenov, informed Smith that the Soviet Union would drop its demand for control on forward-based systems on the condition that the USSR would be “compensated” for US FBS. Semenov explained that the Soviet Union would allow the US to keep its FBS if the Soviets would be allowed to have more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States as a form of compensation. Such an arrangement would allow the two sides to reach an agreement that recognized the principle of equal security.²⁰⁰ When Smith checked with Washington to gauge whether Nixon might be willing to consider the Soviet compensation proposal, he received a clear answer. Smith should immediately reject the idea of compensation, reminding the Soviets that American FBS were off the table and that United States was interested only in a comprehensive agreement. Behind scenes, however, Kissinger began to consider the Soviet compensation proposal.

¹⁹⁸ Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), May 20, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 77.

¹⁹⁹ Minutes of a Verification Panel Meeting, May 26, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT, document 79. Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 6, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 80.

²⁰⁰ Memorandum, Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, “Salt Status,” June 6, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 80.

On June 10 Kissinger invited Dobrynin to join him for a ride aboard the President's yacht, the *Sequoia*. Before they went to the yacht, however, the two men met in the Map Room of the White House, where they were joined by President Nixon. Nixon took the opportunity to impress upon Dobrynin the extent to which the President had confidence in Kissinger. "Kissinger," Nixon said, "has full authority to speak on my behalf." Nixon also stressed the importance that he attached to the confidential channel. "Normal diplomatic channels," he explained, "do not allow one to speak frankly enough, to get right to the point, without any formalities and without looking over one's shoulder at bureaucrats who are taking notes of the conversations." Nixon also confessed that he had little hope that the delegates in Vienna would be able to reach an agreement but that he hoped that an agreement could be achieved through the confidential channel "as early as this year." In parting, Nixon exhorted Dobrynin to keep the discussions in the confidential channel absolutely confidential. "Nobody in the U.S. Government will know about this conversation except Kissinger and myself," Nixon informed Dobrynin. "Therefore," he added, "I would ask you to convey any response from Moscow through Kissinger alone. This subject should not be discussed either with U.S. Ambassador Beam or with any of the top State Department officials. At the same time, you should regard everything Kissinger says as coming personally from me." Dobrynin duly noted Nixon's extreme confidence in Kissinger, including in his report to Moscow the following observation: "It must be said that in my experience, neither President Kennedy nor President Johnson had given such sweeping powers or instructions to their assistants as Nixon had, bypassing even the Secretary of State." Dobrynin also

noted the effect of Nixon's statements on Kissinger's ego, writing, "Kissinger, who was present during all of this, positively glowed with pleasure and from the acknowledgment of his importance."²⁰¹

The two men then departed for the Presidential yacht, where they remained from 7:30 pm until 1:00 am. During this time on the yacht, Kissinger gave his first indication to Dobrynin that the United States might be willing to consider compensating the Soviets for American forward-based system. The two men began by discussing the latest American proposal in the official SALT negotiations in Vienna—that the two sides would be granted an equal number of intercontinental missiles, namely, 1,710 each. Dobrynin voiced the now familiar Soviet objection to an agreement that would establish equal limits on intercontinental systems. The Soviets could never accept such an agreement, Dobrynin explained, because the Soviet Union had no equivalent to American forward-based systems and that "there should be some limitation on their deployment."²⁰² One possible way to resolve this disparity, Dobrynin proposed, would be for the United States to withdraw its aircraft carriers far enough away from Soviet territory to prevent related aircraft from being able to reach the USSR. Kissinger countered that aircraft carriers did not play a significant role in Soviet strategy against the Soviet Union but that it would be impossible for the US to withdraw them, because doing so would affect their utility

²⁰¹ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, June 10, 1970. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 81–89. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 60, SAR).

²⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, June 10, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 81.

against other countries.²⁰³ According to Dobrynin's record of their conversation, Kissinger then suggested an alternate solution.²⁰⁴ "There is, as we know, another option for correcting that disparity," Kissinger said, "i.e., through some sort of compensation in the area of other strategic systems." "The U.S. would be prepared to see what could be done," Kissinger offered, "in the balance of the overall aggregate number of launch units—what could be done, if it were really necessary, to provide reasonable compensation to the Soviet Union for what it regards as the disproportion in the U.S. proposals." This suggestion was exactly the proposal that Soviet negotiators had made in the official SALT negotiations and that Nixon had ordered American negotiators to reject. Now Kissinger was introducing it into the private channel as an American initiative. Kissinger informed Dobrynin that the United States was prepared to consider Soviet proposals related to compensation but urged Dobrynin to begin offering specific numbers. Alluding once again to Nixon's desire for a quick agreement, Kissinger urged Dobrynin to give him concrete numbers. "It is high time," Kissinger advised, "to talk in specific terms, because otherwise the whole issue of compensation is purely theoretical." Time was of the essence, Kissinger again reminded Dobrynin. "It is now time to seek a possible agreement on specific ceilings for strategic forces," Kissinger declared. "President

²⁰³ In Kissinger's account of this conversation, he does not mention which countries these carriers were intended to deter. In Dobrynin's account, Kissinger says that they were meant to deter China.

²⁰⁴ In Kissinger's version of the conversation, Dobrynin raises this issue first, not Kissinger.

Nixon,” Kissinger concluded, “would like to receive a response from the Soviet Government outlining its views on this issue, preferably by the end of the month.”²⁰⁵

Dobrynin quickly tabled Kissinger’s proposals and then returned to the Soviet strategy of questioning the value of the confidential channel and of pressing Kissinger to concede even more. Kissinger noted, as if in passing, that “confidential channels had been used more effectively under Kennedy and even under Johnson.” Dobrynin expressed the hope that the confidential channel “would function more productively” and that Kissinger, “as the President’s assistant and someone who is especially trusted by the President, would make more use of that channel for specific discussion of issues with a view to finding concrete solutions and mutual agreement.” Dobrynin concluded by warning Kissinger that the Soviet Union “had no intention of settling for the external trappings of a ‘confidential communication channel’ when in strict confidence we hear pretty good things, but they don’t show up in U.S. policy.” In his report to Moscow on his conversations with Kissinger, Dobrynin smugly noted the effect of his comments. “I could see,” Dobrynin wrote, “that Kissinger took note of these comments of mine and they made him somewhat uneasy. It was quite obvious that he greatly values the special role Nixon has assigned to him with respect to the Soviet Union.”²⁰⁶

Following this meeting on the Presidential yacht, the Soviets adopted what would become a familiar pattern—they tabled Kissinger’s proposal but ignored his pleas for specific numbers and a speedy response. Two weeks passed with no reply

²⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, June 10, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 62–75. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 63, SAR).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

from the Soviets. President Nixon was very unhappy with this silence. And then, to add insult to injury, Soviet negotiators in Vienna informed Smith that they were ready to take a break from the negotiations and return to Moscow. Smith shared this information with Washington, and Nixon was livid. He, the President of the United States, had taken time out of his busy day to meet with Dobrynin on June 10. He had then authorized Kissinger to discuss compensation with the Soviets and had requested a swift response. But the Soviets had ignored him, and now they were talking about a break in the negotiations. Nixon wanted to secure a quick agreement in the confidential channel that could be eventually introduced into and finalized in the official channel, but a break in the negotiations would make this impossible.²⁰⁷

On June 23 Nixon instructed Kissinger to arrange another meeting with Dobrynin. "Tell him I want an answer in 48 hours," Nixon demanded.²⁰⁸ Kissinger invited Dobrynin to the Map Room the same day to convey the President's dissatisfaction. Kissinger began by asking Dobrynin "in an agitated tone" why the Soviet government had not replied to the President's offer." "One sensed," Dobrynin observed, "that Nixon was really stung by the lack of response." Dobrynin feigned innocence, telling Kissinger that he had no idea "why [Kissinger] was so worked up."

²⁰⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 151. Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, June 23, 1970. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 1, Pt. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive. (Document 64, SAR).

²⁰⁸ During a phone conversation on June 23, 1970, between Kissinger and Nixon, Nixon told Kissinger, "I took time out of a busy day to see him [on June 10]. Dobrynin has found me very willing to talk, and I made a very firm offer and he replied nothing.... I want you to call him and tell him you talked to me, and I am very disappointed. Tell him the President came to that room very willing to talk. I made a firm offer, and he didn't have anything to say. Tell him I want an answer in 48 hours." (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 5, Chronological File).

Frustrated by Dobrynin's apparent obtuseness, Kissinger told Dobrynin that he would repeat the President's proposal "regarding their readiness to consider, through the confidential channel, the question of 'compensation.'" Dobrynin informed Kissinger that he did not have an answer for the President at the moment, but that he would be sure to convey the President's message to Moscow.²⁰⁹

The Soviets allowed another two weeks to pass before informing Kissinger on July 7 that it would not be possible to reach an agreement during the current round of SALT negotiations in Vienna. Dobrynin's reports to Moscow during this time make clear that the Soviets believed that delaying an agreement would play in their favor. "President Nixon," Dobrynin wrote, "attaches considerable importance to the time factor, namely, when, in what time frame, some kind of strategic arms agreement, even the most limited agreement, can be reached and, most importantly when it can be made public." In light of Nixon's concern about timing, Dobrynin supported the decision of his superiors to initiate a pause in the negotiations. "In essence, our proposal to declare a recess in the talks at this time and resume in November–December denies Nixon the opportunity to effectively use these negotiations in the upcoming U.S. Congressional elections (in early November)," Dobrynin concluded. "Apparently, this fact is currently forcing Nixon," Dobrynin continued, "to weigh all the possibilities and think about whether it might not still be possible to find some area—within the aforementioned overall problem of

²⁰⁹ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, June 23, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l.90–93. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 65, SAR).

limiting the arms race—that could become the basis for reaching some kind of agreement right now, without putting this off until the end of the year.”²¹⁰

Nixon was not happy with the news that the Soviets would press for a recess in the negotiations, but he still hoped that the Soviets would agree to a summit meeting in the near future. On July 9 Kissinger raised the question again with Dobrynin—What, Kissinger asked, “is the attitude of the Soviet leaders toward the basic idea of holding a summit meeting as early as this year, which was proposed by the President?” Dobrynin once again declined to offer a conclusive answer. Kissinger then informed Dobrynin that the United States had modified its position regarding compensating the Soviets for American FBS. The American side would be willing to continue to discuss the question of compensation, but for the time being, it would prefer to deal with this issue by allowing certain systems on both sides to be left out of the negotiations. For example, Kissinger explained, the US would not insist on including Soviet intermediate-range missiles in the agreement if “the Soviet side would set aside the issue of US nuclear missiles in Europe.”²¹¹ Dobrynin tabled Kissinger’s offer to exclude certain systems from the negotiations but rejected the comparison between Soviet intermediate-range missiles (which the Soviets believed were a non-strategic system) with American missiles in Europe (which the Soviets believed were strategic weapons). The Soviets would prefer to wait on an

²¹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, July 7, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 105–107. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 67, SAR).

²¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, July 9, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 108–119. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 69, SAR).

agreement than abandon the principle of equal security by excluding from the talks a non-strategic Soviet system in exchange for a strategic American system.

In a message to Moscow later that day, Dobrynin affirmed the ongoing Soviet strategy to use Nixon's desire for a summit to the Soviet advantage. "Considering all of the circumstances," Dobrynin concluded, "it seems advisable to use the interest Nixon has shown and, without responding directly to his proposal, to handle the matter in such a way that we could put pressure on him to move toward accepting the need for certain preliminary agreement on the substance of some of the problems that are currently of greatest interest to us."²¹²

On August 14 the SALT negotiations in Vienna recessed, but Kissinger continued his talks with Dobrynin, repeatedly asking him for an answer to the President's request for a summit.²¹³ On September 24 the Soviets partially relented. Dobrynin informed Kissinger that the Soviet leadership agreed in principle to a summit with Nixon. The date, however, would be a matter for further discussion and would be dependent on progress in the talks. Soviet sources make clear that the Soviet leadership agreed to a summit in principle in order to pacify Nixon. Dobrynin had reported to Moscow in June that Nixon was becoming increasingly offended at Soviet silence on the question of a summit. Nixon, Dobrynin wrote, "is beginning to feel that all this is virtually a personal boycott of him by our side."²¹⁴ So Moscow

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Summary of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, October 22, 1970, AVP RF, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 171–176. Top Secret. (Document 95, SAR)

²¹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, June 23, 1970. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 489, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 1, Pt. 2. Top Secret; Sensitive. (Document 64, SAR). In

finally agreed to a summit. But they still refused to agree to a date or to a public announcement. Their goal, as before, was to delay these things as long as possible in order to extract concessions from the Americans.

On October 22 Nixon and Kissinger met with Dobrynin and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister. Gromyko was in the States for a meeting of the United Nations, and Nixon decided to use this occasion to attempt to fix a definite summit date. During this meeting, the two sides summarized their current proposals in the SALT negotiations. The Soviet side wanted an agreement based on the principle of equal security that placed limits on or accounted for American forward-based systems. The United States should either withdraw its FBS or the Soviet side should granted compensation for these systems by being allowed a higher ceiling than the United States on ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers—although the Soviets still declined to offer specific numbers related to how many extra strategic offensive systems would be acceptable to them. Barring an agreement that satisfied their expectations for equal security, the Soviets preferred an ABM only agreement, leaving negotiations on offensive systems for a later date. The Americans, by contrast, wanted an agreement that dealt with ABMs and offensive systems. Offensive systems would be limited by placing equal ceilings on strategic weapons in keeping with the American notion of strategic parity. In the private channel, the Americans expressed a willingness to entertain the idea of compensating the Soviets in some way, but the American position on this issue was still evolving. One constant of the American

Dobrynin's report to Moscow, he also noted that Nixon was "beginning to feel that all this is virtually a personal boycott of him by our side."

position in the confidential channel was that Nixon wanted a summit with the Soviet leadership in the near term.

After this meeting, Soviet leaders were impressed again with the intensity of Nixon's desire to set a firm date for a summit meeting. One Soviet account noted the "emphatic wish expressed by Nixon" for "a public announcement on the issue of a Soviet-U.S. summit meeting" by October 29 or 30, "even if only in a brief or general form." The Soviet report observed that Nixon's desire was fueled primarily by domestic political considerations: "Making such an announcement as soon as possible," the document stated, "is important to him primarily because of the rapidly approaching U.S. congressional elections, which will take place on November 3. This factor is of considerable importance in the domestic political affairs [in the United States]." The Soviet leadership believed that further delay would put more pressure on Nixon and would only benefit their position.²¹⁵

The official SALT negotiations resumed in early November. At the recommencement of the talks, the Soviets accused the United States of improving their FBS throughout the early rounds of the negotiations.²¹⁶ American negotiators dismissed these arguments, calling any changes in American FBS the result of

²¹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, July 9, 1970, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 54a, p. 426, d. 1, l. 108-119. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 69, SAR). On the same day that Kissinger made this new proposal regarding compensation in the private channel, Nixon issued formal instructions to the SALT delegation that they should categorically reject any Soviet proposals regarding compensation. In addition, the instructions added, the Delegation should seek further instructions "if the Soviets raise the question of an exchange of statements or assurances with respect to systems excluded from an initial agreement." This was a preemptive step by Nixon to tie the hands of the American SALT delegation and make sure that any agreement related to compensation would happen in the confidential channel.

²¹⁶ See previous chapter for details.

“routine modernization.” The Soviets countered on December 5, 1970 with their toughest proposal of the negotiations to date. They demanded that the United States withdrawal some of their forward-based systems and also unilaterally reduce the number of their central strategic offensive systems—ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers. Senior American government officials believed that this proposal was nothing more than an attempt “to make negotiations on offensive weapons looks so unattractive that the separate ABM agreement, by comparison, would look good.”²¹⁷ The American SALT delegation immediately rejected this proposal, and, once again, the talks were at a standstill. Smith called the debates surrounding American FBS “the SALT problem of the year” for 1970.²¹⁸

Kissinger and Dobrynin met again on December 22. During this meeting Dobrynin once again employed the strategy of questioning the value of the confidential channel in order to motivate Kissinger to make concessions. “The two of us talk a lot,” Dobrynin told Kissinger, “but to be honest, we’re not getting anywhere.” Kissinger immediately asked whether this was Dobrynin’s personal opinion only or whether this view was shared by Moscow as well. Dobrynin informed him that he believed that Moscow also held this view. According to Dobrynin, Kissinger then “became noticeably agitated” and urged Dobrynin to meet with him again at the beginning of the New Year.

²¹⁷ Memorandum, President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, “Status Report on SALT,” December 10, 1970, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 118.

²¹⁸ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 187.

Abandoning Parity for the Sake of An Agreement

Over the next two weeks, Kissinger and Nixon met behind the scenes to review the history of the SALT negotiations in 1970. They had hoped for a swift limited agreement and a summit before the end of the year, but now the year was drawing to a close, and they had nothing to show for it. Faced with these dismal results and the prospect of another year without an agreement or a summit, the two men devised a new proposal that they hoped would break the logjam in the negotiations. This new proposal would involve abandoning, at least temporarily, the goal of a treaty that produced parity—equal numbers of intercontinental systems for both sides.

On January 9 Kissinger informed Dobrynin that the United States was now prepared to make an ABM agreement. This agreement, however, had to be paired with two additional things: 1) “an undertaking to continue working on offensive limitations,” and 2) “a freeze on new starts on offensive land-based missiles until there was a formal agreement in limiting offensive weapons.” The second item—a freeze on new starts on offensive land-based missiles—was an entirely new approach. Prior to this time, the United States had sought to establish equal production ceilings so that both sides would eventually end up with the same number of strategic offensive weapons. Under this new proposal, both sides would stop production at the time of the agreement, leaving the two countries with whatever number of offensive strategic weapons that they owned at the moment the freeze went into effect, even if that number was not equal. This is particularly noteworthy because both sides knew that the number would not be equal—by early

1971 the Soviet Union had surpassed the United States in land-based strategic missiles.²¹⁹

Dobrynin was clearly interested in this new overture, and he wanted to know more about what the United States had in mind regarding the freeze. In particular, Dobrynin wondered how the United States envisioned dealing with sea-based strategic missiles—submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Kissinger answered that there “might be some provision that would have to be made for submarines” but that he “had no specific proposal to make” at the moment.²²⁰ Kissinger concluded by reminding Dobrynin that this proposal was being made only through the confidential channel and that “neither the State Department nor the U.S. Embassy in Moscow has been informed of these proposals by the President.”²²¹

After the January 9 meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, Kissinger’s new proposal dominated negotiations in the secret channel for the next five months. On January 23 Dobrynin informed Kissinger that “there was considerable sympathy for the approach” within the Soviet leadership and that the Soviet government now believed that it might be possible to hold a summit in July. Kissinger was enthusiastic about this prospect. He described this meeting as “the most significant that I have had with Dobrynin since our conversations began.”²²²

²¹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, January 9, 1971, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 124.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, January 9, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1970, Vol. 4 [Pt. 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive. (Document 109, SAR).

²²² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, January 23, 1971, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 127.

But the Soviets were not ready to schedule the summit just yet. Dobrynin once again returned to the question of American forward-based aircraft, reminding Kissinger that this was still a “major problem” for the Soviet Union. Not wanting the summit to slip away, Kissinger agreed with Dobrynin. “I said it was obvious,” Kissinger records in his transcript of the meeting, “that we could not upset the strategic balance by forward deployments.” Kissinger knew that it would be difficult to include forward-based systems in a formal SALT agreement, given the widespread opposition to doing this within the American arms control community, but he offered an alternate option. “This might be handled more easily under a tacit agreement,” Kissinger suggested. Both of these suggestions—that the United States would not allow forward deployment to upset the “strategic” balance and that this question could be resolved by a tacit, confidential agreement—were major departures from the official American negotiating positions. Gerard Smith and the American SALT delegation had spent an entire year of negotiations rejecting the notion that American FBS had any bearing on the strategic balance, but now Kissinger had accepted this idea and had offered to alleviate Soviet concerns over FBS through a secret understanding.²²³

Over dinner on February 10, Dobrynin informed Kissinger that the Soviet government was amenable to the American proposal. The Soviet leadership, Dobrynin announced, “was prepared to accept a freeze on land-based construction.” They were also “prepared to discuss sea-based systems, but they preferred not to do

²²³ Ibid.

so at this point.”²²⁴ Kissinger voiced no opposition to this suggestion, and the two men then moved on to other subjects. It was in this way, without the slightest protest from Kissinger, that the Soviet leadership made exclusion of SLBMs a condition for Soviet approval of a freeze on offensive strategic missiles. This would have far-reaching consequences for the negotiations that followed over the next year and a half, leading to the SALT I interim agreement. American arms control experts would be shocked that Kissinger had agreed to leave SLBMs out of the freeze agreement, and, more significantly, the Soviet leadership would interpret the exclusion of these weapons from the freeze agreement as a tacit form of compensation for American FBS. It should be recalled that on July 9, Kissinger himself had introduced the idea of excluding certain weapons systems from the negotiations as a way to compensate the Soviets for FBS.

Political Calculations

The agreement by the two sides to limit ABMs while simultaneously freezing development of certain strategic offensive weapons was a breakthrough in the negotiations, and Nixon petitioned the Soviet government to formalize this agreement with an exchange of letters and a public announcement. Nixon was eager to get credit for progress in the talks, but it is clear that he realized that he had made major concessions to get to this point and that the proposed agreement would favor the Soviet Union. In the weeks preceding the May 20 announcement of a breakthrough, Nixon became increasingly cynical about the agreement.

²²⁴ Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, February 10, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 490, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 4 [Pt. 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. (Document 120, SAR).

During a phone conversation on April 17 between Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman, Nixon criticized the agreement that he was about to announce to the world. "I know that this kind of agreement isn't worth a damn," Nixon declared. "We're having it for political reasons," he explained. "That's right," Kissinger responded. Nixon then added, "Because the American people are so peace-loving, they think agreements solve everything. If we can do it for political reasons....and get this sort of peace issue going with us...then we should survive in the election." After the election, Nixon explained, he would change course and adopt a more hardline position and "go all out...on more defense." But for the time being, he would support the agreement. Kissinger then agreed with Nixon's assessment, interjecting, "It won't mean a damn thing. But at this stage, we've got to defuse—we've got to break the back of this generation of Democratic leaders."²²⁵

In another phone conversation with Kissinger on April 23, Nixon again repeated his negative assessment of the agreement that he was about to endorse. "All this is a bunch of shit," Nixon declared. "It's not worth a damn. But the point is that in terms of our public relations, we can use something like this at this time."²²⁶

On May 6 Nixon again expressed his opinion that the main value of the pending agreement was its political value. In a phone conversation with Alexander Haig, the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Nixon explained why he would benefit from a SALT announcement even if the details of the agreement were not entirely favorable to the United States. The American people

²²⁵ Transcript, Telephone conversation between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Bob Haldeman, April 17, 1971, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 148.

²²⁶ Transcript, Telephone conversation between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Bob Haldeman. April 23, 1971. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 150.

would respond favorably to almost any announcement that seemed to move in the direction of peace, Nixon explained, because “SALT is way over their heads. They haven’t the slightest idea what SALT is. It’s too goddammed complicated.” Later that day, Nixon continued this line of thought in a conversation with Haldeman, who confirmed the President’s assessment. “It’s true,” Haldeman told the President, “it isn’t going to make a lot of difference to people. People just don’t understand what’s SALT, SALT does, or care.” “Yeah,” Nixon replied, “it’ll be a peace move.”²²⁷

Although Nixon could not seem to care less about the details of the agreement, one thing he cared about deeply was who would get the credit for it. Just weeks before Nixon and Kissinger finalized the details of an announcement related to their breakthrough agreement with the Soviets through the confidential channel, Semenov began discussing the details of the agreement with Smith. As stated in the opening pages of this chapter, Smith immediately transmitted this news to Washington, expecting a positive response. Instead, he got silence for several weeks. This was mystifying to Smith, who had no idea what was transpiring behind the scenes in the American capital. It is probably for the best that Smith never found out.

Upon hearing that Semenov had introduced the back channel agreement into the official SALT forum, Nixon was filled with concern that Smith might get credit for the breakthrough. In a conversation with Haig, Nixon vented his frustration. “Why does Semenov tell it to that asshole Smith?” Nixon asked. Haig, anticipating the President’s own thinking, answered, “Well, I think the reasons for that are just as

²²⁷ Transcript, Conversation in Oval Office between President Nixon, Alexander Haig, and Bob Haldeman (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 493-10) FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 153.

simple, sir. To the degree they can keep you from getting the credit, they're going to do it. They don't want you to be reelected—not one goddamn bit.” Nixon agreed with this assessment, but vowed not to let this happen.²²⁸ A few days later, a conversation between Kissinger and Nixon followed a similar pattern. Just as Haig had done, Kissinger told Nixon that the Soviets had inserted the pending agreement into the SALT forum in order to “deprive you of the credit.” Once again, Nixon agreed, replying, “They'll try, and if anything happens in Vienna, they'll take credit for it.”²²⁹ Clearly, Kissinger shared the President's concern. On May 11 he laid into Dobrynin over the telephone, accusing the Soviets of “a deliberate attempt to...bypass” the President.²³⁰

As was Dobrynin's custom, he sent a report to Moscow after his conversation with Kissinger, lacing his transcripts with his own analysis and recommendations. Summarizing his talk with Kissinger, Dobrynin wrote, “Kissinger's comments definitely contain personal elements. He eagerly conducted confidential negotiations...in hopes of success, which would elevate him in the President's eyes. He is therefore, to a considerable extent, against any independent negotiations at the Semenov–Smith level.” But in Dobrynin's analysis, Kissinger's vanity was not the main problem. Nixon, whom Dobrynin described in very unflattering terms, was the real concern:

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Transcript, Conversation in the Oval Office between President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, May 10, 1971 (National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 496–9) FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 154.

²³⁰ Transcript Excerpts, Telephone conversation between Henry Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin, May 11, 1971. As quoted in the editorial note on pp. 483-484 in FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I.

Nixon himself, as is well known, in terms of his personal traits is a very petty and distrustful man with a huge ego, who carries grudges....Every step or response to the President by us is viewed at the White House through a magnifying glass to see if there might be some sneaky trick here or a wish to "deceive or demean" the President personally. In short, Nixon measures everything by his own yardstick.... This suspiciousness of Nixon's, which is encouraged in every way by his inner circle...has now reached pathological proportions.²³¹

The next day, Kissinger invited Dobrynin to the meet with him again. Kissinger realized that he had gone overboard the day before and was very apologetic. Dobrynin received the apology but took the opportunity to give Kissinger some advice. Dobrynin cautioned Kissinger that "the hot temper and lack of self-control, combined with tinges of semi-hysteria, that were present yesterday in [your] description of the President's feeling had made the most negative impression." Kissinger suggested that they "forget the whole episode." Dobrynin then urged Kissinger to control his emotions "and not allow them to influence serious intergovernmental relations."²³²

A week after this unfortunate episode, Nixon and Kosygin issued a joint statement announcing their desire to reach an agreement on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. The statement declared that the United State and the Soviet Union agreed to concentrate on working out an agreement for the limitation of the deployment of anti-ballistic missile shields and that together with concluding such

²³¹ Transcript, Telephone Conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin, May 11, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Box 27, Dobrynin File. (Document 151, SAR).

²³² Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin, May 12, 1971. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 491, President's Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1971, Vol. 6 [Pt. 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only. (Document 153, SAR).

an agreement, the two sides “will agree on certain measures with respect to the limitation of offensive strategic weapons.” The language in the final phrase was far less precise than Nixon and Kissinger had hoped, but Kissinger’s recent meltdown in front of Dobrynin had weakened the American negotiating position during the days in which the final language for the statement was being decided.

Criticism of the May 20 Announcement

The reaction to the announcement was mixed. To those who were not privy to the tacit agreement regarding a freeze on land-based missiles, the statement seemed much to-do about very little. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J.W. Fulbright said that he did not completely understand its significance and would reserve judgment. Press coverage of the announcement was also somewhat limited. The President’s Special Assistant Bob Houdek worried that Nixon was not receiving enough publicity for the announcement, so he encouraged Kissinger to make phone calls to several journalists in order to stir up interest in and generate additional coverage for the statement.²³³ To the members of the American SALT delegation, however, the announcement, and the confidential freeze agreement, were a turning point, for better or for worse. Smith tried to interpret how the tacit agreement related to Soviet efforts to include American FBS in the negotiations. Smith believed that the United States “had in effect accepted that the FBS issue was blocking a treaty setting ceilings on offensive weapons and switched its aim to negotiating a moratorium or freeze approach.” Smith wondered how cognizant Kissinger was of the implications of this decision. “[T]he move from an agreed ceiling to a freeze

²³³ See the editorial note in FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, 503-504.

concept,” Smith wrote, “entailed eventual registration of the Soviet numerical advantage in missile launchers. I doubt this was fully anticipated in May 1971.”²³⁴

Smith and Garthoff’s biggest criticism of the May 20 agreement was that it left Soviet SLBMs unrestrained. Both men could not fathom why Kissinger would allow this. “I was struck by the absence of any mention of SLBMs,” Smith wrote.²³⁵ “How could Kissinger have casually agreed to omit SLBMs?” asked Garthoff.²³⁶ Smith’s theory on the omission was two-fold. He believed that Kissinger had been driven by political calculations. “I got the impression,” Smith wrote, “that Kissinger was more interested in the major political thrust that this accord would give the negotiations than its specific provisions.”²³⁷ Smith also believed that Kissinger, working alone and in secret, had been outmaneuvered by the Soviets, in part due to Kissinger’s vanity:

This back-channel negotiation, as it has been called, followed an entirely different procedure from that which governed the delegation. There were no building blocks, no analytical work, no strategic analysis in the agencies concerned. There were no Verification Panel or National Security Council discussions. There were no consultations with congressional committees or with allies. It was a one-man stand, a presidential aide against the resources of the Soviet leadership. Several times during this subnegotiation the entire Soviet Politburo considered the issues, a unique phenomenon which impressed that hard-to-impress individual, Kissinger, with the extreme importance of what he singlehandedly was doing.²³⁸

Garthoff also believed that political considerations and a lack of expert support had shaped Kissinger’s handling of the talks:

²³⁴ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 225.

²³⁵ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 223.

²³⁶ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 181.

²³⁷ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 224.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 225-226

Kissinger was apparently unaware that the United States had neither programs nor capacities to resume construction and deployment of SLBM-carrying submarine during the period of the freeze, so that leaving SLBMs unlimited was of advantage only to the Soviet Union. But he had not studied the question or consulted with other parts of the government. Instead he had concentrated on what was required in terms of politics.²³⁹

The SALT I Interim Agreement

Between May 21, 1971 and May 27, 1972 the United States and the Soviet Union focused on converting the May 20 announcement into a formal agreement. The biggest obstacle to reaching this goal was the question of submarines. After the May 20 announcement, Kissinger had been roundly criticized for allowing the Soviets to exclude SLBMs from the agreement. Kissinger's quest for the next year, therefore, was to convince the Soviets to include limits on nuclear submarines in a SALT agreement.

Soon after the May 20 agreement, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that it would be impossible for the Nixon administration to get an agreement ratified if it did not include limits on submarines and SLBMs. Kissinger proposed to Dobrynin that one way to solve the problem of submarines would be for the two sides to each have "an equal number of modern missile-carrying submarines." "In the President's view," Kissinger explained, "this would be a reasonable approach; such an understanding would not arouse either side's suspicions as to the other's motives and would establish full parity between the sides." The Soviets were completely opposed to this proposal, rejecting it outright as a violation of the principle of equal security because it did not take into consideration American geographic advantages. Thus,

²³⁹ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 181.

the two sides once again experienced the deadlock of competing principles of equality—equal security versus parity.²⁴⁰

Throughout the winter of 1971-72 negotiations went nowhere, as Nixon and Kissinger devoted their full attention to preparing for Nixon's summit in China that was scheduled for February 21-28, 1972. When Nixon returned from this trip, negotiations with the Soviets in the confidential channel resumed. By this time, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to a summit meeting in Moscow in May, and the negotiations resumed their familiar intensity.

During the month of March, Kissinger made several major concessions to the Soviets in the hopes of securing an agreement. His first compromise was to drop his previous insistence that submarine levels be equal for the two sides. On March 10 Kissinger informed Dobrynin that the United States would be willing to shift the cut off date for production of submarines to allow the Soviet Union to build more submarines and surpass the United States' total number of submarines. In addition, the United States would allow the Soviets to convert some of their antiquated submarines into modern ones. In total these two options would allow the Soviets to have as many as 55 submarines, which would be 14 more than the United States, who had only 41. Dobrynin was quite surprised by this offer and confessed that he could not understand American "eagerness to get an agreement which was so

²⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, November 18, 1971. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation. f. 0129, op. 55a, p. 426, d. 3, l. 77-86. Top Secret. From Dobrynin's Journal. (Document 225, SAR).

unequal.” Dobrynin asked what the angle was. Kissinger answered that there was no angle; just a “serious concern about submarines.”²⁴¹

On March 17 Kissinger further explained the logic behind the new American proposal. Kissinger said that he was fully aware “such inequality in the number of submarines will inevitably lead certain circles in the U.S. to criticize the government.” Despite this expected criticism, Kissinger continued, “the White House would still be prepared, for the sake of compromise, to agree to this as well, in order...to compensate the Soviet side for the well-known strategic imbalance in the deployment of nuclear submarines...because the USSR lacks forward bases for such submarines.”²⁴² Here again, Kissinger returned to the idea of compensating the Soviets for American forward-based systems despite the fact that almost every senior official in the American government opposed this idea.

Despite the generosity of the American offer, the Soviet leadership was still reluctant to place any limits on their burgeoning submarine program. With the talks stalled again, Kissinger decided to make a personal visit to the Soviet Union for secret meetings with the Soviet leadership. He arrived in Moscow on April 20 and stayed for two days of intensive negotiations. During these negotiations, the Soviets made their own proposal for dealing with the question of submarines. Under the Soviet proposal, which took into consideration the “differences in the geographies of

²⁴¹ Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, March 10, 1972. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 493, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1972, Vol. 9 [Pt. 1]. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. (Document 270, SAR).

²⁴² Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Dobrynin and Kissinger, March 17, 1972. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 0129, op. 56, p. 418, d. 5, l. 119–130. Top Secret. From Dobrynin’s Journal. (Document 273, SAR).

the two sides” and “US forward submarine bases,” the United States and their NATO allies would be allowed to have up to 50 modern submarines with a total of 800 ballistic missile launchers, including the 41 submarines with 656 ballistic missile owned by the United States. The Soviet Union would be allowed to have 62 modern submarines with a total of 950 ballistic missile launchers. Kissinger replied that the United States could not speak on behalf of their NATO allies but that he agreed in principle to the numbers proposed. “The submarine matter is acceptable,” Kissinger stated. Brezhnev then answered, “I feel it incorporates...the principle of equality, and I don’t foresee any changes.” Kissinger agreed. “I don’t see any problems.”²⁴³

In the context of all of the negotiations that had preceded this moment, Brezhnev’s statement and Kissinger’s response hold great significance. After proposing a submarine agreement in which the Soviet Union would have 21 more submarines than the United States and almost 300 more missiles—numbers that were strikingly unequal—Brezhnev said that such an arrangement would incorporate the “principle of equality.” Kissinger then assented to this conclusion. For the first two years of the talks, the American government had defined *equal* as “equal numbers.” Now Kissinger was accepting an entirely different notion of equality, the Soviet principle of equal security. This was a major American concession and a great Soviet victory.

With a few minor modifications, the Soviet proposal became the basis for the SALT I interim agreement that was signed by Nixon and Brezhnev at a summit in

²⁴³ Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Kissinger and Leonid Brezhnev, April 22, 1972. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 72, Country Files, Europe, USSR, HAK Moscow Trip—April 1972, Memcons. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. (Document 305, SAR).

Moscow on May 27, 1972. During this summit, Soviet leaders made a point of repeating on several occasions that the United States had agreed to give the Soviet Union more submarines than the United States because this was in keeping with the principle of equal security and was “compensation for the disadvantage of [the Soviet Union’s] geographic situation.”²⁴⁴ Brezhnev, Smirnov, Gromyko, and Dobrynin all stated at least once during the summit that this was the reason that the United States had agreed to give the Soviet Union extra submarines. Eventually, even Kissinger echoed this thought. “If you accept our proposal,” Kissinger told Brezhnev during one negotiating session, “you’ll have 62 submarines—that’s 50% more than we have—and 300 more missiles. That is a compensation for geographic inequality.”²⁴⁵ The Soviet leadership was elated that the United States appeared to be finally accepting their view of the strategic balance and their definition of equality.

To further enshrine the Soviet principle of equal security as the accepted definition of equality for negotiations between the two sides, the Soviet Union inserted the phrase *equal security* into the joint statement made by the two countries at the end of the summit. The statement read as follows: “The two sides intend to continue active negotiations for the limitation of strategic offensive arms and to conduct them in a spirit of goodwill, respect for each other’s legitimate

²⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon, May 23, 1972. Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation, f. 80, op. 1, d. 791, l. 1–24. Top Secret. (Document 353, SAR).

²⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Henry Kissinger, Leonid Smirnov, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, and Georgi Korniyenko, and others, May 25, 1972, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 308.

interests and observance of the principle of equal security.”²⁴⁶ With this statement, the Soviets believed that their view of equality had prevailed. This belief would have significant consequences for the future of US-Soviet relations.

Conclusion

The Soviet Union entered the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks with two goals—to gain American acceptance for the principle of equal security and to secure an agreement with the Americans that accounted in some way for American forward-based systems. Nixon and Kissinger, in contrast, did not have principles in mind when they entered the SALT talks and quickly initiated a secret negotiating channel with the Soviets. They wanted a quick political victory for the President and a widely-publicized summit in Moscow. Eventually, to a large extent, both sides got what they wanted from the talks. Nixon secured an agreement that scored him political points, and the Soviet leadership secured American acceptance of the principle of equal security and received substantial compensation for American forward-based systems. The declassified record of the SALT I negotiations shows clearly that this is how the Soviet leadership interpreted the SALT I agreement, and this record also overwhelmingly supports this Soviet interpretation.

In the months following the SALT I agreement, however, Nixon performed an about-face. He immediately criticized the deal, calling for a new agreement that restored parity between the two sides and gave both countries equal numbers of strategic offensive systems. Kissinger, for his part, completely denied that he had ever even entertained the idea of granting the Soviet Union compensation for

²⁴⁶ *Pravda*, May 31, 1971, 1-2. (CDSP).

American forward-based systems. Nixon and Kissinger's exercise in immediate historical revisionism caused profound upheaval in US-Soviet relations in the years to come.

CHAPTER THREE

**BREZHNEV AND THE
BREAKTHROUGH AT
VLADIVOSTOK,
1972-1974**

The Soviet Union viewed the SALT I interim agreement as a victory for their understanding of equality, and they hoped to make the agreement into a permanent treaty. They quickly discovered, however, that Nixon and Kissinger, had a very different view of the treaty. Nixon and Kissinger had negotiated the agreement in order to gain a political victory, but neither of them liked the agreement's terms or saw it as the basis for a permanent treaty. When an influential Senator and members of the Department of Defense also criticized the agreement, Kissinger used their criticism to convince the Soviets to give up their cherished principle of equal security and accept an agreement based on parity—equal numbers of intercontinental systems for both sides. Through hours of negotiations, Kissinger gradually educated Brezhnev regarding the limitations of American domestic politics and convinced him that the US Congress would never accept a treaty based on anything other than equal limits. At the Vladivostok summit in November of 1974 between Brezhnev and Gerald Ford, Brezhnev exercised his authority as General Secretary of the CPSU to win consensus among the Soviet leadership for a major concession—the acceptance of an agreement with the United States based on equal numbers of intercontinental systems for both sides. Brezhnev had become convinced that this was necessary in light of the strange limitations imposed on American leaders by American domestic politics.

**The Soviet Interpretation:
Official American Recognition of Equal Security**

The Soviet leadership viewed the interim agreement as a major victory and sought to make it permanent. During months of negotiations in the official SALT

channel and in the back channel with Kissinger, the Soviets had pressed for American acceptance of the principle of equal security and some form of compensation to the Soviets for American forward-based systems. Finally, Kissinger had relented. In their secret negotiations with him, Kissinger had agreed to compensate the Soviets for American forward-based systems by allowing the USSR to have 300 more intercontinental ballistic missiles and 240 more submarine-launched ballistic missiles than the United States. The Soviets viewed these American concessions as a triumph for the Soviet principle of equal security. Although the agreement gave the Soviets an unequal number of ICBMs and SLBMs, the “Basic Principles” document signed by the two sides stated that in the nuclear age, the two sides agreed to conduct their mutual relations based on the principle of equality. In addition, the joint statement made by Soviet and American officials at the signing of the SALT I agreement declared that all future negotiations would be governed by “observance of the principle of equal security.” Nixon even went on Soviet television and told the people of the USSR that the ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement “gave fair equality to both sides.”²⁴⁷ In other words, an agreement that gave the Soviet Union more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States was surrounded by official documents and statements that claimed that the agreement was based on equality and equal security for the two sides. Soviet officials rejoiced that the Nixon administration had finally seen the light—equality in strategic nuclear weapons did not require the two sides to have equal numbers; in fact, equal security, as enshrined in the agreement and its accompanying pronouncements,

²⁴⁷ *Congressional Record*, September 14, 1972, 30633.

meant allowing the Soviet Union to have more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States in order to compensate the Soviet Union for American forward-based systems. This was clearly the Soviet interpretation of the agreement.

In the initial months following the agreement, the Soviet press and a large number of Soviet officials repeatedly stated this conclusion—that the agreement marked an official endorsement by the United States of the principle of equal security. On May 26, L. M. Zamyatin, Head of the Department of International Information of the Central Committee of the CPSU, held a press conference for Soviet and foreign journalists in which he asserted, “The agreements signed today are based on recognition of the principle of the equal security of both sides, and they provide no unilateral military advantages.”²⁴⁸ An editorial in *Pravda* two days after the agreement was signed stated: “The treaty and the agreement do not give unilateral military advantages to either side: They are based on the recognition of equal security of the sides.”²⁴⁹ On June 11 *Pravda’s* Washington correspondent concluded that rational observers would view the agreement “solely from the standpoint of guaranteeing equal security for both sides,” and on June 22 another article in *Pravda* asserted that “sober-minded public figures in the USA” all agreed “that relations with the Soviet Union can be built only on the basis of observance of the principle of equal security and the ruling out of unilateral military advantage.” “This realistic viewpoint,” the article continued, “has been officially recognized by

²⁴⁸*Pravda*, May 27, 1974, 4. (CDSP).

²⁴⁹ *Pravda*, May 29, 1972, 1. (CDSP).

the American leaders as well. This has been confirmed by H. Kissinger, Assistant to the US President for National Security Affairs.”²⁵⁰

When the interim agreement came before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Supreme Soviet for review, the prevailing logic for supporting it, as voiced by numerous Soviet officials, was that the agreement was based on the principle of equal security and served as official recognition by the American government of this principle. Vasili Kuznetsov, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, argued that the agreements were “based on the principle of ensuring equal security of both sides, taking into account the special features of each side and the inadmissibility of unilateral military advantages.” Kuznetsov also asserted, “The U.S. President’s signing of the document on strategic arms limitation should be regarded as official recognition of the indisputable fact that relations with the Soviet Union can be built only on the basis of complete equality.” Mikhail Suslov, Second Secretary of the CPSU and the Party’s chief ideologue, stated that the “main feature” of the Interim Agreement on Strategic Arms “is that they are based on the principles of equal security of both sides and provide no unilateral advantages in the field of strategic missile arms to either side.”²⁵¹

Satisfied that they had reached an agreement that compensated them for American forward-based systems and, thereby, met the requirements of the Soviet principle of equal security, the Soviet leadership’s goal was to make the Interim Agreement into a permanent treaty. Brezhnev expressed this desire during the final

²⁵⁰ *Pravda*, June 11, 1972, 4. (CDSP). *Pravda*, June 22, 1972, 4. (CDSP).

²⁵¹ “In the Interests of Strengthening Peace—Joint Session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet,” *Izvestia*, August 24, 1972, 1-2. (CDSP).

negotiating sessions with Nixon that led to the Interim Agreement. During a meeting in Brezhnev's office in the Kremlin on May 23, Nixon summarized for Brezhnev the terms of the emerging agreement on submarines: "We have 950 SLBMs and 62 boats for [the Soviet Union] and 44 boats and 710 SLBMs for [the United States]." Thrilled with these favorable numbers, Brezhnev asked Nixon, "What do you think about the idea of converting the submarine agreement into a permanent one, I mean the figures?" When Nixon seemed reluctant to do this, Brezhnev interjected a few minutes later: "If I might throw in another idea. Make the agreement last 10, not five years."²⁵² Although the two sides ultimately agreed to make the agreement last for five years, once the SALT II negotiations got underway, Semenov, the chief Soviet SALT negotiator, informed the US delegation that the goal for the SALT II negotiations should be "to embody in appropriate provisions of a permanent agreement the principle of equal security."²⁵³ In other words, the Soviet leadership was satisfied with the logic that undergirded the Interim Agreement and wanted to fix in perpetuity the accord's ceilings on ICBMs and SLBMs that favored the Soviet Union.

The American Response to the Interim Agreement

On June 13, 1972 President Nixon transmitted the Interim Agreement to the US Senate and House of Representatives, requesting "an expression of support from

²⁵² Memorandum of Conversation (US), Meeting between Richard Nixon, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, May 23, 1972. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 487, President's Trip Files, President's Conversations in Salzburg, Moscow, Tehran and Warsaw, May 1972, Pt. 1. Top Secret; Sensitive; Exclusively Eyes Only. (Document 352, SAR).

²⁵³ Memorandum, US Delegation SALT Two to US Secretary of State, "Semenov Statement, March 15, 1974 (SALT Two-413)," National Archive and Records Administration.

both Houses of Congress.” Nixon described the agreement as a “significant step into a new era of mutually agreed restraint and arms limitation between the two principle nuclear powers” and claimed that it would “provide a more stable strategic balance in the next several years than would be possible if strategic arms competition continued unchecked.”²⁵⁴ Large majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate supported the Interim Agreement, and, after just a few days of debate, the House of Representatives voted in favor of a resolution that authorized the President to approve the agreement. The agreement also seemed headed for speedy approval in the Senate when the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations voted unanimously to support it without amendment. But hearings in another Senate committee did not go as smoothly.

Several members of the Senate Committee on Armed Services had concerns about the agreement. They were uneasy about the sizeable numerical advantages that the agreement gave to the Soviets in ICBMs and SLBMs, and they pressed Nixon administration officials to explain these disparities. Sam Ervin, Democratic Senator from North Carolina, peppered Melvin Laird, Nixon’s Secretary of Defense, with questions about the agreement’s unequal numbers. “Under this agreement,” Ervin questioned, “Russia could have 62 modern ballistic missiles as against the United States 44? ...And Russia could have 950 ballistic missile launchers on submarines as against the United States 710?” Secretary Laird confirmed that these numbers were

²⁵⁴ “Military Implications of the Treaty on the Limitations of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms,” Hearing Before the Committee on Arms Services, United States Senate,” Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972, v. Since the Interim Agreement was not a formal treaty, it did not require Senate ratification. Instead, it required a simple majority vote of approval by both Houses of Congress.

correct. Senator Ervin then continued, "In every category [where] there is a limitation...Russia gets the long end of the stick and the United States get the short end of the stick." Secretary Laird replied, "That is correct, Senator." Ervin, unhappy with this answer, responded, "We once had a superiority. And then when your predecessor, as I recall, Secretary McNamara, came along, we had an equality. And now we will accept under the ratification of these agreements an inferiority on the part of the United States."²⁵⁵ Ervin and his colleagues in the Senate Armed Services committee wanted an explanation as to why the Interim Agreement would give the Soviet Union such large numerical advantages.

Explanations for Unequal Number

When Nixon administration officials sought to justify why the agreement gave the Soviet Union more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States, they did not attempt to explain the Soviet concept of equal security; neither did they confess that Kissinger had explicitly agreed to compensate the Soviets for American geographic advantages. Instead, they presented two arguments. First, they argued that the agreement stopped the momentum of the aggressive Soviet build-up in land and sea-based strategic nuclear missiles. They pointed out that the Soviets were already numerically ahead of the United States in ICBMs and SLBMs and claimed that the agreement prevented them from getting more ahead. On May 26, immediately after the agreement was signed, Alexander Haig, Nixon's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs told John McCloy, Chairman of the General Advisory Committee for

²⁵⁵ "Military Implications of the Treaty on the Limitations of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms," Hearing Before the Committee on Arms Services, United States Senate, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972, 47-48.

Arms Control, “In essence, what we feel we have done is really broken the momentum of [the Soviet Union’s] on-going programs.”²⁵⁶ The same day Kissinger also made this argument. During a press conference in Moscow on May 26, he argued, “In assessing the significance of the freeze it is not useful to analyze whether the freeze reflects a gap between the forces that are being frozen....[T]he question to ask in assessing the freeze is not what situation it perpetuates, but what situation it prevents. The question is where we would be without the freeze.”²⁵⁷ During a Congressional hearing a couple weeks later, Kissinger explained further:

[A]s a result of decisions made in the 1960s...there would be a numerical gap against us in two categories of land- and sea-based missile systems whether or not there was an agreement. Without an agreement, the gap would steadily widen. The agreement would not create the gap. It would prevent its enlargement to our disadvantage.²⁵⁸

Second, Nixon administration officials justified signing an agreement with ceilings on ICBMs and SLBMs that favored the Soviet Union by arguing that these Soviet advantages were balanced out by American superiority in other areas of the strategic nuclear arms race. They pointed to the fact that the United States had more heavy bombers than the Soviet Union.²⁵⁹ They also argued that the United States enjoyed significant technological advantages in the arms race, highlighting

²⁵⁶ Transcript, Telephone conversation between the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) and the Chairman of the General Advisory Committee for Arms Control and Disarmament (McCloy), May 26, 1972. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 319.

²⁵⁷ The White House, “Press Conference with Henry Kissinger and Gerard Smith, Spaso House, Moscow,” May 26, 1972.

²⁵⁸ The White House, “Congressional Briefing by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs—The State Dining Room,” June 15, 1972.

²⁵⁹ “Statement of Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense,” *Senate Hearings on the Military Implications of the Treaty on the Limitations of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, June 6, 1972, 9. The United States had a 457 to 147 advantage in heavy bombers.

American supremacy in the accuracy of its missiles and in its use of multiple independent re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) on US strategic missiles. Finally, to the surprise of the members of the official American SALT delegation, Kissinger and his aides also argued that the Soviet numerical advantages in ICBMs and SLBMs were counter-balanced by American forward-based systems. On June 15, during a briefing in the State Dining Room of the White House, Kissinger told members of Congress, “Early in the discussions...between the President and the Soviet leaders, it was decided to exclude from the freeze bombers and so-called forward-based systems. To exclude, that is, the weapons in which this country holds an advantage.... We urge the Congress to keep this fact in mind, when assessing the numerical ratios of weapons which are subject to the offensive freeze.” Haig also made similar arguments during his phone calls to key Washington officials. During his conversation with McCloy, Haig attempted to remove the “psychological problem” created by the presence of unequal ceilings in the agreement by assuring McCloy, “On balance...we are very comfortable with that because of...our four base [forward-based] systems, our aircraft, and the MIRV numerical [advantage].”²⁶⁰

Doubts within the Nixon Administration

Although most Administration officials defended the Interim Agreement in public, many of them admitted privately that their own arguments in favor of the agreement were full of holes. Perhaps the strongest argument in support of the agreement was that it stopped the momentum of the Soviet strategic build-up—

²⁶⁰ Telephone Conversation Between the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) and the Chairman of the General Advisory Committee for Arms Control and Disarmament (McCloy), May 26, 1972. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 319.

Kissinger repeatedly argued that the agreement prevented the Soviets from building all of their planned strategic missiles. But Raymond Garthoff, the State Department representative on the SALT negotiating team, rejected this claim. In his lengthy tome on the SALT negotiations, *Détente and Confrontation*, Garthoff argues that Kissinger backed himself into a corner when he told Dobrynin in 1971 that it would be fine to leave SLBMs out of an agreement. Later, when he reversed position and tried to convince the Soviets to include them, the Soviets would not budge. Realizing that he could never get Congressional approval for an agreement that failed to include SLBMs, Kissinger “decided to make the Soviet leaders an offer they could not refuse—to accept a nominal constraint by formally including SLBM launchers, but at such a high level that in practice the Soviet Union would not actually have to constrain its SLBM buildup.” Garthoff states that US national intelligence estimates at the time included eight possible projections for how many SLBMs the Soviets might build if there were no SALT agreement. Seven of these projections put the number at fewer than 950. Kissinger, however, picked the largest number—the Pentagon’s “worse-case scenario estimate”—and proposed this number to the Soviets as the ceiling for their SLBMs during the dates covered by the temporary agreement. As a result, Garthoff writes, “the Soviets accepted his proposition that a formal SALT limitation be provided on SLBMs, though at a level not requiring the Soviets to curtail their modernization plans.” According to Garthoff, when Kissinger returned from negotiating this agreement in Moscow, he then instructed two of his staff members to prepare a study that would make the 950 SLBM limit look better by bracketing this number with estimates presenting much higher possible Soviet

build ups in the absence of SALT. "The actual intelligence estimate," Garthoff writes, "was therefore superseded...by a specifically prepared NSC paper that estimated not what the Soviets *would* do, but what they *could* do if they made a maximum effort."²⁶¹ Two pieces of evidence confirm Garthoff's arguments: 1) a CIA National Intelligence Estimate published at the end of 1971 estimated that that the Soviet Union would have only 646 SLBMs by the middle of 1976, and 2) we know in hindsight that the Soviet Union did not, in fact, reach the level of 950 SLBMs until after the expiration of the five-year Interim Agreement.²⁶² Thus, the strongest Administration argument in favor of the agreement appears to have been seriously overstated.

Nixon officials also privately doubted whether American advantages in heavy bombers, missile accuracy, and MIRV technology would last very long. Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense, argued that American heavy bombers were becoming antiquated and, therefore, did not justify giving the Soviets higher ceilings in land- and sea-based missiles. Laird pointed out that the youngest American B-52 would be 20 years old by the end of the five-year agreement.²⁶³ Laird also believed that American technological advantages were exaggerated. During a meeting of Nixon's National Security Council several months before the Interim Agreement was finalized, Nixon asked Laird how far ahead the United States was in the accuracy of its missiles. Laird replied, "We're not sure how far ahead we are. We can't make a

²⁶¹ Garthoff, *Defense and Confrontation*, 183-187.

²⁶² CIA National Intelligence Estimate, "Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack," October 21, 1971.

²⁶³ "Statement of Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense," *Senate Hearings on the Military Implications of the Treaty on the Limitations of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, June 6, 1972, 46.

claim that we are far ahead. They can acquire accuracy. They have the technology to do it.”²⁶⁴ David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense, agreed. “There is no need to debate whether their accuracy can be improved; they can do it,” Packard added. During the same meeting, various officials informed Nixon that the Soviets would likely develop MIRV technology in the near future. CIA Director Richard Helms told Nixon that satellite images of Soviet missile fields already showed canisters sitting near Soviet missile silos with clusters of three warheads instead of one, and Laird warned him, “[I]t is clear that they can get MIRV if they want.” John McCloy, Chairman of the General Advisory Committee for Arms Control and Disarmament, shared this view. Right after the agreement was signed, he informed Haig, “And the argument...so far that troubles me a little bit is that, well, we have so many more warheads than they have and we have this wonderful MIRV business. In my judgment the Soviets are going to get MIRVS without any question—they have the full capacity to do it and...it isn’t going to be very long.”²⁶⁵

Behind the scenes many Nixon officials were also surprised by and opposed to Kissinger’s arguments that American FBS should be considered part of the strategic equation between the United States and the Soviet Union. No one knew that Kissinger had explicitly told the Soviets that the higher Soviet ICBM and SLBM ceilings were compensation for American geographic advantages, so they were taken aback when Kissinger suddenly described American FBS as an American

²⁶⁴ “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” March 8, 1971. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 137.

²⁶⁵ Telephone Conversation Between the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) and the Chairman of the General Advisory Committee for Arms Control and Disarmament (McCloy), May 26, 1972. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 319.

strategic advantage. Gerard Smith, head of the American SALT delegation was most surprised. His memoirs reflect his continued puzzlement years after the agreement:

Under White House guidance the delegation argued that the United States did not derive any net strategic advantage from these systems. We maintained that they were balanced off by Soviet intermediate-range missiles targeted on Western Europe and their large number of [short-range] bombers. Then, in justifying the freeze, this argument was rather surprisingly reversed by the White House, when it pointed to forward-based systems as compensating for the Soviet advantage in launcher numbers under the freeze. A cynical turn of mind would suggest that the Soviets did get compensation for our forward-based systems in the form of a substantial, though hopefully short-term, numerical advantage.”²⁶⁶

While Smith tried to understand Kissinger’s convoluted logic, Defense Department officials flat out rejected the notion that American FBS should be equated with Soviet ICBMs and SLBMs. Before the Interim Agreement was signed, both the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense repeatedly argued that American FBS were counterbalanced by Soviet intermediate-range missiles (IRBMs) and should be kept out the SALT talks entirely. In fact, Nixon seemed to share this belief. During a NSC meeting in 1971, Deputy Defense Secretary Packard argued that American FBS were parallel to Soviet IRBMs and should be kept in that context. Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed, arguing that although the Soviets had raised the issue in the talks, the US should not make any concessions related to FBS. Nixon then continued this thought, concluding, “They may raise it, but then we should suggest that their IRBM’s be discussed.”²⁶⁷ Thus, Kissinger’s secret offer to compensate the Soviets for American FBS and his public

²⁶⁶ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 457.

²⁶⁷ “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting,” March 8, 1971. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 137.

arguments that forward-based systems gave the United States a strategic advantage both contradicted Nixon's private view of American FBS.

Almost no one in the Pentagon believed that the Interim Agreement established parity between the two sides. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told Nixon several months before the agreement that they would not support a freeze that resulted in unequal numbers in intercontinental systems.²⁶⁸ Once the agreement was reached, Defense Secretary Laird testified before Congress that his support of the agreement was conditional on Congressional approval of huge increases in the defense budget to pay for new American submarines (Trident) and bombers (B-1). These new strategic systems, Laird argued, would allow the United States to return to parity with the Soviets in the future.

The Jackson Amendment

Inconsistencies in the arguments made by Nixon Administration officials deeply troubled one member of Congress—Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, a “tenacious, well-informed, defense-minded Democrat who played a central role in arms control debates in the 1960s and 1970s.”²⁶⁹ When the Senate prepared to vote on August 3 on a joint resolution that would give the President approval for the Interim Agreement, Jackson introduced an amendment to this resolution. Jackson rejected the notion that American forward-based systems and technological superiority provided an adequate balance to Soviet numerical advantages in land and sea-based strategic missiles. He argued that the unequal ceilings for ICBMs and

²⁶⁸ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 346.

²⁶⁹ Michael Krepon, “The Jackson Amendment,” August 9, 2009, Arms Control Wonk Website <http://krepon.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/2414/the-jackson-amendment> [accessed 07/23/13].

SLBMs in the Interim Agreement gave the Soviet Union a major advantage in the nuclear arms race and set a bad precedent for future negotiations. But Jackson realized that the Senate resolution to approve the agreement would pass by a large margin, so his strategy was to push for an amendment to this resolution that would establish clear guidelines for American negotiators in the next round of SALT and prevent the United States from ever accepting unequal numbers in intercontinental strategic systems again. Jackson's amendment stated, "[T]he Congress...urges and requests the President to seek a future treaty that, *inter alia*, would not limit the United States to levels of intercontinental strategic forces inferior to the limits provided for the Soviet Union."²⁷⁰

Senator Jackson's amendment plunged the Senate into a protracted debate over the definition of equality in the strategic nuclear arms race, a debate that, ironically, closely mirrored the debates between Gerard Smith and Vladimir Semenov that had paralyzed the early stages of the official SALT negotiations in Vienna and Helsinki. Jackson criticized the Interim Agreement for failing to maintain parity between the United States and the Soviet Union. "The agreement," Jackson protested, "gives the Soviets more of everything: more light ICBM's, more heavy ICBM's, more submarine launched missiles, more submarines, more payload...In no area covered by the agreement is the United States permitted to maintain parity with the Soviet Union." Jackson contrasted the Interim Agreement with the ABM Treaty, which he claimed established a "principle of equal limits." "The Soviet Union must understand," Jackson asserted, "that the numerical advantages conceded to

²⁷⁰ *Congressional Record—Senate*, September 14, 1972, 30623.

them in the interim agreement are not permissible except as a transitory stage to equal balances.” Jackson further argued that any advantages afforded the United States by technological superiority were fleeting. “We are moving into a period of rapidly changing technology in which the advantage we presently enjoy by virtue of our greater technical sophistication will be narrowed as the Soviets move to close this gap,” he said. In fact, Jackson believed that the Soviets were so “close to developing a MIRV capability” that they might achieve it “at any moment.” “It is, therefore,” Jackson concluded, “with a view to the future when the Soviets are able to exploit their vastly superior payload capability by dividing it into many more efficient MIRV warheads that we must concern ourselves with a restoration of parity.”²⁷¹

The staunchest opponent of the Jackson amendment was J. William Fulbright, the esteemed Democratic Senator from Arkansas and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee since 1959. Jackson had asserted that the United States needed to concern itself with “a restoration of parity, but Fulbright argued that a “reasonable parity” already existed—a parity made possible by American forward bases. “What [Jackson] has not taken into consideration,” Fulbright said,

²⁷¹ *Congressional Record*, August 3, 1972, 26693. Gordon Allott, a Republican Senator from Colorado and supporter of the Jackson amendment, shared Jackson’s assessment. “Our original estimates,” Allott argued, “were that the Soviet Union would be ready 3 years ago [to deploy MIRVs]. Thus the Soviet Union is already late. How much later they will be, we do not know...The Soviet Union repeatedly has demonstrated the discomfiting capacity for developing these things sooner than we had expected.” “Clearly.” Allott continued, “it would be folly to take comfort from the assumption that our monopoly of MIRV’s will be long-lived...And remember this: when our monopoly ends, we will not be left with anything remotely approximating parity. The Soviet Union will have more and bigger missiles to MIRV. Then the picture will be complete: the Soviet Union will enjoy superiority in every category of strategic weapons covered by these agreements.” *Ibid.*, 26686.

“are our forward bases for our nuclear submarines, of which we have three and the Russians have none, [and]...forward bases for our airplanes, which give the capability of delivery by airplanes from Europe to Soviet country—to the heartland of Russia itself.”²⁷² Jackson, however, rejected the counting of American forward bases in the strategic equation, arguing that the Soviets had 600 intermediate- and medium-range missiles that could destroy every American forward base. He also pointed out that American FBS were “dedicated to the defense of our European allies and friends in the Middle East” and should not be “limited in a bilateral treaty in which our allies are not full participants.”²⁷³

After a month of debate over the Jackson amendment, Fulbright introduced his own amendment, which he hoped the Senate would pass in lieu of the Jackson amendment. The Fulbright amendment read as follows:

The Congress supports continued negotiation to achieve further limitations on offensive nuclear weapons systems with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the basis of overall equality, parity, and sufficiency, taking into account all relevant qualitative factors pertaining to the strategic nuclear weapons systems of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America.²⁷⁴

While the Jackson amendment called for equal levels of intercontinental strategic forces, the Fulbright amendment called for “overall equality.” Fulbright was probably not aware of the fact, but his formulation of “overall equality” was strikingly similar to the Soviet principle of “equal security.” Jackson was quick to point out that the term *overall equality* implied “the inclusion of our aircraft carriers

²⁷² Ibid., 26694.

²⁷³ Ibid., 26694. *Congressional Record*, September 14, 1972, 30623.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 30623.

and European air forces” in the strategic nuclear equation. He absolutely rejected this inclusion and lambasted the Fulbright amendment. He argued that calling for “overall equality, parity, and sufficiency” was the opposite of his amendment, and he criticized these terms as “vague and ill-defined.”²⁷⁵

Eventually, it became clear to many in the Senate that the real issue at stake was how the United States would define equality. This, we may recall, also had been the central question in the official SALT negotiations between the USA and USSR. Senator Edmund Muskie observed, “The debate is over whether we embrace the ‘principle of overall equality’ rather than numerical equality in intercontinental systems alone,” and Senator Alan Cranston concluded, “[W]e all agree that the United States must have equality with the Soviet Union in nuclear strength and in military strength generally. We disagree only on how equality should be measured, calculated, counted.”²⁷⁶

On September 14 the President of the Senate called for a vote on both the Fulbright and Jackson amendments. When the votes had been counted, the Senate had rejected the Fulbright amendment 48-38 and approved the Jackson amendment 56-35.²⁷⁷ A few hours after passing the Jackson amendment, the Senate voted 88-2 to approve the Interim Agreement. Eleven days later, the House of Representatives followed suit, voting 308-4 to add the Jackson amendment to their previous resolution in favor of the Interim Agreement. Thus, Congress simultaneously

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 30624.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 30626.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 30665.

supported the Interim Agreement and an amendment that rejected the agreement's underlying logic.

The Administration's Strategy for Using the Jackson Amendment

According to Gerard Smith, Jackson's initiative won Congressional approval "only because the White House let it be known that it favored the amendment."²⁷⁸ Before Jackson had even announced his proposal, Nixon quietly let it leak that he would support it.²⁷⁹ For many who supported the Interim Agreement, the President's support of the Jackson amendment was a perplexing, inexplicable event. Gerard Smith wondered why the Administration was "vomiting on its own much-vaunted SALT freeze agreement,"²⁸⁰ Senator Fulbright announced that the White House's support raised "very serious questions...as to the sincerity of the administration," and Senator Cranston admitted that he was "baffled" by the news, "which indicated a totally different approach by the administration."²⁸¹

Why did Nixon promote the Interim Agreement while simultaneously "vomiting" on it by supporting Jackson's amendment? As discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, Nixon desperately wanted the political benefit that would come from passing an arms control agreement with the Soviets, but he profoundly disliked the actual agreement that he had achieved. During several phone conversations, Nixon told Kissinger that "this kind of agreement isn't worth a damn," and Kissinger agreed with him. The two men decided that they would negotiate a temporary freeze with the Soviets "for political reasons" so that they

²⁷⁸ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 442.

²⁷⁹ *Congressional Record*, August 3, 1972, 26680. *New York Times*, August 3, 1972.

²⁸⁰ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 442.

²⁸¹ *Congressional Record*, August 3, 1972, 26680.

would “survive in the [upcoming] election.” Kissinger told the President that the agreement would not “mean a damn thing” but that he hoped it would “break the back of this generation of Democratic leaders.”²⁸² Nixon went so far as to describe the agreement as “a bunch of shit.” “It’s not worth a damn,” Nixon said. “But the point is that in terms of our public relations, we can use something like this at this time.”²⁸³ With such disregard for the agreement, it was not difficult for Nixon to support an amendment that contradicted the agreement’s central tenets.

Although Kissinger had told Soviet officials that they would be granted more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States as compensation for American geographic advantages and Nixon had been willing to endorse the principle of equal security in several official statements accompanying the agreement, in reality neither man ever embraced the Soviet view of equality. Nixon and Kissinger wanted an agreement for its political value, and they were willing to say almost anything to the Soviets to obtain it. Then, once they achieved an agreement with the Soviets, they were willing to say almost anything to the American Congress to get it approved. But once that agreement’s approval was assured, Nixon and Kissinger quickly moved to position themselves for the next round of negotiations.

Nixon and Kissinger supported the Jackson amendment not only because they did not like what they had achieved in the past; they supported it because it would make it easier for them to do what they already intended to do in the future—reject the Soviet principle of equal security and push for a return to parity

²⁸² Transcript, Telephone conversation between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Bob Haldeman. April 17, 1971. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 148.

²⁸³ Transcript, Telephone conversation between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Bob Haldeman. April 23, 1971. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 150.

between the two superpowers in strategic nuclear weapons. After negotiating the Interim Agreement, before Jackson ever introduced his amendment, Kissinger had secretly advised Nixon: “We have conceded in both ICBM and SLBM unequal numbers in the Soviet favor.... Now, with some underlying stability created, we should deal with the disparity in numbers.”²⁸⁴

Dealing with “the disparity in numbers” involved two strategies—engaging in a new round of American strategic weapons building and negotiating a treaty that set equal limits on American and Soviet systems. Thus, Nixon and Kissinger not only supported Jackson’s amendment regarding equal ceilings on strategic systems, they also supported Defense Secretary Laird’s request for a substantial increase in defense spending. The fact that both of these initiatives were introduced by people other than Nixon and Kissinger played perfectly into their plans.

When the SALT negotiations resumed at the end of 1972, Kissinger repeatedly used the Jackson amendment and the Defense Department’s desire for increased defense spending to his advantage in the negotiations. Although Kissinger supported both of these positions, he distanced himself from them and used them to play a version of “good cop, bad cop” with the Soviets. In the role of the “good cop,” Kissinger presented himself as an eminently rational and reasonable diplomat. He was judicious and balanced; he understood Soviet positions. He was the American official who supported détente the most and who was the most willing to make difficult concessions in order to reach a fair arms accord. But his ability to do so was

²⁸⁴ Briefing Paper, “SALT Background,” [undated], FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 278. The paper was part of a briefing book for the summit prepared by the NSC staff for the President.

blocked by the “bad cop,” a role filled collectively by Senator Jackson and the Department of Defense. While expressing sympathy for Soviet positions, Kissinger repeatedly told Soviet negotiators that the Jackson amendment tied his hands; it would be pointless, he informed them, to negotiate a treaty that the Senate would later reject. Even if he did not like it, the only pathway to Senate ratification would be to heed the Jackson amendment. In addition, Kissinger frequently lamented in the presence of Soviet leaders that his desire to include certain American systems in the negotiations or to stop production of other US strategic programs was thwarted by the machinations of Defense Department officials.

Kissinger’s memoirs allude to this strategy. When describing the “conservative revolt” led by Senators Jackson and Goldwater in reaction to the Interim Agreement, Kissinger writes that “it could do no damage for the Soviet leaders to realize that our domestic opposition set limits to our flexibility.”²⁸⁵ Later, Kissinger revealed his strategy more clearly when he counseled President Ford on how to negotiate with Soviet leaders on nuclear arms. He advised the President to use Jackson against the Soviets in the negotiations. “Jackson is actually helpful with the Soviet Union. Keep him out in front; he is a good negotiating weapon,” Kissinger counseled.²⁸⁶

Laying the Groundwork for Using Domestic Opposition Against the Soviets

During three meetings between Kissinger and Soviet officials in the immediate aftermath of Jackson’s introduction of his amendment, Kissinger laid the

²⁸⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1233.

²⁸⁶ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume 16, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976 (hereafter, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76) document 11.

foundation for his later use of Senator Jackson and the Secretary of Defense's positions against the Soviets. On August 4, 1972, the day after Jackson introduced his amendment in the Senate, Dobrynin met with Kissinger and launched what Kissinger described as "a rather strong attack on the Jackson Resolution." Although Nixon had not openly supported the Jackson proposal, Dobrynin was not fooled. He accused the Nixon administration of being behind the amendment from the beginning, taking as evidence the fact that Senator Scott, a Republican with close ties to the Administration, was a co-sponsor.²⁸⁷ Dobrynin warned that the US "would pay a price totally out of proportion to any possible gain" for following the course proposed by Jackson.²⁸⁸ In response to Dobrynin's outburst, Kissinger played the diplomat. He claimed that the Administration had no prior knowledge of the Jackson resolution and asserted that the Administration was completely neutral. He also promised Dobrynin that he would look into the matter to see "what could be done at this late stage." Appreciative of Kissinger's offer, Dobrynin replied, "it would make a great deal of difference if some progress could be made." This was the first of several meetings in which Kissinger lied about the Administration's real view of the Jackson amendment while simultaneously portraying himself as the sympathetic statesman.

On September 13 the Jackson amendment was again the topic of conversation when Kissinger met with General Secretary Brezhnev in Moscow. In a moment of unusual candor, Brezhnev asked to make a couple comments "not for the

²⁸⁷ It is likely that Dobrynin also read a *New York Times* article published that morning.

²⁸⁸ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 15: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (hereafter, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74), document 23.

record.” “I was very sensitive,” Brezhnev confessed, “to the facts that relate to the Jackson Amendment regarding the Moscow treaty. It appears that his actions were concerted in advance. I am speaking in a personal way.” Brezhnev also expressed unhappiness with the increased funds allocated for defense spending in the new American budget. “Then there is another fact that deeply affected me,” Brezhnev continued, “You appropriated large sums of money for new strategic arms at an accelerated pace.” “We have a freeze and an agreement to make the interim agreement a permanent one,” Brezhnev reminded Kissinger. In reply, Kissinger assured Brezhnev that the Amendment would not pass the House if it made it through the Senate. If it did pass the Senate, Kissinger promised that arrangements had been made “for the conference report to drop it.” To explain the increases in American defense spending, Kissinger blamed Defense Secretary Laird. “Regarding the expenditures, we leave it to your Ambassador to explain to you the personality of our Secretary of Defense,” Kissinger answered. Kissinger added that Laird was justifying his calls for more spending by pointing to the SALT Interim Agreement. The President was not behind any budget increases, Kissinger assured Brezhnev. Decisions related to defense spending increases in the United States, “were a boring domestic issue [and] did not require a presidential decision.”²⁸⁹

On October 2 Kissinger met with Ambassador Dobrynin and Foreign Minister Gromyko in Washington. The Soviets again expressed their unhappiness with the Jackson amendment. Kissinger informed Dobrynin and Gromyko that the White

²⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, September 13, 1972, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 44.

House Press Secretary, Ron Zeigler, had issued a statement that distanced the President from the Jackson Amendment and made it clear that the amendment in no way obligated the President to adopt a particular course of action. And then Kissinger added, almost as an afterthought, “The Jackson Amendment is advisory, but of course we will take it seriously.” With this statement—“of course we will take it seriously”—Kissinger put the Soviets on notice that although the Administration might not wish to do so, it would have to take the Jackson Amendment seriously. Of course, we know that this is exactly what the Administration wanted to do from the beginning.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, and Henry Kissinger, October 2, 1972, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 55. Kissinger took a very similar approach with Congressmen who were unhappy that the Administration had supported the Jackson Amendment. Shortly after the Senate voted in favor of the amendment, Kissinger met with Senator Fulbright and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “You realize you put us all on the spot, hedging on the SALT deal,” Senator Symington told Kissinger. “First you sign the agreement....But Jackson then said it stinks and the Administration then supports Jackson. Now I think the SALT agreement is out the window unless the Russians are totally stupid.” Symington and his colleagues wanted to know the Administration’s plans for the next round of SALT negotiations. They wondered which agreement reflected the Administrations true thinking—the one signed in Moscow or the one modified in Washington by Jackson? Kissinger apologized for any misunderstandings and informed the group of Senators that he had commissioned a new interdepartmental group to study “the problem of how to define equality.” He hoped that this would produce “a unified view within the government.” He assured the group that he understood Soviet concerns about weapons that were able to reach Soviet soil and declared that “it would be wrong to try to be cute in the negotiations” by ignoring these systems in the negotiations. “The [Jackson] amendment,” Kissinger concluded, “is an advisory opinion only.” The real agreement, he assured them, was the one signed in Moscow, not the one changed in Washington. In fact, he seemed to tell the group everything that they wanted to hear. And then he added, almost as an afterthought, “—although we take any expression of Congressional concern very seriously.” In other words, Kissinger seemed to tell them: “I actually agree with you in almost every way. I am a judicious, rational diplomat, but the Senate voted to approve the Jackson amendment, and we have to take this expression of Congressional concern very seriously.” FRUS 69-76, Vol. 32, SALT I, document 343.

SALT II Begins

The official SALT negotiations resumed in November of 1972, six months after Nixon and Brezhnev signed the Interim Agreement in Moscow. The Soviet position had not changed when the two delegations held the first SALT II negotiating sessions. The Soviet leadership hoped to use the Interim Agreement as a model for a permanent treaty based on the principle of equal security. American negotiators, however, notified their Soviet colleagues that the United States was determined to equalize force levels in any new agreement. This would be consistent, they informed the Soviets, with the wishes of the American people and the US Congress.

When the Soviets learned about the new American position, they immediately blamed Senator Jackson. A scathing article in *Izvestia* on December 5 attacked Jackson's amendment. "[T]he notorious Jackson amendment cannot be passed over in silence," the article stated. "It's seeming simplicity (100 missiles for you, and the same number for us)," it continued, "should not mislead one." The Jackson amendment, the article warned, "calls in question the underlying principle on which the agreement already reached is based and on which subsequent agreements can be based—the principle of the parties' equal security."²⁹¹

Throughout the first half of 1973, Kissinger repeatedly attempted to leverage the Jackson Amendment and Department of Defense positions against the Soviets. On February 5 Kissinger met with Gromyko in Washington to discuss Kissinger's upcoming trip to Moscow in March. Kissinger informed Gromyko that he was

²⁹¹ *Izvestia*, December 5, 1972, 4. (CDSP).

prepared to bring a concrete proposal to Moscow and indicated that it was time for the Soviets to get serious in the negotiations (i.e., make concessions) because Jackson and the military would never support a treaty along the lines of current Soviet positions. “You think we will have serious talks on SALT?” Kissinger asked. “There almost have to be,” he continued, because “Jackson and our military are now a united front.”²⁹²

When the second round of SALT II negotiations began in March, US negotiators tabled a proposal that called for a new accord to supersede the Interim Agreement that would establish strict numerical equality between the United States and the Soviet Union in all three areas of the strategic triad—ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers. US negotiators informed their Soviet counterparts that this proposal was in line with the wishes of the American Congress, an allusion to the Jackson amendment. When Kissinger met with Brezhnev in May, Kissinger added a freeze on MIRVs to this proposal, calling for equal aggregate ceilings of 2,350 for all strategic launchers (land, sea, and air) starting on July 1, 1973. When Brezhnev dismissed this proposal as being extremely one-sided, Kissinger explained that this was the best offer that he could make due to a split between the State Department and the Department of Defense.²⁹³

²⁹² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Andrei Gromyko and Henry Kissinger, February 5, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 160.

²⁹³ Coit D. Blacker, “The Soviets and Arms Control: The SALT II Negotiations, November 1972—March 1976,” in *The Other Side of the Table: The Soviet Approach to Arms Control*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1990), 41-87.

Paralysis Returns

Despite Kissinger's efforts to leverage US domestic opposition to extract concessions from the Soviets, throughout the first two years of the SALT II negotiations, Soviet negotiators refused to budge. When Nixon met with Brezhnev at Camp David in June of 1973, Brezhnev continued to push for a treaty based on the Soviet principle of equal security, and the two leaders failed to achieve any major breakthroughs in the SALT negotiations.²⁹⁴ A few months later Soviet negotiators tabled another proposal that called for the withdrawal of American FBS or "full compensation" in intercontinental systems—a position that had changed very little since 1969. The American delegation in Geneva, now headed by Alexis Johnson who had replaced Smith at the start of 1973, concluded that the Soviets hoped to "preserve into the indefinite future Soviet Interim Agreement advantages in numbers." "In our view," the delegation concluded, "there is simply no way we can successfully negotiate an equitable agreement from the Soviet text."²⁹⁵

The Soviet negotiating position remained unchanged when the third round of the SALT II negotiations began on February 19, 1974. On February 14, 1974, Semenov penned an article in Pravda that argued that "failure to take account of all

²⁹⁴ The incompatibility of the two sides' positions was not helped by Brezhnev's propensity for waking up late. On July 27, 1972, a few days after the Nixon-Brezhnev summit, Kissinger told a group of French officials, "When Brezhnev was in Camp David the meetings were scheduled at eleven o'clock. Brezhnev wouldn't get up until noon, the meetings would start at one o'clock, and we would talk until five o'clock. Therefore, there was no lunch. I don't know what it did for personal relations." Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between French Minister of Armed Forces Robert Galley, Henry Kissinger, et al., July 27, 1973, Nixon Presidential Library VC.

²⁹⁵ Cable, US Delegation SALT Two Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, "Further Comments on Soviet October 9 Draft (SALT-Two-310)," October 13, 1973, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Access to Archival Database: <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/> (hereafter, National Archives AAD) [accessed 12/13/13].

types of strategic offensive systems or to consider strategic situation in totality would be tantamount to seeking unilateral advantage.”²⁹⁶ On February 26 Soviet negotiators gave a lengthy repetition of the familiar arguments related to equal security, arguing that “equal security is the fundamental precept of our negotiations and we cannot violate it.”²⁹⁷ In March Oleg Grinevsky informed American negotiators that the Soviet side had “ruled out Soviet acceptance of any arithmetical equality between the central strategic systems of the two sides.” “It was not equality that the Soviets were seeking,” Grinevsky declared, “but equal security.” Equal security, he added, required “numerical imbalances.” When Earle asked Grinevsky whether the goal of equal security had been achieved in 1972, Grinevsky replied that it had.²⁹⁸

Soviet negotiators kept repeating the same positions, and American negotiators continued to reject them. Eventually, fatigue and frustration set in. US officials complained that Soviet negotiators had “advanced no new positions,”²⁹⁹ and Victor Smolin, a member of the Soviet SALT delegation, declared that “the sides had

²⁹⁶ Cable, American Embassy Moscow to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Pravda Discusses SALT,” February 14, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

²⁹⁷ Cable, US Delegation SALT II Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Semenov Statement, February 26, 1976 (SALT Two-382),” February 26, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

²⁹⁸ Cable, Cable, US Delegation SALT II Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Highlights: Post-Meeting Discussions, March 12, 1974 (SALT Two-406),” March 12, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

²⁹⁹ Cable, US Delegation SALT II Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Draft Statement for NAC Consultation February 27, 1974 SALT Two-378,” February 23, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

reached a virtual impasse in the negotiations,” observing that “neither side had anything new to say and that the statements and responses were reaching the point of rote.”³⁰⁰ General Trusov complained that Soviets negotiators actually “felt slighted” by US negotiators. In the Interim Agreement the US had accepted the principle of equal security, but now they had rejected this principle and “seemed to be dictating to the Soviets that negotiations can moved forward only if certain conditions are met.” What happened to American recognition of the principle of equal security, Soviet negotiators wondered. “Just which principle guides the US side at our negotiations?” Trusov asked. “[T]he principle of equal security...which the leaders of our countries set down as the basis for negotiations...or [the] principle of equality of systems?”³⁰¹

Kissinger’s Continued References to Domestic Opposition

While negotiations in Geneva stalled, Kissinger continued his efforts to use the Jackson amendment to extract concessions during his meetings with Soviet leaders. At the end of March, Kissinger met with Brezhnev again in Moscow. During these meetings, Brezhnev proposed extending the Interim Agreement until 1980. Before Kissinger could bring up US domestic opposition to such an agreement, Brezhnev anticipated him, conceding that he realized that this proposal “alone would not exactly satisfy certain circles in the US.” Kissinger agreed, replying, “Quite

³⁰⁰ Cable, US Delegation SALT II Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Highlights: Post-Meeting Discussions, March 5, 1974 (SALT Two-397),” March 5, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

³⁰¹ Cable, Cable, US Delegation SALT II Geneva to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Highlights: Post-Meeting Discussions, March 12, 1974 (SALT Two-406),” March 12, 1974, Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/13/13].

candidly, this would be quite impossible in present conditions in the United States. It would strengthen Jackson, quite frankly.” Prepared for this answer, Brezhnev offered to add equal limits on MIRVs (1,000 each) to a treaty that would extend the Interim Agreement. This MIRV proposal was unattractive to the US since it would allow the USSR to catch up with the US in MIRVs while retaining the numerical advantages in ICBMs and SLBMs established in the Interim Agreement. But Kissinger, ever the tactician, did not declare his own opposition to the proposal; he simply referred again to opposition from other parties in the US. “As you know, Mr. General Secretary, “ Kissinger answered, “we have come under strong attack in the United States for the existing agreement, so extending it is not an easy matter.”³⁰²

After lunch Kissinger explained in greater detail his difficulty with accepting the Soviet proposal. He began, “Let me explain our difficulties, and let me explain how it will present itself in the United States.” Then he immediately mentioned Jackson. “You will remember,” he said, “from my public testimony when Senator Jackson attacked the first agreement...” Kissinger then provided a lengthy criticism of the Soviet proposal, but then ended by indicating that he was merely describing how others in the US would react. “I don’t want to give you ideas,” Kissinger explained, “but these are the arguments that will be made. I just wanted to give you the reasoning of our people.” Brezhnev eventually conceded that they were at an impasse and that the two sides would have “look for a more acceptable solution.” “[I]n order to remove the arguments of Jackson, if he represents the American

³⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, March 25, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 165.

public opinion,” Brezhnev summarized, “...we could try to find some other common ground.” With this statement, Brezhnev seemed to be coming around to Kissinger’s desired position—that any agreement would have to meet Senator Jackson’s requirements. Gromyko, however, was not ready to accept this view. “But we never accepted the view of Jackson, that the previous agreement was unequal,” he interjected. Rather than engaging Gromyko or Brezhnev directly, Kissinger again indicated that his hands were tied. “I am just telling you the arguments we will be faced with,” Kissinger demurred. “Our military says we accepted unequal conditions in the first SALT agreement.”³⁰³

The next day Kissinger made a point of informing Brezhnev that Senator Jackson was in Europe where he was stirring up support for his proposal for equal limits in any future arms accord. Realizing that his frequent references to Jackson were beginning to have their intended effect, Kissinger added sarcastically, “I know how pleased the General Secretary is to receive reports from Senator Jackson.”³⁰⁴ The next day Brezhnev complained to Kissinger that some in the US were “mobilizing public opinion behind the idea that the United States must be stronger.” This was the exact message that Kissinger wanted Brezhnev to receive, so he did not

³⁰³ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, March 25, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 166.

³⁰⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, March 65, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 168. On March 25, Jackson gave a speech to European leaders in which he accused the Nixon administration of treating Western Europe allies as adversaries while pursuing the Soviet Union as a friend.” See *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1973, “Jackson Hits Nixon Stance on Allies.” During another visit to Europe a few months earlier, Jackson had also given a speech to NATO legislators in Bonn in which he charged European leaders to let US officials know that they opposed the inclusion of American FBS in the SALT negotiations.

dispute Brezhnev's assessment. Laughing, Kissinger answered, "There is certainly merit in what the General Secretary is saying. I am not arguing every point the General Secretary makes." Brezhnev then stood up, and, with arms gesticulating vigorously, pretended to give a speech calling for the USSR to be stronger than America. Brezhnev asked, "What if I get up and make [such a] speech?" Again laughing, Kissinger returned to his familiar response, "If you said that, Senator Jackson would give you wide publicity in America." Flummoxed, Brezhnev declared, "Senator Jackson again!"³⁰⁵

Kissinger left Moscow without an agreement, but his Jackson strategy was starting to make inroads. A few days later, *Pravda* placed the blame for the lack of progress in the talks squarely at the feet of the US military and Senator Jackson. In an article titled, "Arms Limitation and Its Opponents," *Pravda* claimed that "certain influential circles in the U.S.A. that are opposed to the easing of tension and representatives of the military-industrial complex in Congress—H. Jackson, B. Goldwater, J. Buckley and others—are trying to poison the atmosphere of the talks and to sow seeds of distrust between the two sides."³⁰⁶ Kissinger had succeeded in convincing the Soviets that his inability to compromise in the talks was the fault not of his own stubbornness or carefully crafted positions but of intransigence in the US military and Congress.

In the months that followed Senator Jackson became even more of a thorn in the side of the Soviet Union when he introduced another amendment in the Senate

³⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, March 27, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 170

³⁰⁶ *Pravda*, April 7, 1974. (CDSP).

that was targeted against the Soviet Union. The Jackson-Vanik amendment, as it was called, would deny most favored nation status to any country that denied its citizens the right to emigrate freely. Regarding the combined effect of the two Jackson amendments on Soviet leaders, Kissinger told Nixon in April, "Senator Jackson is clearly Brezhnev's bugbear these days."³⁰⁷

While Brezhnev worried about Jackson, Nixon and Kissinger worried about the escalating Watergate Crisis. Ultimately, Watergate would deprive Nixon of the opportunity to push for a treaty during his second term in office. Despite three Nixon-Brezhnev summits, including a final one from June 28-July 3 at Brezhnev's dacha, Nixon was never able to wrest any major concessions from the General Secretary in the SALT negotiations.³⁰⁸ A month after his summit with Brezhnev in Oreanda, Nixon resigned the Presidency and left office.

Nixon's forced resignation due to the Watergate scandal was a powerful affirmation of Kissinger's arguments to Soviet leaders that American politicians were limited by the realities of domestic politics and did not have a free hand to do whatever they wanted in foreign policy. Soviet leaders were in disbelief that an American president could be forced out of office. "Before Nixon's resignation, Moscow did not (or would not) understand," Dobrynin writes, "how the president of the United States could be prosecuted for what it viewed as such a 'small matter.'" "The minds of Soviet leaders," he continues, "simply could not grasp the situation,

³⁰⁷ Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, April 10, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 15, Soviet Union 72-74, document 172. Kissinger is quoting a report by Secretary Dent.

³⁰⁸ The headline to the *Washington Post's* feature story on the final Nixon-Brezhnev summit captures the corrosive effect of the Watergate Crisis: "Summit Clouded by Watergate." *Washington Post*, July 4, 1974.

because they could not grasp such a thing as the criminal prosecution of the highest authority. In any case, Moscow did not believe until the last moment that Nixon could be forced to resign.”³⁰⁹

Ford Adopts the Jackson Perspective

Gerald Ford assumed the Presidency on August 9, 1974, having served less than a year as Nixon’s appointed Vice President. During early briefing sessions with his top advisors on the SALT negotiations, Ford indicated a willingness to move outside the strict confines of the Jackson amendment. In particular, he seemed open to a treaty that established “essential equivalence” or “balanced advantages.” The new President expressed a willingness to negotiate a treaty to place limits on American FBS if equal limits were placed on Soviet intermediate-range missiles pointed at Europe. But General George Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and James Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense, sought to steer the President back to the comfortable confines of the Jackson perspective. General Brown reminded the President, “the basic thing we are after is equal aggregates.” Secretary Schlesinger warned Ford that “unequal numbers would not have much Congressional support and would violate the Jackson amendment.” “The focal point for equality,” Schlesinger advised the President, “is equal aggregates.”³¹⁰ Kissinger took these admonitions a step further; he counseled Ford to use Jackson to American advantage in the negotiations. Rather than moving away from Jackson, Ford should

³⁰⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 310.

³¹⁰Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, “SALT,” October 7, 1974, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/1552376.pdf> [accessed 05/05/14].

“keep him out in front.” “Jackson is actually helpful with the Soviets...he is a good negotiating weapon,” Kissinger advised.³¹¹

Ford was swayed by this advice, and when he issued his first guidelines to the American SALT delegation, his instructions conformed closely with Jackson’s view of equality. “The Delegation should state that any agreement must provide a high degree of equivalence in central strategic systems—ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers,” Ford directed.³¹² Thus, although Ford initially had been willing to explore alternate models of strategic equivalence, he decided to enter the negotiations with Jackson on his side.

Breakthrough at Vladivostok

On September 20 Ford and Kissinger met with Gromyko and Dobrynin. Gromyko suggested that a summit meeting between Ford and Brezhnev might be the way to resolve the outstanding differences on strategic nuclear arms control. Ford was initially cool to this proposal. He saw “no reason to travel halfway around the world just to hear a restatement of known Soviet views.”³¹³ But Gromyko persisted, hinting that the Soviets might be prepared to make new concessions. The outcome of September 20 gathering was the scheduling of two Ford-Brezhnev summits—a formal summit in 1975 and a pre-summit get-together in November of 1974 in Vladivostok. The Ford-Brezhnev “mini-summit” at Vladivostok and the

³¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, August 14, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 11.

³¹² National Security Decision Memorandum 271, “instructions for the SALT Talks Geneva, September 18, 1974,” September 24, 1974, Ford Presidential Digital Library, September 24, 1974, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0310/nsdm271.pdf> [accessed 12/12/13].

³¹³ Gerald Ford, *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 215.

Brezhnev-Kissinger meeting leading up to it would produce major breakthroughs in the SALT II negotiations.³¹⁴

To lay the groundwork for the mini-summit in November, Ford dispatched Kissinger to Moscow, where he met with Soviet leaders from October 25-27. Brezhnev opened the first meeting with a series of questions about American domestic politics. “Brezhnev first requested my private assessment of the US domestic scene, something again showing his concerns,” Kissinger reported to Ford. Kissinger took this as a sign that his strategy of continually raising the specter of US domestic opposition was working, and he provide Brezhnev with a lengthy description of the “the nature of the coalition opposing détente.”³¹⁵ Kissinger warned Brezhnev that Jackson and the military would attack any SALT agreement but promised Brezhnev that he would fight for the agreement and for détente as a whole. Brezhnev then asked, “Can we help you in any way?” Laughing, Kissinger answered, “The best way is if you and I are on the same side and Jackson is on the other.” “I agree,” Brezhnev replied.³¹⁶ During Kissinger’s next meeting with Brezhnev, he presented the latest US negotiating proposal: both sides would be allowed 2,350 total systems (ICBMs, SLBMs, and long-range bombers), and, of these 2,350 total systems, each side would be allowed 1320 MIRVed systems. Kissinger described this proposal as a great American concession—it would allow the USSR to catch up with the United States in MIRVs. Kissinger indicated that he had worked

³¹⁴ Kissinger used the term “mini-summit” to describe the meeting at Vladivostok. See, Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 319.

³¹⁵ Memorandum, Brent Scowcroft to Gerald Ford, October 25, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 69.

³¹⁶ Message, Henry Kissinger to Brent Scowcroft, October 24, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 67.

hard to overcome opposition in the US government to this latest proposal but that we was willing to do this, because he truly wanted improved relations between the USA and USSR. “That’s my desire, as I’ve expressed publicly on many occasions—to the great displeasure of many of our military people,” Kissinger said. Again, Brezhnev seemed convinced by Kissinger’s description of the American domestic scene. “They’re insatiable,” Brezhnev answered in reply to Kissinger’s depiction of the US military.

By prefacing the latest US proposal with a discussion of the Jackson-led domestic opponents of détente and then following it with a reference to his battles with the military over improved US-Soviet relations, Kissinger had taken another step toward convincing Brezhnev that Kissinger was the strongest proponent of détente in the US and that Brezhnev’s best bet for a fair treaty would be to negotiate with Kissinger.

Having laid this foundation, Kissinger shifted tactics and proceeded to attack the Soviet interpretation of the Interim Agreement, something that he had always avoided doing in front of Brezhnev in the past. During his private negotiations with the Soviets prior to the Interim Agreement, Kissinger had agreed to compensate the Soviet Union for American geographic advantages by granting the Soviets more ICBMs and SLBMs than the United States—at least this is what he had told the Soviets. But now, for the first time, Kissinger told Brezhnev to his face that he had a very different understanding of the logic behind the Interim Agreement. Kissinger’s attack on the Soviet view of the Interim Agreement was triggered by a question from Gromyko. “What about forward bases?” Gromyko asked. “Has that factor

disappeared? If you took that factor into account in the first agreement, why not now? Has it disappeared? Surely forward-bases haven't disappeared." To this line of questioning, Kissinger answered, "We gave you a numerical advantage in the provisional agreement because it was provisional." Gromyko did not believe this response. "Not only because of that," he countered. Kissinger then admitted that there was another reason, but it was not compensation for geographic advantages. The second reason for American acceptance of the Interim Agreement, Kissinger explained, was that the advantage in warheads that the US had enjoyed in 1972. Both Gromyko and Brezhnev seemed unwilling to accept that Kissinger had really viewed the Interim Agreement in this way in 1972. "I said so publicly," Kissinger declared. "You didn't say so then," Brezhnev challenged. Kissinger then countered that the Soviets must have known that this was why the US had accepted Soviet numerical superiority in the Interim Agreement. "But, we didn't know!" exclaimed Brezhnev. "We would have talked a different language [had we known]. We learned about it after signing the agreement," he declared.³¹⁷

Having disabused the Soviets of their belief that the US had ever agreed to compensate them for American FBS in the past, Kissinger sought to dismiss Soviet arguments that American geographic advantages warranted compensation in a future agreement. When Gromyko argued again that the US had to consider the "geographic factor"—the difference between the distances that American and Soviet submarines had to travel due to American forward bases—Kissinger argued that

³¹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and others, October 25, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 71.

technology had eliminated any advantages conferred by geographic differences. "Geographic range is not important after 1980," Kissinger argued. Due to the range of the missiles being developed by both sides, he explained, both countries could fire their submarines from port and reach the other country. There was no need for the Soviets to venture into the Atlantic Ocean let alone have forward bases. "By the time these numbers become effective, there will be no significant geographic advantages," Kissinger concluded.

Reeling from Kissinger's sudden shift from empathetic ally to ruthless negotiator, the Soviets raised one more obstacle. "The problem is still third countries," Ambassador Dobrynin interjected. The Soviets believed that British and French nuclear weapons should be counted as part of American totals, since these two countries were allies with the United States. Kissinger's response to this argument was that British and French systems were not only obsolete but insignificant in the big picture of the superpower arms race. Kissinger said, "We will have twice as many warheads on one Trident boat as the entire British and French warheads. If we go to war, [British and French] boats will make no difference. If we don't go to war, they are useless." Faced with another impasse, the two sides agreed to a five-minute break.³¹⁸

When they returned from the break, Kissinger offered the first American departure from equal limits since the start of the SALT II negotiations. Kissinger agreed to depart from the strict guidelines of the Jackson amendment and allow the Soviet Union to have 200 more missiles than the United States as compensation for

³¹⁸ Ibid.

British and French systems. Under the new US proposal, both the United States and the Soviet Union would be granted 2,400 intercontinental systems, but the United States would agree, in a secret agreement with the Soviets that would not be included in the official treaty, not to build 200 of their allotted 2,400. Kissinger presented this as a major American compromise. In reality, this token compensation was far less than the numerical advantages that the Soviets had received in the Interim Agreement, and Kissinger was willing to offer it because the United States did not plan to build more than 2,200 systems, even if a future treaty allowed them to build more than this number.

After presenting this offer, Kissinger returned again to his strategy of heavily emphasizing American domestic opposition to detente and presenting himself as the Soviet Union's best hope for a fair negotiating partner. "Any analysis of the U.S. scene would show that I alone have kept open the possibility of an agreement. Every proposal made to you in the last year has been made by me against the opposition of the majority in the U.S. Government," said Kissinger. This was his third visit to the Soviet Union, he explained, and, if he returned to the US a third time without an agreement, détente would be imperiled and the opponents of détente strengthened. "If there is no progress now, it would without any question be described as a failure in the United States." His latest offer, Kissinger informed them, was the very best offer that he could make. "We will certainly not make a more forthcoming proposal," he concluded. Before the meeting ended, again without any movement on the Soviet side, Gromyko again expressed the Soviet dismay at Kissinger's revisionist history of

the Interim Agreement. "I don't understand, Dr. Kissinger," Gromyko lamented, "how you could have lost sight of the geographic factor."³¹⁹

The next day, Brezhnev finally conceded. Predictably, his concession came after a brief discussion of Senator Jackson. Brezhnev began their meeting with the question, "Do you have anything new to tell me for the U.S. side?" When Kissinger replied that he had already given Brezhnev the latest American proposal, Brezhnev clarified what he meant: "No, I mean maybe something more interesting that may have happened in the United States. I haven't been able to follow events there. Maybe Jackson's invented something new. Maybe you have something new by way of instructions." Kissinger, realizing that Brezhnev was lightening the mood by bringing up their common nemesis, responded in kind, "Any instructions that Jackson sent me would have to be sent to our Secret Service first. They might explode." After a couple minutes of banter about Jackson, Brezhnev proceeded to accept Kissinger's latest proposal—both sides would be permitted 2,400 total systems; the US total would include 200 systems owned by Britain and France; and within the overall total of 2,400 both sides could have 1,320 MIRVed systems. This was the biggest breakthrough since the commencement of the talks in 1969. The Soviets would retain a symbolic advantage of 200 systems through a secret exchange of letters between Ford and Brezhnev, but the official treaty would conform with the Jackson amendment and establish equal numbers for both sides.

The table now seemed set for a major agreement to be finalized during President Ford's upcoming meetings with Brezhnev in Vladivostok. But Kissinger

³¹⁹ Ibid.

was not yet completely satisfied with the terms that he had negotiated. He still worried that Congress would eventually learn about the secret 200 system advantage that he had offered the Soviet Union and that this revelation would lead to a massive reaction from Jackson and the opponents of détente. “[I]n its present form,” Kissinger warned Ford, “it would be shredded by the DOD, leaked to the press by Jackson, and destroyed before we can shape it.” Thus, Kissinger advised Ford to keep the details of Kissinger’s negotiations in Moscow a secret. He also convinced the Soviets to do the same, arguing that publicizing their agreement before it was finalized by Ford and Brezhnev would trigger a bureaucratic process “most unfavorable to the Soviet Union” that would certainly include hearings led by Jackson. Having convinced both sides to keep the details of the agreement a secret, Kissinger then developed a plan with Ford to withdraw the proposal for unequal limits during his meetings with Brezhnev and to try to get the Soviets to agree to completely equal numbers (2,400 for each side).³²⁰

Kissinger was confident that Ford would be successful in eliminating the 200-missile disparity and negotiating a treaty with equal limits. His confidence was based in part on the role that Jackson would play in the Vladivostok negotiations. During Kissinger’s last meeting with the Soviets in Moscow, Soviet leaders again expressed their loathing for Jackson. “Last night after our meeting,” Kissinger reported to Ford, “Brezhnev and Gromyko took me aside to tell me privately of their total outrage at Jackson’s behavior.” Kissinger then told the President that he

³²⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, November 10, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 85.

believed that Jackson's opposition to détente would be useful in Vladivostok. "I think [the Soviets] will perform quite well for fear of strengthening Jackson," he concluded.³²¹ During a briefing on the eve of the Vladivostok meetings, Kissinger encouraged Ford to "act confident" and "mention the right-wing problems, and Jackson."³²²

On November 23 Ford arrived in Vladivostok, the largest Soviet port city on the Pacific Ocean and the main naval base of the Soviet Pacific Fleet. His plane landed inside a military base that was used for Soviet interceptor aircraft. It was covered in deep snow except for one landing strip that had been cleared for Air Force One. All the base's military facilities were underground, so when Ford stepped off the plane, his first sight was of "a vast, treeless field of snow with just a few scattered buildings." Dobrynin observed that Ford "looked overwhelmed by this white stillness." Brezhnev and a small entourage met the President in the blistering cold and escorted him to a train that would take the group 10 miles to the Okeanskaya (Oceanside) Sanatorium, a health spa on the Amur Bay, an inlet of Peter the Great Gulf in the Sea of Japan.³²³ After a brief, informal discussion on the train that ranged from cognac to sports to Soviet snow plows, the superpower leaders returned to their compartments. Alone in his berth, Brezhnev had a seizure. His doctor, Professor Evgeny Chazov, was able to get the seizure under control, but he

³²¹ Memorandum, Brent Scowcroft to Kissinger, October 27, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 78.

³²² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, November 16, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 88.

³²³ Of the health resort, President Ford wrote, "Although the Soviets had labored for ten days to spruce up the place and apply a fresh coat of paint to the main buildings, it still looked like an abandoned YMCA camp in the Catskills." Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 214.

urged the Soviet leader to postpone his negotiations with Ford, which were scheduled to start the following day. Brezhnev rejected his advice, ordered Chazov to keep his condition a secret, and decided to press on with the negotiations.³²⁴

Brezhnev's decision was of great historical import, for the Vladivostok mini-summit would prove to be the high water mark of the détente era. At the Okeanskaya Sanitorium, Ford was finally able to convince Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership to accept a treaty based on equal limits. He did so by repeatedly insisting that American domestic politics would never allow a treaty that did not include equal limits and by making a key concession related to American FBS. Ford began by telling Brezhnev that it was "essential" to make the aggregate number 2,400 for both sides and "extremely important...in order to get full support for an agreement from Congress and the American people that we have numerical equivalents." Any differential in numbers, Ford stated a few minutes later, would be "a major problem from the standpoint of our domestic situation." Kissinger then interjected that allowing the Soviet Union to have 200 more systems than the United States, even if it was done through a confidential letter, "would be extremely dangerous given the present political situation in the United States." Ford then added that there was "strong insistence on the part of public opinion, also reflected in the Congress, that we have equivalence in the final figures." When Brezhnev refused to budge,

³²⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 328-329. Background Memorandum, "The Okeanskiy Sanitorium," Robert T. Hartmann Papers (Box 153 - President - Trips, 11/18-26/74 - Japan, Korea, USSR - Background - Vladivostok), Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library. Andrew Downer Crane, *The Ford Presidency: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 98-99. Dobrynin surmises that this seizure was one of the first signs of atherosclerosis of the brain. When Brezhnev left Vladivostok by train after his meetings with Ford, he suffered another seizure that caused him to temporarily lose consciousness.

complaining that the US was “paying very little attention to...the geographic factor and the forward based systems,” Ford indicated that an agreement without equal limits would not only destroy support for détente in the US but also open the way for someone like Jackson to become President.³²⁵ Ford urged Brezhnev to consider “which administration in Washington can ensure irreversible détente.” “Without mentioning any names—and you can imagine whom I am talking about,” Ford warned, “—if the United States were to accept an agreement on the basis of disparity,” such an agreement “could bring in the elections an administration that would not be as committed to pursuing détente on a continuing basis.” If Brezhnev was truly committed to the “momentum and irreversibility of détente,” then he would support an agreement based on equal numbers, for only such an agreement would keep someone like Jackson out of the White House.³²⁶

After this barrage of arguments related to American domestic considerations, Brezhnev still seemed torn. “[T]his stiffening of the United States position,” he protested, “seems to be breaking apart everything we had agreed upon.” Ford then made the concession that he had kept in his pocket until this moment—he offered to stop using the American naval base in Rota, Spain, for nuclear submarines in 1984. He offered to do this “in the spirit of mutual understanding...to further détente.” This proposal seemed to be the show of goodwill that Brezhnev needed to concede to American demands for equal limits. “This is a very important statement you made,

³²⁵ Jackson had unsuccessfully run for President in 1972 and planned to run again in 1976.

³²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, November 23, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 91.

Mr. President,” Brezhnev remarked. With this new American initiative on the table, Brezhnev asked to leave the room for a few minutes to confer with his aides.³²⁷

According to one account, Brezhnev left the room bellowing, “Kozlov, Kozlov!”³²⁸ Colonel General Mikhail Kozlov was the representative of the Soviet military at the negotiations in Vladivostok. Brezhnev left the room convinced that Ford would never accept a treaty with unequal limits, and, based on this conclusion, he had decided to accept the latest American proposal, but Brezhnev knew that he could not do so without the support of the Soviet military.³²⁹ Therefore, Brezhnev called for Kozlov. He also began making phone calls to military leaders back in Moscow.³³⁰ When these leaders heard what Brezhnev had in mind, they were not happy, and a wave of debate crashed through the Politburo. General Nicolay Detinov, one of three Soviet arms control experts who advised Brezhnev at Vladivostok, called these debates “acrimonious” and “quite heated;”³³¹ Kissinger surmised that Brezhnev must have had to “knock heads” to gain consensus;³³² and Georgi Kornienko, head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s American desk, said that “Brezhnev had to spill political blood to get the Vladivostok accord.”³³³ Foreign Minister Gromyko eventually supported the General Secretary, but concluded, nevertheless, that the decision to exclude any consideration of American FBS and

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Crane, *The Ford Presidency*, 99.

³²⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 330.

³³⁰ Ibid. According to Dobrynin, Brezhnev made numerous calls to Moscow throughout the Vladivostok summit to coordinate his positions with other Soviet leaders.

³³¹ Detinov, *Big 5*, 50.

³³² Talbott, *Endgame*, 32.

³³³ Ibid., 78.

the 200 British and French systems was “an enormous concession.”³³⁴ Brezhnev’s biggest battle was with Andrei Grechko, the physically imposing (six foot six) Soviet Defense Minister. Grechko adamantly opposed making any more concessions in the SALT negotiations.³³⁵ In fact, according to Semenov, Grechko believed that the very idea of negotiating with the imperialist United States on nuclear weapons was criminal.³³⁶ Grechko argued during the Vladivostok negotiations that the Soviet Union had to hold the line on counting British and French systems in the American totals. His opposition was staunch, and it threatened to block a Vladivostok breakthrough, but Brezhnev ultimately triumphed by asserting his authority as leader of the Communist Party. “Grechko yielded,” Dobrynin recalls, “only after Brezhnev angrily employed his authority as a general secretary, and did so in strong words.”³³⁷

After gaining the requisite consensus from the Politburo, Brezhnev returned to the negotiating room accompanied by Colonel General Kozlov. To the great surprise of Brezhnev’s American opposites, he then promptly accepted the American proposal. “I appreciate that your internal situation differs from ours,” Brezhnev began, alluding to one of the factors that had shaped his decision. “So let’s do it this way....2400 launchers for you and 2400 for us; 1320 MIRVed missiles for you and 1320 MIRVed missiles for us.” Brezhnev then proposed that after Ford

³³⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, November 23, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 91.

³³⁵ Dobrynin describes Brezhnev’s clash with Grechko during the Vladivostok negotiations as a “serious dispute.” See, Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 330.

³³⁶ Jonathan Haslam, *Russia’s Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 218.

³³⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 330.

returned to Washington and Brezhnev returned to Moscow, the two sides could sign an aide-mémoire that set forth in writing these agreed-upon figures. Ford immediately accepted this suggestion, eager to codify Brezhnev's unexpected concession. Brezhnev's sudden acceptance of equal numerical limits for both sides was a huge shift in the Soviet position and a major Soviet compromise.

Ford and Kissinger were stunned and elated by this acceptance of the American figures and the American definition of equality. Ford described himself as "euphoric" after this meeting—the negotiations had "far exceeded" his expectations.³³⁸ Kissinger heralded the agreement as a "breakthrough," and Ford's press spokesman announced that the President "would return home in triumph."³³⁹

Why did Brezhnev suddenly forsake his insistence on including American FBS and British and French system in the American totals and agree to a treaty based on equal limits on intercontinental systems? Surely, Ford's offer to stop using one of America's forward nuclear submarine bases was an important factor, but this was not the only reason. Kissinger believed that his strategy of educating Brezhnev concerning American domestic opposition and using Jackson and the Defense Department as foils had worked. Shortly after Vladivostok, the Prime Minister of Canada asked Kissinger privately why the Soviets had been willing to make such major concessions. Kissinger replied, "They really have a stake in détente—and to defuse people like Jackson."³⁴⁰ Brezhnev himself seemed to confirm this

³³⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 218.

³³⁹ *New York Times*, November 6, 1974, 39.

³⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Prime Minister of Canada Allan MacEachen, President Gerald Ford, et al., "December 4, 1974, Ford Presidential Digital

interpretation during the Vladivostok negotiations. Immediately before accepting the American position, Brezhnev mentioned “the internal situation” in the US, and right after accepting the American proposal, he began talking American domestic politics again. “Then,” Ford writes in his memoirs, “displaying a surprising grasp of the way our political system worked, [Brezhnev] began talking about Congress.” Brezhnev told Ford that he “had learned during Nixon’s years in office that the future of their relations with the United States didn’t depend solely on the decisions of the American President. Congress was a force to be reckoned with.”³⁴¹

Conclusion

When Nixon and Brezhnev had signed the SALT I interim agreement in May of 1972, the Soviet leadership believed that the US had finally accepted the principle of equal security. The soon discovered, however, that this was far from the case. The agreement was widely criticized in the United States, and the US Senate, led by Scoop Jackson, passed an amendment that rejected the logic behind the interim agreement and re-enshrined the principle of parity as the goal of US-Soviet arms agreements. Kissinger then used this amendment, the staunch Congressional opposition, and Jackson himself to convince Brezhnev that the United States would never ratify a treaty that did not include equal numbers for both sides. Brezhnev eventually accepted this logic and fought against opposition in the Politburo to

Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/memcons/1552871.pdf> [accessed 12/12/13].

³⁴¹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, 217. This view was also reflected in an editorial in *The New York Times* by the moderate columnist James Reston. Reston wrote, “[The Soviets] have apparently concluded that a major disruption of the détente policy would probably produce a violent anti-Communist reaction in the United States, and maybe a Henry Jackson Presidency.” *New York Times*, November 27, 1974, 37.

negotiate an agreement with President Ford at Vladivostok. Brezhnev and his colleagues fully expected that the Vladivostok accord would quickly be converted into a permanent SALT II agreement.

They were wrong. Although the Vladivostok accord seemed to favor the United States so much, the same thing that happened after the interim agreement happened again after the Vladivostok accord. This disappointing turn of events would convince Soviet leaders that the United States would never be satisfied and that they would never be able to achieve equal security through arms negotiations. They would have to achieve it through deployment of additional nuclear weapons, including a powerful new three-headed missile called the SS-20.

CHAPTER FOUR

**SALT AND THE SS-20 MISSILE,
1974-1976**

A Shadow Falls Over Europe: The Soviet SS-20 Missile

In April of 1976, less than a year and a half after the breakthrough agreement at Vladivostok, the Soviet Union began fielding a new type of nuclear missile along its western borders called the SS-20 “Saber” missile.³⁴² These missiles employed the most cutting-edge nuclear weapons technology available at the time. Unlike previous missiles that carried a single nuclear device, the SS-20 could deliver three nuclear warheads. Each of these warheads possessed ten times the destructive force of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and each warhead could be independently targeted. An unholy trinity of mass destruction, the SS-20 launched into the sky as a single rocket but descended from the heavens as three separate nuclear bombs. A breakthrough in Soviet weapon design, the SS-20 missile was also mobile. Soviet scientists had devised a way to deploy the weapon in transportable canisters that were installed on camouflaged, twelve-wheeled, mobile road launchers. This meant that the SS-20 could be easily concealed, quickly relocated, and rapidly launched. The missile’s range, 2,700 miles, made it the perfect Soviet weapon for use against Europe. When deployed along the western borders of the Soviet Union, the SS-20 could cover European targets ranging from Gibraltar to Scotland. It would take less than 20 minutes after launch for the missile to reach London, Paris, or Bonn.

³⁴² “SS-20 Saber” was the Western designation for this Soviet missile. The Soviet designation was RSD-10 Pioneer (Пионер). This dissertation will use Western designations for Soviet missiles, because these were the designations used by both American and Soviet officials throughout the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

The Soviet decision to deploy this new missile was a wake-up call for many in the West. Numerous American and European leaders saw the deployment of these weapons as a deliberate Soviet effort to undermine détente and as a blatant attempt to gain nuclear superiority over the West. They repeatedly described the Soviet missiles as something unprecedented and unjustified. NATO Defense Ministers expressed grave alarm over the SS-20 at the end of 1976 and began devoting particular attention to it at special planning sessions over the next several years.³⁴³ Dr. David Manfred Woerner, Shadow Defense Minister of the Christian Democratic Union in West Germany, described the Soviet deployment as “a massive increase in Soviet nuclear striking power.” “The USSR does not want a balance of power,” he argued, “but rather absolute military superiority in order to be able to intimidate and blackmail free Europe and the West. It does not want détente and disarmament, but rather tension and rearmament. There can be no other reason for this Soviet step. There is nothing comparable on the Western side.”³⁴⁴ Major General Brandt, Head of the West German Defense Ministry Political Department, declared that the Soviet missiles posed a “great threat to Europe” and created a new imbalance in the European theater in the Soviet favor.³⁴⁵ Prominent French journalist Jerome Doumlin argued that the Soviets were taking advantage of loopholes in the SALT I agreement and concluded, “the Soviet military superiority in Europe is at this point

³⁴³ *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, December 13, 1976, 25.

³⁴⁴ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, August 10, 1976, “CDU/CSU Reaction to Reported MIRV-ing of Soviet IRBM’s.” Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD.

³⁴⁵ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, November 11, 1976. “FRG-NATO Military Matters.” RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 11/15/13].

considerable.”³⁴⁶ Fred Ikle, Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, offered an opinion that closely mirrored the European interpretation. “The Soviet Union,” he asserted “is now embarked on new weapons programs that will further increase its superiority in regional nuclear forces.”³⁴⁷ Director Ikle also captured the widely shared European view that these missiles were entirely unnecessary and that the Soviets had no legitimate reason for deploying them. He described the Soviet SS-20 deployment as “massive, unwarranted, and unexplained.”³⁴⁸

These European criticisms were pervasive and persuasive, but they were also uninformed and inaccurate. They ignored the six years of US-Soviet SALT negotiations that preceded the SS-20 deployment decision and the collapse of these negotiations in 1975 after the massive Soviet concessions at Vladivostok in 1974. By examining the history of the SALT negotiations between the Vladivostok mini-summit and the Soviet SS-20 deployment decision and reviewing the US-Soviet arms control talks from 1969-1976, this dissertation chapter argues that the Soviet decision was neither “unwarranted” nor “unexplained.” In fact, given the context in which it was made, it was both entirely justified and thoroughly predictable.

Overview

When President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev left Vladivostok in November of 1974, both men believed that they had achieved a historic

³⁴⁶ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, August 8, 1976. “Press Coverage of Soviet Arms Developments.” RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 12/02/13].

³⁴⁷ *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, Sept. 6, 1976, 27.

³⁴⁸ *The Economist*, September 11, 1976, 32.

breakthrough and expected that they would be able to sign a major arms control treaty within a year. During the Vladivostok negotiations, Brezhnev had exercised his authority as General Secretary to win consensus within the Politburo for a huge Soviet concession—the abandonment of the principle of equal security and the acceptance of an agreement based on equal numbers of intercontinental nuclear systems. Ford, Kissinger, and even Brezhnev, all believed that the equal ceilings in the Vladivostok agreement would quiet Senator Jackson and the critics of détente and would open the way for a new SALT treaty in the near future.

But they all were mistaken. The same thing that happened after the Interim Agreement happened again after Vladivostok—a volcano of criticism erupted in the United States in opposition to the agreement. And, once again, this criticism was led by Senator Jackson and officials in the US Department of Defense.

When Jackson and the military criticized the Interim Agreement in 1972, Kissinger believed that this criticism could be constructive; he could use it to persuade Brezhnev to accept a new agreement that was more favorable to the United States. Kissinger believed that this is what happened at Vladivostok in 1974—Brezhnev finally accepted that Congress would never accept a treaty based on anything other than equal numbers—but when Jackson and the DOD introduced new criticisms after Vladivostok, Kissinger wondered if they would ever be satisfied with any agreement and concluded that their demands for additional Soviet concessions were unreasonable and destructive. Kissinger's conclusions were correct. The new demands of Senator Jackson and the military derailed the arms control negotiations during the remainder of Ford's presidency.

As the negotiations stalled again, the Soviet Union became increasingly disillusioned with SALT. Brezhnev had “shed political blood” to win support from the other members of the Politburo for major Soviet concessions. After years of arguing for compensation for American FBS and British and French systems, the Soviet Union had abandoned its cherished principle of equal security and agreed to the American definition of equality—equal numerical limits on intercontinental systems. But even after this huge shift in the Soviet position, the United States still was not satisfied; US officials refused to finalize a SALT treaty until the Soviet Union made even deeper concessions. Faced with these new American demands, Soviet officials wondered if opponents of détente in the United States would block any SALT agreement, no matter how many concessions the Soviet Union made.

Although Brezhnev had dropped the Soviet insistence on receiving compensation for American FBS and British and French systems, the Soviet leadership remained deeply concerned about these weapons, and they continued to look for ways to alleviate these concerns through the negotiations. They asked the United States for a commitment to discuss FBS in future negotiations, and they tabled a provision that would bar the United States from transferring its weapons to third parties, but the United States was unwilling to entertain either proposal.

By 1976 the Soviet leadership concluded that the United States was unlikely to convert the Vladivostok agreement into a new SALT treaty in the near future or to negotiate any limitations on American FBS or British and French systems. It was at this time that the Soviet leadership decided to deploy its SS-20 missiles along its western borders and aim them at targets across Europe. Having failed to obtain any

redress for American FBS and British and French systems through years of negotiations, they felt entirely justified in taking action outside the negotiations to counter these systems.

Shared Expectations after Vladivostok

On December 10, 1974 Kissinger and Dobrynin approved on behalf of their respective governments an *aide-mémoire* that set forth in writing the details of the Vladivostok agreement. The document captured the optimism that followed the meeting between Ford and Brezhnev and their belief that a new treaty was just around the corner. “A new agreement will be completed as soon as possible, with the objective of signing it in 1975,” the *aide-mémoire* declared.³⁴⁹ The shared expectation that an agreement could be reached by the end of 1975 stemmed from the fact that Ford and Brezhnev both believed that they had finally negotiated an agreement that would placate the opponents of détente in the US and meet with Congressional approval. When Ford briefed Congress a few days after the Vladivostok mini-summit, one of the very first things that he told them was that the agreement conformed with the Congressional preference for equal limits. “As a result of about 12 hours of hard bargaining,” Ford reported, “we reached an agreement which is in accord with the language set forth in the Senate language on equivalence.” Then, a few sentences later, he repeated this point again, emphasizing that the agreement coincided “with the Congressional requirements for

³⁴⁹ Aide-Memoire, December 10, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 97.

equivalence.”³⁵⁰ Brezhnev anticipated that some in the US would have minor quibbles with the agreement but also expected that the agreement’s equal numbers would quiet US domestic criticism. “Of course, it is always possible that some people will nitpick,” Brezhnev told Ford at Vladivostok, “but it will be difficult to argue against such complete equality....you can return and report to your people that you have reached a treaty on the basis of full equality.”³⁵¹

New American Obstacles—Backfire Bombers and Cruise Missiles

If Ford, Kissinger, and Brezhnev believed that the critics of the 1972 Interim Agreement would be pacified by the equal ceilings in the 1974 Vladivostok accord, they were quickly disabused of this belief. Senator Jackson struck again, immediately lambasting the Vladivostok agreement. Initially, Jackson criticized the agreement from the left, claiming that the agreement did not place low enough limits on strategic nuclear weapons. On November 26 Jackson gave a radio interview in which he described the ceilings in the agreement as “astonishingly high” and called for much lower limits.³⁵² During an interview on the television show *Face the Nation* two weeks later, he argued that the United States “had the bargaining power to force a new accord with the Russians setting lower limits on missiles and bombers than that agreed by President Ford and Leonid I. Brezhnev.”

³⁵⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership, and Brent Scowcroft, November 26, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 94

³⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Leonid Brezhnev, and others, November 23, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 91.

³⁵² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership, and Brent Scowcroft, November 26, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 94. *New York Times*, November 27, 1974, 1.

Jackson called on Congress to reject the accord “even before it was made final” and to demand that the Administration secure “substantial mutual phased reductions.” “[W]e have the chips to force them down” to a lower level, he declared.³⁵³

These initial criticisms from the left did not find much resonance in the arms control debates in Washington, and the Ford administration was able to dismiss them as naïve and overly optimistic. However, Jackson was not finished. He then joined with Department of Defense officials to attack the agreement from the right. Jackson and an assortment of DOD officials claimed that the Vladivostok agreement was overly ambiguous and that it needed to be re-written to precisely define which systems were to be included in or excluded from the 2,400 ceiling on strategic delivery vehicles. In particular, they announced that they would oppose any agreement unless it included a new Soviet aircraft called the “Backfire” bomber and excluded the latest generation of American cruise missiles. In other words, Jackson and the Pentagon wanted to count more Soviet systems and fewer American systems in the ceilings established at Vladivostok.

Unlike the Interim Agreement, which placed limits only on land- and sea-launched missiles, the Vladivostok accord included heavy bombers—each heavy bomber would count as one delivery vehicle against the 2,400 ceiling. Both sides agreed that a heavy bomber was an aircraft capable of carrying and delivering nuclear bombs intercontinental distances, and, throughout the negotiations up to this point, both sides had agreed that the Soviet Union had two types of heavy bombers: the 3M “Bison” and the Tu-95 “Bear.” After the Vladivostok mini-summit,

³⁵³ *New York Times*, December 8, 1974, 12.

however, Senator Jackson and members of the US Defense Department began arguing that the Soviet Union was developing a third strategic bomber, which they called the “Backfire” bomber. They believed that with in-flight refueling the Backfire could travel intercontinental distances and deliver nuclear bombs to targets in the United States. Based on these estimates, they argued that the Backfire should be counted against Soviet totals in SALT.

Critics of the Vladivostok agreement also wanted to be sure that any SALT treaty left the latest generation of American cruise missiles unrestrained. During the Vladivostok negotiations, Ford and Brezhnev had agreed to count each air-to-surface missile with a range of 600 kilometers or more as one delivery vehicle in the 2,400 ceiling established for both sides. The December 10 *aide-mémoire* stated that the 2,400 ceiling on delivery vehicles of strategic arms would include ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers equipped with “bombs or air-to-surface missiles with a range not exceeding 600 kilometers.” “When a bomber is equipped with air-to-surface missiles with a range over 600 kilometers,” the *aide-mémoire* continued, “each of such missiles will be counted as one delivery vehicle in the aggregate number (2400).”³⁵⁴ After Vladivostok, the US Defense Department insisted that the language regarding air-to-surface missiles on bombers was intended to cover only *ballistic* missiles—“rocket propelled vehicles that flew to their targets by following high parabolic trajectories”—and did not include *cruise* missiles.³⁵⁵ At the time of the Vladivostok agreement, American military engineers were developing a new

³⁵⁴ Aide-Mémoire, December 10, 1974. FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 97.

³⁵⁵ Talbott, *Endgame*, 35.

generation of cruise missiles. These new missiles were subsonic, jet-propelled drones that could be launched from American bombers. Once launched, a cruise missile could “sneak under enemy radar, skimming the treetops, finding its way by retracing a preprogrammed map of the terrain below, zigging and zagging to avoid known anti-aircraft installations, and homing in on its targets with uncanny accuracy.”³⁵⁶ These new cruise missiles would be small and inexpensive, which meant that an American heavy bomber could be loaded with far more cruise missiles than its normal payload of large, heavy bombs. In addition, since these cruise missiles could travel intercontinental distances, the American bomber would not have to fly close to the USSR; it could release its nuclear drones from thousands of miles away, outside the range of Soviet anti-aircraft defenses.

Kissinger’s Response to Criticisms of the Vladivostok Agreement

Senator Jackson’s attack on the Vladivostok agreement caught Kissinger by surprise, and he was extremely unhappy with the Senator’s assault on the latest achievement of the Kissinger-led US-Soviet negotiations.³⁵⁷ Kissinger believed that Jackson’s new criticism was motivated almost entirely by Jackson’s aspirations for the presidency.³⁵⁸ During a meeting with President Ford, Kissinger described Jackson’s plans to hold hearings on the agreement as “a total invasion of Executive

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ “I am surprised,” Kissinger confessed, when asked by a reporter whether he expected Jackson’s criticism. *New York Times*, December 5, 1974, 3.

³⁵⁸ *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1974, 1

authority.” “The Congressional function,” Kissinger told the President, “is to approve treaties, not to participate in their negotiation.”³⁵⁹

Kissinger believed that the terms of the Vladivostok agreement should be converted into a new SALT treaty, and he advised the President accordingly. He did not think the Vladivostok needed to be modified to include Soviet Backfire bombers or exclude American cruise missiles, and he feared that a protracted debate within the United States over the Vladivostok agreement would destroy the possibility of concluding a SALT treaty. The Soviets had made “very major concessions” at Vladivostok, Kissinger told reporters on December 4. Therefore, “if approval of the Vladivostok accord faces the same kind of bitter debate in Congress, then the Soviet Union would be able to conclude only that political *détente* with us faces domestic difficulties of an insuperable nature.”³⁶⁰ He argued that the calls for including Soviet Backfire bombers and excluding American cruise missiles were unfair and should be rejected. “I am not sure we want to omit cruise missiles,” he told Ford on January 9, 1975, “it leaves a huge loophole.”³⁶¹ Kissinger acknowledged that the Vladivostok negotiating record was “ambiguous” regarding whether or not the two sides had intended to limit only *ballistic* missiles or to cover *all* missiles, but he warned Ford that the US should not try to “put something over on [the Soviets] with a shyster trick.”³⁶² Regarding Soviet Backfire bombers, Kissinger told the President that he did not see how it would be possible to place limits on Soviet Backfire bombers

³⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, January 8, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 113.

³⁶⁰ *New York Times*, December 7, 1974, 1.

³⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, January 9, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 116

³⁶² *Ibid.*

without also accepting limits on American FBS.³⁶³ He pointed to the fact that the American military and intelligence communities were split on whether or not the Backfire bomber was a strategic weapon—the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Air Force believed that the Backfire had a range of up to 7,925 miles and was designed primarily for use against the United States, but the CIA and the Navy estimated much shorter ranges for the Backfire and believed that it was best suited for “Eurasian strike options” and designed “primarily for that role.”³⁶⁴ The DIA and Air Force estimates, Kissinger pointed out, were dependent on mid-flight refueling and one-way missions. If the United States used this type of calculation to label the Backfire bomber a strategic weapon, how, he asked, could it simultaneously refuse to apply the same label to American FBS? Kissinger told Strobe Talbott that he viewed Backfire bombers and cruise missiles as irrational “hang-ups” of the Pentagon—“the Backfire because the US military was so determined to stretch SALT to cover it, and the cruise missile because the Defense Department was so determined to prevent SALT from covering it.”³⁶⁵

Initially, Ford heeded Kissinger’s advice. Two months after the Vladivostok mini-summit, on January 30, 1975, the President instructed the US SALT Delegation to “follow the principles agreed to at Vladivostok” in the next round of SALT.³⁶⁶ These instructions, however, were quickly reversed. Throughout the early months

³⁶³ Memorandum, Counselor of the Department of State (Sonnenfeldt) and Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hyland) to Secretary of State Kissinger, February 9, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 127.

³⁶⁴ CIA, National Intelligence Estimate, “Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Attack,” January 25, 1974.

³⁶⁵ Talbott, *Endgame*, 35-36.

³⁶⁶ *New York Times*, January 30, 1975, 6.

of 1975, Jackson was unrelenting in his criticism of the terms of the Vladivostok agreement, and, after doing the political math, Ford and Kissinger concluded that they had to at least air some of Jackson's arguments in the SALT negotiations to give themselves political cover. During a meeting between Ford and Kissinger at this time, Kissinger described Jackson as one of "the most ruthless" politicians in Washington and concluded, "We have to worry about Jackson."³⁶⁷ Kissinger argued that it was politically necessary to make a good show of calling for the inclusion of Soviet Backfire and the exclusion of American cruise missiles, but he expected that Jackson's arguments would eventually lose support. "He may try to put on even more restrictions but will have lost his following," Kissinger told Ford.³⁶⁸ Once this happened, the US would be able to move forward with pursuing a treaty largely along the lines of the Vladivostok agreement.³⁶⁹

The Soviet Reaction to Post-Vladivostok Backlash in the US

Soviet leaders were surprised and dismayed by the storm of criticism in Washington that followed the announcement of the Vladivostok accords.³⁷⁰ After making such major concessions at Vladivostok, this was not what they expected. TASS lashed back at Senator Jackson, accusing him of favoring "a runaway race in nuclear armaments" and suffering from "the military industrial complex," and Soviet

³⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, January 11, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 119.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Memorandum, Counselor of the Department of State (Sonnenfeldt) and Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hyland) to Secretary of State Kissinger, February 9, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 127.

³⁷⁰ *New York Times*, January 30 1975, 6.

negotiators immediately rejected American calls to include Soviet Backfire bombers and exclude American cruise missiles.³⁷¹

The Soviet leadership vehemently denied that the Backfire could reach the United States and rejected the idea that it should be classified as a heavy bomber and included in SALT ceilings. They repeatedly insisted that their primary concern in developing the Backfire was not to attack American territory but to counter American forward-based systems in Europe and the nuclear forces of Britain and France. The Backfire bomber, they noted, would replace Soviet intermediate-range bombers currently slotted for this purpose that were now twenty years old.

By the early 1970s, the Soviet bomber fleet originally designed for use against Europe was almost completely antiquated and in desperate need of replacement. In the mid-1950s, the Soviet military had developed a subsonic, medium-range bomber called the Tu-16 "Badger." In the late 1950s and early 1960s, they had attempted to find a replacement for Badger but had failed to do so. The Soviet military eventually came up with an aircraft called the Tu-22 "Blinder", but the Blinder suffered from a high accident rate and a plethora of technical defects and was never deployed in significant numbers. As a result, the Badger remained in service until the early 1970s, almost twenty years after its debut. In 1964 Brezhnev instructed Andrei Tupolev, a brilliant Soviet aircraft designer, to build a bomber with a range of 3,000 miles to replace the Badger. Tupolev's solution was the Tu-22M Backfire bomber. The first test of a Backfire took place in 1969, and early production began in 1972. Thus, Soviet leaders viewed the Backfire, from its

³⁷¹ *New York Times*, November 29, 1974, 5.

inception to its deployment, as a medium-range bomber. It would replace the aging Badger and give the Soviet Union a much-needed counter to American aircraft stationed at forward-bases in Europe.³⁷² Since this was the Soviet view of the Backfire, Soviet leaders were incensed at American efforts to include the aircraft in SALT. They viewed these attempts as a gross hypocrisy—how could the US attempt to include Backfire in SALT while refusing to include American FBS?—and a deliberate scheme by the opponents of a US-Soviet arms accord to undermine the momentum of Vladivostok.³⁷³

The Soviet leadership was also very unhappy with US efforts to keep American cruise missiles out of SALT. They insisted that the intention of Vladivostok was to include *all* air-to-surface missiles, regardless of their locomotion and flight path, including cruise missiles. They pointed out that the *aide-mémoire* that both sides had approved referred simply to air-launched missiles without any further qualifications. Moreover, Gromyko told Kissinger, leaving these weapons unrestrained would inevitably lead to an explosion in the arms race. “It would be suicide,” Gromyko said, “to leave outside of the agreement and give great freedom to the development of these weapons. It would be tantamount to building a dam

³⁷² Steven J. Zaloga, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1945-2000* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 120-22, 173-175.

³⁷³ Recently-available Russian sources support the Soviet claim that the combat range of the Backfire was far less than DIA and Air Force estimates and that Soviet leaders never intended the aircraft for use against the United States. See, for example, V. E. Ilin et al., “Kratky spravochnik po rossiiskim I ukrainskim samolyotam I vertolyotam,” *Aviatsia I kosmonavtika* 6 (1995): 41.

against a stream and then letting the stream break through to the left and right.”³⁷⁴ From the Soviet perspective, leaving cruise missiles out of SALT contradicted both the letter and the spirit of the Vladivostok agreement. They concluded, therefore, that the sudden effort to add the word *ballistic* to the air-launched missiles limited at Vladivostok was a blatant, post-summit attempt to allow the United States to gain a huge advantage in the arms race.

The Soviets entered the post-Vladivostok negotiations with three main objectives. First, they wanted to convert the terms of the Vladivostok agreement into a permanent SALT treaty. Early in 1975 Gromyko informed Kissinger that the Soviet Union favored “proceeding from the Vladivostok agreement, whose sequel was the agreed aide-mémoire.”³⁷⁵ Second, the Soviet leadership hoped that the United States would agree, in recognition of Soviet concessions at Vladivostok, to conduct negotiations on American FBS in the future. They no longer insisted on including American FBS in the current negotiations that they hoped would yield a Vladivostok-based SALT treaty, but they hoped that the United States would pledge to engage in negotiations on these systems at some point in the future. Third, they wanted the United States to commit not to transfer nuclear weapons to third parties. The Soviet leadership feared that the United States could circumvent the equal limits of the Vladivostok negotiations by transferring its extra nuclear systems to its allies in Europe. Now that the Soviet Union had dropped its efforts to receive compensation in SALT for the nuclear systems of America’s European allies, any

³⁷⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Andrey Gromyko, Henry A. Kissinger, and others, July 10, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 159.

³⁷⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Andrei Gromyko, Henry Kissinger, and others, May 20, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 150.

additional nuclear weapons in the hands of these European countries would make the Soviet security system even worse. Thus, the Soviet Union hoped that the United States would agree not to transfer nuclear weapons to third parties. For the Soviet leadership, the second and third objectives were direct corollaries of their concessions at Vladivostok. The decision to abandon their efforts to limit American FBS and British and French systems in SALT made it even more imperative that they find some other way to deal with these weapons.³⁷⁶

Kissinger's Efforts to Win Support for a Vladivostok-Based Treaty

The United States rejected all three of the Soviet proposals. President Ford instructed the American SALT delegation to press for the inclusion of Backfire bombers and the exclusion of cruise missiles, to refrain from making any commitments regarding discussing American FBS in future negotiations, and to reject the Soviet non-transfer proposal. Kissinger, however, feared that the American positions on Backfire bombers and cruise missiles would destroy the negotiations. Therefore, he developed a twofold strategy—in meetings with Soviet leaders he presented the arguments for including Backfire and excluding cruise, but in meetings with American officials he endeavored to convince them to abandon these stances and allow him to negotiate a treaty based on the Vladivostok accords.

On May 26 Kissinger told President Ford and Brent Scowcroft that he believed that the United States was “cheating a little” when it came to cruise missiles because the Soviets “may honestly think that Vladivostok settled it.” He also warned

³⁷⁶ Telegram, US Delegation SALT Two to US Secretary of State, “Draft NAC Statement for May 7 Consultation (SALT Two-647),” May 3, 1975, RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 02/01/14].

Ford that American positions on Backfire bombers had paralyzed the negotiations. "On Backfire," Kissinger said, "we are out of ideas."³⁷⁷ In July Kissinger told the Secretary of Defense (Schlesinger), the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (Ikle), the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Brown) and the Director of the CIA (Colby) that the American position on cruise missiles was "preposterous." "We can't present a SALT agreement [to Congress] that lets cruise missiles run free," Kissinger argued. "We would be laughed out of town."³⁷⁸ Two weeks later Kissinger complained to Ford that the US SALT position was "a disgrace."³⁷⁹ He urged the President to "get Schlesinger in line" and railed against the "hot shots" who "think they can keep kicking the Soviets in the pants and keep peace." "Being a cold warrior in a time of peace is no great achievement," Kissinger said with reference to Schlesinger. Tell the Secretary of Defense, he advised Ford, that in order to "get a deal we need a new position on cruise missiles and Backfire."³⁸⁰ After meeting with Dobrynin in August, Kissinger warned the members of the National Security Council that "the Backfire and cruise missile issues could

³⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, May 26, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 153

³⁷⁸ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, July 25, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750725.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

³⁷⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft, August 4, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 175.

³⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Henry Kissinger, and other, October 24, 1974, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 176.

break the negotiations.”³⁸¹ In September he told Ambassador Alexis Johnson, “The Backfire issue is a fraud...To try to include Backfire is an outrage.”³⁸²

Despite Kissinger’s efforts, Senator Jackson and the Department of Defense refused to modify their positions on cruise missiles and Backfire bombers. Kissinger was incensed at this intransigence. During a meeting with Ford and Scowcroft in 1975, he complained that any agreement with the Soviets always resulted in “a brutal fight with Jackson.” Scowcroft agreed, adding, “Jackson will attack it no matter what.”³⁸³ But Kissinger placed the lion’s share of the blame for the lack of a SALT agreement on the Department of Defense. On September 27, Kissinger vented his frustration on two representatives of the military: General Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and William Clements, Jr., Under Secretary of Defense. He described the state of the negotiations with the Soviets as “a real mess” and grumbled, “I think we are killing ourselves with our SALT position.” Kissinger told Brown and Clements that he was “extremely pained by the military” and had a “grievance against DOD.” He claimed that the DOD and State Department had not had “a working relationship” for two years and that the DOD had “ceased being part of the government.” It had become, Kissinger accused, “a political party—positioning itself both to the right and the left of the Administration.”³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 17, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750725.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

³⁸² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Henry Kissinger, Ambassador Alexis Johnson, and others, September 19, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 194.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Henry Kissinger, William Clements, Jr., George S. Brown, and Bren Scowcroft, September 27, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital

Seeking to break this logjam, Kissinger petitioned Ford to replace Schlesinger. In November Ford followed Kissinger's advice, firing Schlesinger and replacing him with Donald Rumsfeld. But to Kissinger's dismay, this did not fundamentally change the military's position on cruise missiles and Backfire bombers. At the end of 1975, the CIA Director told members of Ford's national Security Council (NSC) that a new intelligence study on the Backfire bomber concluded that it was designed for "missions in Europe and Asia" and that it was "unlikely Backfire will be specifically assigned to intercontinental missions."³⁸⁵ Despite this assessment, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Army, and the Air Force still insisted that it was primarily an intercontinental weapon. The Pentagon also refused to budge on cruise missiles. "Those geniuses," Kissinger said while gesturing across the Potomac River toward the Pentagon, "think the goddamn thing is a cure for cancer and the common cold."³⁸⁶

On January 8, during another NSC meeting, Kissinger gave his assessment of the thirteen months of negotiations after Vladivostok. "[T]he Soviets have made all the concessions in this round. There have been no US concessions except to play with numbers."³⁸⁷

Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553248.pdf> [accessed 04/14/14].

³⁸⁵ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, December 22, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/751222.pdf> [accessed 04/14/14].

³⁸⁶ Talbott, *Endgame*, 35.

³⁸⁷ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, January 8, 1976, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/760108.pdf> [accessed 11/2/13].

Growing Soviet Frustration with American Positions on Cruise and Backfire

The Soviet Union shared Kissinger's assessment. Throughout the year following the Vladivostok mini-summit, they grew increasingly frustrated by the unexpected obstacles to finalizing a SALT treaty. Soviet officials believed that the American positions on cruise missiles and Backfire bombers were completely unacceptable. On July 10 Gromyko told Kissinger that it was inconceivable that cruise missiles would be left out of an agreement. "This is not a hitch in the negotiations but something to which we attach paramount significance," Gromyko asserted. Dobrynin complained to Kissinger in August that the Soviets were having "real problems" with the US position on cruise missile. Soviet leaders calculated that air-launched cruise missiles would give the United States 11,000 free warheads that were not counted under the 2,400 aggregate on intercontinental delivery vehicles.³⁸⁸ "It is absolutely impossible," Dobrynin argued, "to agree to a situation where there are 8,000 warheads limited in the aggregate and 11,000 warheads that run free."³⁸⁹

When Ford met with Brezhnev in Helsinki in August, Brezhnev was extremely displeased with the American position on Backfire. According to one account of the meeting, Brezhnev "made a passionate assertion that the Backfire

³⁸⁸ Kissinger figured that this estimate was based on 32 cruise missiles on each B-1 bomber with a total of 240 B-1s and 12 on each B-52 with a total of 400 B-52s.

³⁸⁹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 9, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750809.pdf> [accessed 12/15/13].

was not a strategic bomber.”³⁹⁰ According to another source, he “exploded” when Ford mentioned Backfires.³⁹¹ “Your proposal,” Brezhnev bellowed at Ford, “is completely without foundation.”³⁹²

A few days later, Dobrynin explained Brezhnev’s reaction to Kissinger. The Soviet Union considered the American position on Backfire to be entirely cynical. They believed that the US was taking this position on Backfire bombers solely for bargaining purposes. Dobrynin told Kissinger that the American government surely knew that the Backfire bomber was being deployed for use against Europe and China and not the United States. The US position on Backfire, Dobrynin asserted, gave the Soviet Union a problem that was “simply unmanageable.”³⁹³

The following month, Gromyko again launched into an extended rebuttal of the American positions on Backfire bombers and cruise missiles. He informed Kissinger that only four people on the Politburo really understood the SALT negotiations but that all of them understood Backfire. As a result, they were deeply troubled by the American insistence on placing limits on it. At Vladivostok, Gromyko continued, they had given up their efforts to regulate American FBS, essentially giving the US 1,200 free units. If the US insisted on counting Backfire, then these

³⁹⁰ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750917.pdf> [accessed 12/15/13].

³⁹¹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 9, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750809.pdf> [accessed 12/15/13].

³⁹² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, August 2, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.ford.utexas.edu/library/document/0331/1554002.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

³⁹³ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 9, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750809.pdf> [accessed 12/15/13].

1,200 units should also count. Brezhnev had made major concessions at Vladivostok, but somehow the United States was still not satisfied. In fact, the United States “came back with cruise missiles, which add thousands to [the US side], and Backfire, which takes hundreds from [the Soviet side].” The Soviet Union simply could not understand “the bitterness in the US on SALT,” Gromyko concluded.

Troubling Developments Related to American FBS

Throughout 1975 Soviet leaders repeatedly asked the United States to agree to conduct negotiations on American FBS at some point in the future. Soviet leaders were willing to sign a SALT treaty that did not include American FBS, but they wanted some assurance that the United States would eventually enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union on these systems in the future. US negotiators, however, refused to give the Soviet government any such assurance. In July, when Brezhnev met with a group of American Senators who were visiting the Soviet Union, he immediately brought up American “nuclear bases spread around the world encircling the Soviet Union.” “There is no equality here,” Brezhnev complained, “since the Soviet Union does not have such bases. However, when the Soviets want to talk about FBS, the US says that [these systems] should not be discussed in SALT.”³⁹⁴

Modernization for American FBS, Obsolescence for Soviet IRBMs

The Soviet frustration with the US refusal to discuss American FBS in the negotiations was exacerbated by two troubling developments outside the

³⁹⁴ Telegram, American Embassy Moscow to US Secretary of State, “Humphrey-Scott CODEL Meeting with Brezhnev, July 2,” July 2, 1975, RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 04/24/14].

negotiations—the United States was actually modernizing its forward-based systems in Europe while the Soviet missiles opposite these systems were obsolescing. On January 21, 1976, Secretary Rumsfeld announced that US was making available 250 additional Poseidon nuclear submarine re-entry vehicles to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.³⁹⁵ These additions to American FBS in Europe were another reminder to the Soviet leadership that they had failed to include these systems in SALT. *Izvestia* reflected the extreme Soviet concern with these weapons with a lengthy diatribe against NATO four days after Rumsfeld's announcement that accused NATO of engaging in “an around-the-clock buildup of its forces.”³⁹⁶

American leaders justified the existence and enhancement of American FBS in Europe by claiming that these systems were counter-balanced by Soviet intermediate-range ballistic (IRBM) missiles that were targeted at Europe, but Soviet leaders believed that these antiquating Soviets systems paled in comparison with American FBS. The Soviet IRBMs that were targeted on Europe in 1975 dated back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1959 the Soviets had started deploying the SS-4 “Sandal” missile and in 1961 the SS-5 “Skeal” missile.³⁹⁷ When new deployment of these two systems ended in 1965, the force contained 576 SS-4 launchers and 101 SS-5 launchers. These missiles could reach a range of targets around the Soviet periphery, but the vast majority of them were targeted at Western

³⁹⁵ Telegram, US Secretary of State to CINCUSAREUR, “NPG Ministerial—Highlights,” January 23, 1976, RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed: 04/24/14].

³⁹⁶ *Izvestia*, January 25, 1976, 2. (CDSP).

³⁹⁷ The Soviet designation for the SS-4 was R-12; the Soviet designation for the SS-5 was R-14.

Europe. Most of the medium-range SS-4 missiles were aimed at NATO's central region and the United Kingdom, while most of the IRBMs were pointed toward northern and southern European targets. From the outset these missiles were exceedingly unwieldy to use, requiring 200 men and 12-18 hours to prepare to launch. Two thirds of the SS-4 and SS-5 launchers were on unprotected, open pads, and were clustered closely together in groups of four, making them extremely vulnerable to a first strike. Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev urged the Soviet military throughout the 1960s to develop a modern replacement for these aging systems, but Soviet designers repeatedly failed to produce a viable alternative. In the late 1960s, the Soviets tested two possible replacements—the SS-14 and the SS-15. Flight tests of the SS-14 began in 1965, but after nineteen test launches through March 1970, the state commission overseeing the project deemed it a failure. Flight tests of the SS-15 began in 1967, but the missile proved so flawed that it was cancelled just two years later. The life expectancy for both the SS-4 and SS-5 intermediate-range missiles had been a decade when they were first deployed in 1959 and 1961, but the failure to develop a replacement kept them in use long beyond their projected expiration dates.³⁹⁸

Right around the time that the SALT I negotiations were getting underway in late 1969, Soviet military planners came up with an improvised solution for replacing their obsolescing medium- and intermediate-range missiles. They began

³⁹⁸ Director of Central Intelligence, *CIA National Intelligence Estimate: Warsaw Pact Forces Opposite NATO*, September 4, 1975, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, Central Intelligence Agency. Steven J. Zaloga, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword*, 106, 120 and 171. Raymond L. Garthoff, "The Soviet SS-20 Decision," *Survival*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, (May/June: 1983): 113-118. Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 60.

modifying the launchers for some of their SS-11 intercontinental-ballistic missiles so that these ICBMs could be used as IRBMs and targeted on Europe and Asia. Using SS-11 ICBMs in this way seemed like a possible answer to the problem of the rapidly antiquating Soviet medium- and intermediate-range missile force, but early in the SALT I negotiations, American negotiators successfully argued that any missiles capable of traveling intercontinental distances—even if they were aimed at closer targets—should be counted as strategic systems. This meant that all Soviet SS-11s would count against any ceilings on strategic missiles established in SALT. Consequently, if the Soviets pointed 100 SS-11s at Europe, they would have 100 fewer to point at the United States. The Soviet leadership was willing to continue to target SS-11s on Europe and Asia so long as the United States granted the USSR more ICBMs than the United States, as happened under the terms of the Interim Agreement in 1972. But it was much harder to justify doing this after Brezhnev accepted equal ceilings on ICBMs at Vladivostok in 1974. As a result of Brezhnev's Vladivostok concessions, the Soviet leadership was faced with the painful reality that not only had they failed to convince the Americans to compensate them for American FBS and British and French nuclear systems, but they were also being penalized for using ICBMs to address these very threats. This excruciating situation intensified the Soviet desire to find some way to deal with American FBS—either inside the SALT negotiations or outside of them.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Intelligence Report: The Soviet SS-11 Force and Strategic Implications." October, 1973.

Final Efforts to Reach an Agreement

During the waning months of 1975, Ambassador Dobrynin made a final push to secure an agreement with the United States based on the Vladivostok accord before the end of the year. To convince Ford and Kissinger of the need to finalize an agreement sooner rather than later, Dobrynin emphasized two points—Brezhnev's role in producing the Vladivostok agreement and the importance of completing an agreement before the next Party Congress. Dobrynin sought to impress Ford and Kissinger that a SALT treaty would be impossible without Brezhnev. The Soviet leader had fought to win consensus in the Politburo in support of his Vladivostok concessions. "Without General Secretary Brezhnev," Dobrynin told Ford and Kissinger, "there would have not been the progress we were able to make. He convinced his colleagues to go along with the concessions we made."⁴⁰⁰ But the Soviet military was not happy with these concessions, and Brezhnev's health was fading. Now was the time, while Brezhnev still had both the political power and personal potency, to finalize a treaty. Dobrynin's second point regarding the urgency of completing a treaty in the near future concerned the approaching Party Congress. Dobrynin told Kissinger that Brezhnev wanted to "have a SALT agreement in preparation for the next Party Congress" so that the Soviet Union would "be able to go to that Congress and ask for real reductions in military expenditures."⁴⁰¹ The

⁴⁰⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, Anatoly Dobrynin, and Brent Scowcroft, July 23, 1975, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 16, Soviet Union 74-76, document 168.

⁴⁰¹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 9, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750809.pdf> [accessed 12/15/13].

implication was that the absence of a treaty might result in an increase in military expenditures at the Party Congress.

On January 21, 1976, Kissinger flew to Moscow to meet with Brezhnev. Kissinger hoped to work the same magic that he had conjured up prior to the Vladivostok mini-summit. As he had done in the past, Kissinger made reference to American domestic politics and the opponents of détente to explain why the US could not make any major compromises on the remaining outstanding issues. Kissinger once again mentioned Jackson, but now he also introduced a new force to be reckoned with: Ronald Reagan.⁴⁰² Ford was unable to compromise on including Backfire bombers and excluding cruise missiles because he was now being challenged not only by Senator Jackson, who had announced his decision to run for President as a candidate of the Democratic Party, but also by Ronald Reagan, who hoped to steal the nomination of the Republican Party. Kissinger hoped that the Soviet leadership would once again recognize the constraining realities of American domestic politics and make the concessions necessary to open the way for a SALT treaty. But the Soviet leadership had had enough of American domestic politics, and they were not willing to make any more concessions. In rejecting the latest American proposals, Brezhnev offered the well-established Soviet view. “The American side,” Brezhnev asserted, “attempts on the one hand to introduce

⁴⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Georgy Kornienko, Henry Kissinger, and others, January 21, 1976, Digital National Security Archive. At one point in the discussion, Brezhnev accidentally referred to Kissinger as “Comrade Kissinger.” He quickly corrected himself, and everyone laughed. Kissinger then joked that if Brezhnev were to go the Party Congress and refer to Kissinger as Comrade Kissinger, this would have an influence on the subsequent primaries. “Jackson and Reagon [sic] would be very grateful,” Kissinger said.

limitations on Soviets arms that are not strategic arms at all, and on the other hand to legalize for yourself systems that are genuinely strategic.”⁴⁰³

Kissinger’s meeting with Brezhnev on January 21, 1976, was the last serious attempt to reach a SALT treaty for more than a year. After the meeting, Ford turned his attention to winning the nomination for president of the Republican Party. Faced with the criticism from both Jackson on the left and Reagan on the right that his policy toward the Soviet Union was too soft, Ford began taking a harder line, going so far as to ban members of his cabinet from even using the word “détente.” With Ford’s shift to the right and the onward rush of the all-consuming American election season, the SALT negotiations completely ceased. By this time, the hope surrounding Vladivostok had completely died.

The Deployment Decision

A month after the meeting between Kissinger and Brezhnev in January of 1976 in Moscow, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held their 25th Party Congress. During this Congress, the Soviet leadership made the decision to authorize the deployment of the SS-20 missile.⁴⁰⁴ At the time this decision was made, the Soviet Union had thirteen IRBM divisions, armed with 543 SS-4 and SS-5 missiles. Their plan was to replace these antiquated missiles on a one-to-one basis with new SS-20 missiles. Deployment of SS-20 missiles began in mid-1976 and continued for the next several years.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Raymond Garthoff, "The Soviet SS-20 Decision," *Survival* 25 (May-June 1983): 112-114.

⁴⁰⁵ Zaloga, *Kremlin’s Nuclear Sword*, 171-172.

As discussed at the opening of this chapter, many Western officials were aghast at the deployment of Soviet SS-20 missiles against Europe. They accused the Soviet Union of seeking “military superiority in Europe”⁴⁰⁶ and supported this accusation by claiming that there was “nothing comparable on the Western side”⁴⁰⁷ and describing the Soviet deployment decision as “unwarranted and unexplained.”⁴⁰⁸ These accusations, however, ignored the six years of SALT negotiations that preceded the Soviet deployment decision and the arguments that both Soviet and American negotiators had made repeatedly throughout these negotiations.

The Soviet leadership believed that the course of the SALT negotiations from 1969-1975 fully explained and justified their decision to deploy SS-20 missiles against Europe in early 1976. Their decision to deploy these missiles was entirely in keeping with principles that they had been elaborating, arguments that they had been making, and proposals that they had been tabling over and over again in official forums and through secret channels for more than six years. At the opening of the SALT talks, Soviet negotiators argued that all American systems capable of reaching the Soviet Union should be counted against American strategic weapons totals and limited in the *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*. Only when all systems

⁴⁰⁶ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, November 11, 1976. “FRG-NATO Military Matters.” RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 01/15/14].

⁴⁰⁷ David Manfred Woerner, Shadow Defense Minister of the Christian Democratic Union in West Germany, as quoted in Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, August 10, 1976, “CDU/CSU Reaction to Reported MIRV-ing of Soviet IRBM’s.” RG 59: State Department Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD [accessed 01/15/14].

⁴⁰⁸ Fred Ikle, Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, as quoted in *The Economist*, September 11, 1976, 32.

capable of reaching either side were counted would the two sides be able to achieve *equal security*. Based on this novel understanding of nuclear equality, the Soviet Union called on the United States either to withdrawal their forward-based nuclear systems or to compensate the Soviet Union for these systems. Surprised by this attempt to regulate systems that American officials did not consider to be strategic, American negotiators argued that American FBS were balanced out by Soviet IRBMs and that both American FBS and Soviet IRBMs should be left out of SALT.⁴⁰⁹ Continued Soviet calls for including American FBS in the negotiations and the American refusal to do so produced complete stalemate in the negotiations until Kissinger offered to compensate the Soviets for American FBS by giving the Soviet Union more ICBMs and SLBMs in the Interim Agreement of 1972. The Soviet leadership was exultant that the United States had finally recognized the principle of equal security. But then a firestorm erupted in the United States. Senator Jackson introduced an amendment calling for equal numerical limits on intercontinental nuclear systems, and the Nixon Administration, to the surprise of many, immediately embraced it. Kissinger explained this reversal by arguing that the American negotiating position in SALT had to take into consideration the realities of American domestic politics. After two more years of strained negotiations, Brezhnev eventually became convinced that the only pathway to an agreement with the United States was to accept the equal ceilings called for by Jackson and his allies in the US Defense Department. This was a major concession, and Brezhnev was able to make this move only after waging a civil war against his own military and asserting

⁴⁰⁹ It should be noted that the United States first suggested this argument—that American FBS and Soviet IRBMs were equal.

his authority as General Secretary. The Soviet press then fell in line, heralding the Vladivostok accord as a major breakthrough, a real triumph of détente. But Jackson and the DOD refused to join the celebration. In fact, they denounced the Vladivostok agreement and demanded even deeper Soviet concessions. When Ford echoed these new demands, the Soviet leadership did not know what to think. They hoped to achieve an agreement based on Vladivostok, and they still wanted to introduce American FBS into the negotiations at some point in the future, but the US refused to yield related to Backfire bombers or cruise missiles or to make any promises regarding including FBS in future negotiations. Meanwhile, to make matters even worse, their own medium- and intermediate-range systems were antiquating, they were being penalized for using SS-11 ICBMs as IRBMs, and the United States was adding to its nuclear forces in Europe. In a final attempt to reach an agreement by the end of 1975, Dobrynin had urged the United States to seize the moment—when Brezhnev was still in power and before the next Party Congress had to make key decisions on military spending—but Ford not only ignored these pleas, he actually began taking an even harder line toward the Soviet Union in order to position himself to win the Republican presidential nomination.

When the Soviet leadership met together at the 25th Party Congress in early 1976, their evaluation of the history of the US-Soviet nuclear arms negotiations was extremely negative. Gromyko told Kissinger that the Soviets were “bitter about Backfire and the history of the past 15 months where [the Soviet Union] had made all the concessions.” He went on to say that the Soviets were bothered by the fact that the Soviet Union had “played Vladivostok as a major achievement, whereas the

President got clobbered for it.”⁴¹⁰ In late 1975, Kissinger summarized the Soviet disillusionment with the negotiations as follows: “they think that if they make more concessions, they are not sure we will agree even then, and even if we do that, they’re not sure all hell won’t break loose [in the United States].”⁴¹¹ The Soviet leadership doubted whether hardliners in the US would ever allow the two sides to reach a SALT agreement, and they doubted even more that such an agreement would provide them with any redress for the American forward-based nuclear systems surrounding the USSR or for the nuclear weapons of Britain and France. They had tried for more than six years to negotiate their way to equal security with the United States, but these efforts had failed. Based on this understanding of the history of the negotiations from 1969-1976 and of the prospects for achieving their goal of equal security through future negotiations, the Soviet leadership made the decision to deploy SS-20 missiles along their western borders and target these missiles at Western Europe. Alexander Bessmertnykh, a consul at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, told American officials that the Soviet decision to upgrade its theater nuclear forces was “a response to US refusal to include FBS in the SALT process.”⁴¹² In 1984 the Soviet Foreign Ministry also expressed this view in a book titled, *Equal Security: The Principle of Equality and Equal Security in Modern International Relations*. The book stated:

⁴¹⁰ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, July 25, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750725.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

⁴¹¹ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, August 17, 1975, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/750725.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

⁴¹² Message, US Secretary of State to American Embassy Moscow, “TNF and SALT II,” October 23, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-118-4-9-1.

The need facing the Soviet Union to modernize medium-range weapons systems also arose from certain political reasons. The fact is that the Soviet side more than once took the initiative to include Western medium-range capability within the process of the negotiations on the limitation of nuclear armaments. If this had happened, if this problem had been resolved by means of an appropriate agreement, then it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that the USSR would not have had any motive to modernize its weapons, counterbalancing analogous systems in the West.⁴¹³

Of course, we have no way of testing this assertion—we do not know whether the Soviet Union would have abstained from deploying its SS-20 missiles in 1976 if the two sides had been able to find a way to address American FBS in a SALT treaty in 1972 or 1975—but we do know that the history of SALT from 1969-1976 supported the Soviet claim. From the Soviet perspective, this history fully warranted and explained the SS-20 deployment decision.

⁴¹³ Собакин В.К., *Равная безопасность: принцип равенства и одинаковой безопасности в современных международных отношениях.* Москва: Междунар. Отношения, 1984.

CHAPTER FIVE

**CARTER AND
THE NEUTRON BOMB FIASCO,
1977-1978**

Introduction

As the Soviet Union began deploying its SS-20 missiles in 1976 and 1977, European leaders grew alarmed. Many of them believed that the SS-20 destroyed the balance of forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and constituted a qualitative new threat to Europe. As their concern grew, they discovered something almost equally as disconcerting—the United States did not share their view of the new Soviet weapon.

The Ford administration was divided over how to interpret the new weapon, with the Defense Department arguing that it gave the Soviet Union a distinct new advantage in the nuclear arms race with the West and the State Department arguing that it did not. In the end Ford chose, for the most part, to ignore the SS-20 missile and try to finalize a SALT II treaty. When Jimmy Carter became President in 1977, he had many novel ideas about how to approach the SALT negotiations, but he followed in Ford's footsteps in the way in which he initially responded to the SS-20 missile—he downplayed the importance of the weapon and focused on intercontinental nuclear systems. Carter argued that despite any changes in Soviet forces aimed at Europe or any perceived shortages in NATO's nuclear capabilities in Europe, the ultimate guarantor of European security was the American triad of intercontinental nuclear weapons. An intermediate-range missile like the SS-20, regardless of its potency, could never compare with America's strategic nuclear arsenal.

But Europeans, at whose capitals these new weapons were aimed, were not comforted by American missiles located thousands of miles away. They wanted the United States to remove the SS-20 through arms control negotiations or, failing that,

to counter the missile by deploying new nuclear missiles in Europe. Some Europeans concluded that new cruise missiles under development in the United States might fit this bill and began petitioning the Carter administration to make the new weapon available to Europe. These petitions put Carter into a quandary. He did not believe that the SS-20 warranted any response, and he had no interest in deploying new nuclear weapons in Europe, but he felt compelled to respond in some way to European concerns.

At the same time that Carter was wrestling with how to placate European concerns about the SS-20, another crisis engulfed his presidency. A series of newspaper articles reported that President Ford had approved plans to deploy a frightening new weapon in Europe called the neutron bomb. Many in Europe found the neutron bomb morally reprehensible, and protests broke out across the continent against it. Carter had no enthusiasm for the controversial weapon that he had inherited from Ford, but he was unsure how to calm the growing storm surrounding it.

Faced with two crises—European concerns about the SS-20 missile and protests against the neutron bomb—Carter came up with an improvised and half-hearted solution for solving both problems. He combined them together. The result was a complete disaster.

By the middle of 1978, only a year and a half into the Carter presidency, many in Europe were deeply unhappy with the American president. US-European relations were in tatters, the Soviet Union was deploying more SS-20 missiles every

month, and Carter seemed either unwilling or unable to respond to growing European fears about their security situation.

European Concerns about the SS-20 in 1976

In the spring of 1976, US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld invited representatives of the North Atlantic Council to the Pentagon to view the latest satellite images taken over the western regions of the USSR. One image showed the outlines of a newly-constructed missile base nestled within the snow-carpeted forests of the Ukraine. Zooming in further, the images captured a series of buildings that appeared to be large garages with retractable roofs. Inside the garages were truck-like vehicles, and mounted onto these trucks were Soviet SS-20 missiles targeted at Europe.⁴¹⁴

German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt found these images impressive and disturbing. According to Schmidt, the Allies received “a fairly accurate picture of what was happening through United States satellite observations.” American intelligence briefings convinced Schmidt that the new SS-20 missile was “many times more dangerous to Western Europe ” than the older SS-4 and SS-5 missiles that the SS-20 missiles were replacing. Whereas the SS-4s and SS-5s had one warhead, the SS-20 had three, and each of these three warheads could be aimed at a different target. “This meant,” Schmidt writes, “that each SS-20 rocket could destroy three different targets at the same time—three air bases or three cities.” While the old launchers for the SS-4 and SS-5 missiles could launch only one missile, the new

⁴¹⁴ Maynard W. Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War: An Inside Account of Negotiating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 3-4. *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 11, 1977, 1.

SS-20 launchers could be reloaded, allowing them to fire additional rockets after the first rockets were launched. The launchers for the obsolescing SS-4 and SS-5 missiles had been fixed, which meant that they could be easily targeted by Western systems. The new SS-20 launchers, by contrast, were motorized and moveable. This made them, in Schmidt's words, "elusive targets for Western weapons." The SS-20s were also significantly more accurate than their predecessors. SS-4 and SS-5 missiles could strike within a mile of their targets; SS-20s consistently hit within a quarter mile. The SS-20 also had a superior range—5,500 kilometers as opposed to 2,000 and 4,800 kilometers for the SS-4 and SS-5 respectively. The shorter ranges of the SS-4 and SS-5 missiles meant that these systems had to be stationed close to the Western borders of the Soviet Union in order to reach Western Europe, but the longer range of the SS-20 would enable it to cover all of Western Europe even if stationed east of the Ural Mountains. "Such an eastward shift," Schmidt writes, "would place the SS-20 out of the reach of the American, British, and French nuclear weapons stationed in Europe."⁴¹⁵

As European leaders learned more and more about the SS-20 missile in 1976, their worries grew. After meetings of the North Atlantic Council in Oslo in May and of the Defense Planning Group in Brussels in June, NATO Ministers voiced "concern at the sustained growth in the Warsaw Pact countries' military power...beyond

⁴¹⁵ Helmut Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective* (New York: Random House, 1989), 64. Donald Rumsfeld, *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1977* (Washington: Department of Defense, 1976). Memorandum, US Secretary of State to American Embassy in Bonn, "FRG Press Report on Ikle's Speech," September 3, 1976. RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives AAD [accessed 05/15/12]. *The Boston Globe*, January 9, 1977, 53. *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, May 31, 1976, 12.

levels apparently justified for defensive purposes.”⁴¹⁶ A few weeks later, a report of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency triggered a wave of public denunciations of the SS-20 in Europe.⁴¹⁷ Within days of the report, two major Paris newspapers carried front-page stories about the new Soviet missile. On August 4 *Figaro* declared that the ACDA report amounted to a “lifting of the veil by the Americans on the Soviet nuclear panoply.” The paper charged that the mobile SS-20 would enhance “Soviet military superiority.”⁴¹⁸ On August 5 *Le Monde* warned of the “increasing Soviet military threat” and worried that the Soviets were taking advantage of SALT limitations on intercontinental systems to devote more resources to weapons systems for the European theater.⁴¹⁹ On the same day as the *Le Monde* story, the West German Shadow Defense Minister called the SS-20 a “massive increase in Soviet nuclear striking power” and warned that the new weapon would give the Soviet Union “the ability to blackmail the free states of Europe.”⁴²⁰ During a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) in November, Major General Brandt, Head of the West German Defense Ministry Political Department, expressed

⁴¹⁶ Final Communiqué, Ministerial Session of the NATO North Atlantic Council, May 21, 1976, NATO Archives Online, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c760520a.htm> [accessed 12/12/13]. Final Communiqué, Ministerial Session of the NATO Defense Planning Group, June 11, 1976, NATO Archives Online, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c760610a.htm> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴¹⁷ American press reaction to the report helped fuel the European reaction. See Memorandum, US Secretary of State to US Mission NATO and American Embassies in Bonn, Paris, and Moscow, “Press Questions on ACDA Report on Soviet IRBMs,” July 31, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973—1976, National Archives AAD [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴¹⁸ Memorandum, American Embassy Paris to US Secretary of State, “Press Coverage of Soviet Arms Development,” August 6, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, “CDU/CSU Reaction to Mirving of Soviet IRBMs,” August 10, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

grave concern over the “imbalance in European theatre strategic forces” that would result from the SS-20 missile. The mobility of the new Soviet weapon represented a “great threat to Europe” that the Soviets might attempt to use for “political purposes as they had done against Great Britain during the 1956 Egyptian crisis.”⁴²¹ After another NPG meeting two weeks later, NATO ministers again expressed alarm over “Warsaw Pact attempts to achieve military superiority,” which they described as “destabilizing and a threat to peace.”⁴²² In December Secretary Rumsfeld and members of the Defense Intelligence Agency gave another briefing to the NATO Defense Planning Committee (DPC). Dutch politician and NATO General Secretary Joseph Luns called this briefing “very impressive,” concluding that it revealed “the ferocious determination of the USSR to achieve military superiority” in the European theater.⁴²³ Following this meeting, DPC Ministers expressed “serious concern at the relentless growth in the strength of the Warsaw Pact forces” and, for the first time in an official DPC communiqué, mentioned the SS-20 by name.⁴²⁴

The Ford Administration’s Response to the SS-20

Although briefings and reports by American officials throughout 1976 were the cause of considerable European alarm, the Ford Administration itself was

⁴²¹ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, “FRG-NATO Military Matters,” November 3, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴²² Final Communiqué, Ministerial Session of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, November 18, 1976, NATO Archives Online, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c761117a.htm>. [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴²³ Memorandum, US Secretary of State to Commander in Chief, Atlantic, “DPC Ministerial Meeting, December 7: Agenda Item III, United States Intelligence Briefing,” December 9, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴²⁴ Final Communiqué, Ministerial Session of the NATO Defense Planning Committee, December 8, 1976, NATO Archives Online, <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c761207a.htm> [accessed 12/12/13].

divided over how to view, present, and respond to the Soviet SS-20 missile. The Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and conservative intelligence analysts viewed the SS-20 as a grave new threat that gave the Soviet Union a new advantage in the nuclear arms race. They argued that the SS-20 required a definite American response. But the State Department believed that these concerns were exaggerated. They argued that the deployment of an intermediate-range nuclear missile, even one as potent as the Soviet SS-20, did not alter the complex balance of nuclear forces that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union, a balance that was determined primarily by intercontinental systems. Based on this view, Secretary Kissinger and his staff argued that a specific NATO response to the SS-20 was unnecessary.

Fred Ikle, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, was deeply concerned about the new threat posed by Soviet SS-20 missiles. In August he sent a report to Congress about the new missile and followed up on this report with several speeches calling attention to the SS-20. In September Ikle declared that the Soviet Union now possessed superiority in intermediate-range nuclear weapons and warned that the deployment of the SS-20 together with the Backfire bomber meant that "Russia's strength in regional bombers and missiles grows like a towering, dark cloud over Asia and Europe." Ikle argued that unless the US was able to find a way to limit these systems through negotiations, it would be forced "to compete with the Soviets in an expensive and wasteful buildup."⁴²⁵ When European officials expressed dismay at these comments and the threat that they depicted, State

⁴²⁵ *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, September 6, 1976, 27.

Department officials sought to minimize the importance of Soviet SS-20 deployment by comparing it to NATO's own routine modernization of its forces. During a press briefing, Bob McCloskey, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, said, "Obviously this development would increase their capability, but it is everybody's judgment that our capability—NATO's capability—is also increasing. And both sides have certainly been upgrading and modernizing their forces."⁴²⁶ In documents distributed within the State Department in the wake of Ikle's comments, State Department officials stressed the need to defend President Ford's decision "to focus on strategic systems" in arms negotiations and to dismiss any notion that "the strategic balance is threatened" by the SS-20 missiles.⁴²⁷

A few months later, the division in the Ford Administration over the SS-20 manifested itself in a clash between the State Department and the Defense Department over how to present the SS-20 in briefings to the NATO allies. In early November, the Defense Department sent a draft text to the State Department of a briefing that Secretary Rumsfeld planned to give to the NATO Nuclear Planning Group in November. In the proposed briefing, Rumsfeld would divide the nuclear weapons of NATO and the Warsaw Pact into three categories: 1) central strategic systems, which were the intercontinental weapons covered in SALT; 2) non-central, long-range systems that fell outside SALT definitions; and 3) short-range tactical

⁴²⁶ Memorandum, US Secretary of State to US Mission NATO and Embassies in London, Bonn, Paris, and Moscow, "Press Questions on ACDA Report on Soviet IRBMs," July 31, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴²⁷ Memorandum, US Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn, "FRG Press Report on SALT and Ikle's Speech," September 3, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

and battlefield systems. During the briefing, Rumsfeld would show charts that would compare side-by-side the weapons systems of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in each of the three categories. The charts for the second category—non-central, long-range systems—would include French and UK submarine-launched ballistic missiles, French intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and American FB-111 bombers in the NATO column and Soviet medium-range bombers and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, including SS-4, SS-5, and SS-20 missiles, in the Soviet column. The State Department strongly opposed this type of sub-categorization of the nuclear forces of the two military alliances. Instead, they favored “merging the central and non-central systems” together during the briefing to “avoid the presentation of a distinct European regional sub-balance.”⁴²⁸ The Defense Department argued in response to this suggestion that “the European balance [of] intermediate-range strike systems deserves serious attention, and that to mix it together with central strategic systems would lessen its visibility.”⁴²⁹ But this is exactly what the State Department wanted. They wanted to de-emphasize the correlation of forces in the European theater. Instead of drawing attention to the forces opposing each other in Europe, they believed that the upcoming Rumsfeld briefing (and all US briefings to NATO regarding nuclear weapons) should focus on the role played by the triad of American intercontinental systems (ICBMs, SLBMs,

⁴²⁸ Memorandum, James G. Lowenstein to Henry Kissinger, RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, Box 367, WL Sensitive Non-China 11/76, Department of State Record, National Archives of the United States. Accessed via Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=18792&navinfo=14968> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

and long-range bombers) in guaranteeing Europe's security and in maintaining parity between the United States and the Soviet Union in the overall balance of nuclear weapons. Comparing NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in Europe as a sub-category, they worried, would exaggerate the importance and threat of the SS-20. This might then "create a platform to promote alternative approaches to arms control [rather than focusing solely on intercontinental systems], and be used to rationalize introduction of new weapons systems into Europe"—two things that the State Department strongly opposed.⁴³⁰ On November 10 Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs James G. Lowenstein expressed this view to Kissinger when he wrote:

On the question of the European balance, it is in our interest and that of the Allies, that the integrity of the NATO deterrent Triad not be divided into sub-balances. It is particularly important that we do not allow the introduction of new weapons by the Soviets, such as the imminent deployment of the SS-X-20, to create the illusion that Europe is subject to "blackmail," or that a major European "response" is required.⁴³¹

A month after this controversy over the Rumsfeld briefing, Kissinger gave his own briefing to NATO Foreign Ministers during their meetings in Brussels from December 9-10, 1976. According to Kissinger's talking points for this meeting, he hoped to use his briefing to "put NATO concerns into perspective lest they produce a fatalistic mood," to assure the Allies that the current NATO strategy remained "a

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

valid foundation for defense and deterrence,” and to convince them that there was “no need for radical new concepts.”⁴³²

Competing intelligence analyses in 1976 further illustrate the divisions within the United States over how to interpret and respond to the SS-20 missile. Every year since 1950, the professional intelligence officers at the CIA had produced a series of “National Intelligence Estimates” (NIEs) on the Soviet Union. When George H. W. Bush became Director of the CIA in 1976, he decided to ask a group of Soviet experts outside the CIA to examine the Department’s intelligence data on Soviet nuclear programs and to create their own “alternate” intelligence report. Consequently, at the end of 1976, the CIA published two intelligence reports on Soviet strategic nuclear programs—the CIA’s official NIE and the alternate report. These two reports presented two very different interpretations of the threat posed by the SS-20.

The alternate report criticized the CIA for failing to anticipate the arrival of the SS-20 and for minimizing its significance. It argued that the CIA had become excessively preoccupied with Soviet intercontinental systems since the inception of SALT in 1969. NIEs in the 1960s had examined both central and non-central Soviet systems, but in the 1969 estimate, the alternate report pointed out, “medium bombers and MR/IRBM forces were relegated to a separate section on “Peripheral Forces.” In 1970 these systems disappeared altogether from the yearly NIEs. “The omission from the Estimates of any treatment of Soviet non-central systems,” the

⁴³² Memorandum, Assistant Secretary of State Arthur Hartman to Henry Kissinger, “NATO Ministerial: Objectives and Talking Points,” November 30, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/12/13].

report argued, “produces a picture of the strategic balance seriously at variance with the Soviets’ own view and minimizes the extent of their buildup.” The report concluded that the SS-20 was part of a concerted Soviet attempt to “eliminate whatever remaining advantage NATO may possess in theater nuclear forces”⁴³³ in the hopes that “important political benefits in Europe would flow from achievement of demonstrable regional nuclear preponderance.”⁴³⁴

The alternate report was completed before the CIA published its official NIE on Soviet nuclear weapons for 1976, and the authors of the official NIE had the opportunity to read the alternate report and to decide whether or not to include conclusions from the alternate report in the official NIE. Despite these facts, the official NIE included very little information about the Soviet SS-20. Absent were the dire predictions of a Soviet “regional nuclear preponderance” or of impending political blackmail. The official reports only concerns related to the SS-20 were that it had many of the same features as the intercontinental SS-16 missile, which would make it difficult to tell the two missiles apart, and that the Soviet military might secretly attempt to convert SS-20s to SS-16s by adding a third rocket booster to the SS-20, thus giving it intercontinental range. In other words, the CIA’s only worry

⁴³³ The Soviets would have agreed with this part of the analysis—that the deployment of the SS-20 was part of an effort “to eliminate whatever remaining advantage NATO may possess in theater nuclear forces.” This is exactly the point that Soviet officials made in justifying the deployment of the SS-20. They argued that despite parity in intercontinental systems, the United States still enjoyed an advantage in NATO theater nuclear forces. Thus, in order to achieve “equal security,” the Soviet Union needed to modernize its intermediate-range nuclear missiles by deploying the SS-20. Of course, the conservative authors of the alternate report were not aware that they were supporting the Soviet justification for the SS-20.

⁴³⁴ Author Redacted, “Intelligence Community Experiment in Competitive Analysis: Soviet Strategic Objectives, An Alternative View, Report of Team ‘B,’” December 1976, Central Intelligence Agency, Digital National Security Archive.

about the intermediate-range SS-20 missile was that it might possibly be mistaken for or converted into an intercontinental missile. The implication was that as long as the SS-20 remained an intermediate-range missile (that was targeted on Europe) and was not converted into an intercontinental missile (that could be targeted on the United States), it was not a major threat.⁴³⁵

Although the State Department sought to quell European concerns about the SS-20, Department of Defense briefings, with their satellite images and sober warnings, seemed to have a greater impact on how Europeans assessed the new threat during the final year of the Ford Administration. An American military attaché based in Europe described his feeling and that of many NATO officials in Europe at the end of 1976. "I am frightened," he said, "and I've never been frightened before."⁴³⁶ This rising fear led several Europeans to begin calling for some kind of a NATO response. West German Shadow Defense Minister said that the West could not put up with the "provocative Soviet rearmament" and that it had to do more than file "paper protests."⁴³⁷ FRG Major General Brandt told American

⁴³⁵ Director of Central Intelligence, "NIE 11-3/8-76: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict through the Mid-1980s," December 21, 1976, Central Intelligence Agency, Digital National Security Archive. In early 1976, CIA Director Colby (before he was replaced by Bush), showed a surprisingly accurate understanding of Soviet views of their new deployments. He stated during an NSC meeting, "The comparative number of weapons is evidently an important strategic measure to the Soviets. As you see, they now have fewer weapons than the US and could, therefore, view their current conversion and deployment programs in part as rectifying this imbalance." Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, January 8, 1976, The Gerald Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp> [accessed 04/24/14].

⁴³⁶ Memorandum, US Secretary of State to US Delegation Secretary, "Press Material," December 10, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/15/13].

⁴³⁷ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, August 10, 1976, "CDU/CSU Reaction to Reported MIRV-ing of Soviet IRBM's." Record Group 59: General

officials on December 22 that the SS-20 “posed an entirely new problem” and that it would be necessary for the Alliance to “rethink some if its strategy in order to take account of the new development.” “The Germans believed,” Brandt stated, that it was “essential to begin planning soon.”⁴³⁸

Carter’s SALT Priorities Worry Europe

With European concerns mounting, Jimmy Carter, governor of Georgia and Washington outsider, was elected the 39th President of the United States. Ford had become inextricably linked to the scandals of the Nixon presidency by pardoning Nixon shortly after becoming President. Carter, a devout Christian who promised to bring “sunshine laws” to Washington that would remove secrecy and restore morality to American governance, offered a stark contrast to the dirty politics of the Nixon/Ford years.

Europeans hoped that new President would be up to the challenge of responding to the new Soviet threat. Days before Carter was sworn in as President of the United States, the French newspaper *Aurore* wrote, “The USSR has silently forged a formidable war machine. Will the West be so irresponsible as to let it do this? This is the great question on the eve of the inauguration of the new US President.”⁴³⁹ But despite growing European anxiety, Carter demonstrated almost no interest at the beginning of his presidency in the threat posed to America’s

Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976. National Archives AAD.

⁴³⁸ Memorandum, American Embassy Bonn to US Secretary of State, “FRG-NATO Military Matters,” December 22, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives ADD [accessed 12/14/13].

⁴³⁹ Quoted in Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Report for 1977: A Critical Self-Appraisal,” Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-9-13-5-1.

European allies by the deployment of the SS-20 missile and the Backfire bomber. The historian Gaddis Smith, an eminent scholar of the Carter years, points out that issues involving Western Europe and NATO as a whole “played almost no role in the 1976 presidential campaign.”⁴⁴⁰ When Cyrus Vance, Carter’s Secretary of State, sent Carter an “Overview of Foreign Policy Issues and Positions” in October 1976, he had very little of substance to say about Europe as a whole, and he entirely ignored the question of nuclear weapons in Europe.⁴⁴¹

When it came to nuclear weapons, Carter’s primary objective was to conclude a SALT treaty that included sweeping reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of both sides. This aspiration, however, was incompatible with Soviet objectives for SALT, which had remained the same since November 1974—Soviet leaders hoped to finalize a SALT II treaty based on the Vladivostok agreement. They believed that this agreement included cruise missiles but did not include the Backfire bomber, which they claimed did not have intercontinental range. At the very end of the Ford presidency, Ford and Kissinger seemed increasingly willing to place limits on cruise missiles and to leave the Backfire bomber out of SALT, especially after a new CIA study completed in late 1976 concluded that Backfire was not an intercontinental system. But staunch opposition from the Defense

⁴⁴⁰ Gaddis Smith, “The SS-20 Challenge and Opportunity: The Dual-Track Decision and Its Consequences, 1977-1983, in Lawrence Kaplan, ed., *American Historians and the Atlantic Alliance*, London: The Kent State University Press, 1991, 118.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

Department prevented Ford from making concessions on either of these issues, and the SALT negotiations were at an impasse at the end of the Ford presidency.⁴⁴²

Initial contacts between Carter representatives and the Soviet leadership provided grounds for cautious optimism that Carter might be able to break the deadlock. Prior to the election, Carter sent Averell Harriman to Washington to assure Soviet leaders that détente would be strengthened under a Carter presidency. According to Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister G. M. Kornienko, Harriman led the Soviets to believe that Carter was prepared to start with Vladivostok before moving on to deeper cuts.⁴⁴³ After Carter's victory, Harriman sent Brezhnev a message on November 17, informing the Soviet leader that even before assuming office, Carter was ready to initiate an exchange of views on matters of mutual interest. This, according to Kornienko, led to the exchange of several oral communications that "promised a constructive development of the Soviet-American dialogue—at least on questions of limitations of strategic weapons—after Carter took office."⁴⁴⁴

But these early hopes were quickly tempered. On December 1 Harriman told Ambassador Dobrynin that when the SALT negotiations resumed after Carter

⁴⁴² State Department willingness to make the necessary concessions on cruise missiles and Backfire to finalize a SALT II Treaty and DOD opposition are discussed in *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, "US Plans SALT Resumption," September 6, 1976, 33. Details of the CIA's study on Backfire can be found in Director of Central Intelligence, "NIE 11-3/8-76: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict through the Mid-1980s," December 21, 1976, Central Intelligence Agency, Digital National Security Archive.

⁴⁴³ See Mark Garrison, "Hopes Raised and Dashed—Carter, Brezhnev, and SALT II: An Introduction to G. M. Kornienko's Commentary," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 140; and G.M. Korniyenko, "A 'Missed Opportunity'—Carter, Brezhnev, SALT II, and the Vance Mission to Moscow, November 1976-March 1977," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 141-143.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 141.

became President, Carter wanted to introduce bold new arms reduction proposals and would not “be bound by past negotiations.” Dobrynin was immediately taken aback by this “strange assertion.” “[A]n approach like that,” Dobrynin told Harriman, “is incomprehensible” and “fraught with serious complications for future negotiations.” “All previous negotiations,” Dobrynin scolded, “had been conducted on behalf of the United States, of the country as a whole, and the arrival of a new President should not mean breaking off everything positive that had achieved before him.”⁴⁴⁵ “This was a bad omen,” Kornienko writes, “soon to be more than borne out. But at the time we wanted to hope for the best.”⁴⁴⁶

Once Carter became President, Soviet leaders made several attempts to warn him that they would not be receptive to any approach to the SALT II negotiations that departed from their interpretation of the Vladivostok agreement. In a major speech on January 18 in the Soviet city of Tula, Brezhnev announced, “The Soviet Union is prepared to advance further in questions of limiting strategic armaments, but it is necessary to consolidate what has already been achieved and to implement the accord reached in Vladivostok.”⁴⁴⁷

But Carter ignored these warnings. On February 14 Carter sent a letter to Brezhnev that did not mention Vladivostok even once. Instead, he laid out a grand vision for “significant reductions” that would leave each side with “only the

⁴⁴⁵ Record of Conversation, A. F. Dobrynin and A. Harriman, from the Journal of Dobrynin A. F, published in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 144.

⁴⁴⁶ Korniyenko, “Missed Opportunity,” 141.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in *The Washington Post*, January 19, 1977. A letter from Brezhnev to Carter on February 4 repeated this theme: Letter, Leonid Brezhnev to Jimmy Carter, February 4, 1977, published in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 145-146.

minimum level of armaments sufficient to provide security to both sides.”⁴⁴⁸ Brezhnev was not happy with this line of thinking. Clearly peeved at Carter’s grandiose notions, Brezhnev tried to bring Carter back to the solid ground of Vladivostok. In a letter on February 25, he said, “As I already wrote to you, we firmly believe that in the first place it is necessary to complete the drafting of a new agreement on limitation of strategic offensive weapons, on the basis of that which was agreed in Vladivostok.” Brezhnev urged Carter not to minimize so quickly the accomplishments of the previous few years and warned him not to abandon “a responsible, realistic approach” in favor of “introducing proposals which are known to be unacceptable.”⁴⁴⁹

Carter, however, still wanted to dream big. On March 21 Secretary of State Vance told Dobrynin that the Carter Administration did not “consider itself completely committed to the approach of the former administration.” Carter wanted to negotiate an agreement based on sweeping cuts in strategic weapons. The “Carter government,” Vance elaborated, “strives toward real, and not just superficial reduction of strategic weapon.” Dobrynin was once again baffled by these statements, which discounted the difficult negotiations that went into achieving the Vladivostok understanding. The “reevaluation by every new administration of

⁴⁴⁸ Letter, Jimmy Carter to Leonid Brezhnev, February 14, 1977, published in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 147.

⁴⁴⁹ Letter, Leonid Brezhnev to Jimmy Carter, February 25, 1977, published in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 5 (Spring 1995): 150.

agreement reached by its predecessor does not strengthen the basis for international agreements,” Dobrynin told Vance.⁴⁵⁰

Despite numerous warnings from multiple Soviet officials that the Soviet Union wanted to proceed from the Vladivostok agreement and would reject any grand initiatives, Carter decided to send Vance to Moscow with exactly this kind of proposal. During a National Security Council meeting a few days before Vance left for Moscow, Carter enthusiastically presented the message that Vance would carry for him to Moscow. “I want to say [to the Soviets] that we are wiping the slate clean of the packages Kissinger put forward. They are all gone. This is our package,” Carter declared.⁴⁵¹

The package that Vance brought to Moscow on behalf of Carter was an ambitious slate of reductions that went well beyond Vladivostok. Whereas the Vladivostok agreement would limit both sides to 2,400 delivery vehicles, Carter proposed reducing this number to as low as 1,800. In addition, Carter wanted to place additional limits on Soviet “heavy” ballistic missiles, freeze deployments and ban modifications of existing ICBMs, and prohibit the development, testing, and deployment of mobile ICBMs. Together with this package, Carter would agree to ban cruise missiles with ranges over 2,500 km and to not place any limits on Soviet Backfire bombers, as long as the Soviet Union would agree never to deploy this aircraft as a strategic weapon against US territory. If the Soviets rejected this

⁴⁵⁰ Record of Conversation, Anatoly Dobrynin and Cyrus Vance, March 21, 1977, Box 12 1977-1978, Russian and East European Archive Document Database, National Security Archive.

⁴⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting of the National Security Council, March 22, 1977, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980* (hereafter, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 33, SALT II), document 155.

comprehensive package, then Carter was willing to consider a less ambitious agreement that deferred any decision on Backfire and cruise missiles until future negotiations and reduced the Vladivostok limits of 2,400 down to 2,300.⁴⁵²

When Vance presented these proposals to Gromyko on March 28 in Moscow, Gromyko immediately rejected both of them. According to Korniyenko, the Soviet leadership was unanimous in its opposition to both proposals. It was “absolutely illogical, lacking an common sense,” they argued, “to throw out the results of five years of joint work in a substantially already finished SALT-2 Treaty, and to begin what amounted to new negotiations requiring new conceptual decisions and prolonged working out of many practical, including technical, questions.”⁴⁵³

After Vance left Moscow, the Soviet leadership concluded that Carter had made his new proposals to try to embarrass them. Prior to Vance’s trip, the outlines of Vance’s proposals had appeared in the American press in what seemed to be a series of controlled leaks by the Carter administration. The Soviet leadership interpreted these leaks as evidence that Carter was not really serious, “that he was merely trying to achieve a propaganda victory.”⁴⁵⁴ A *Pravda* article published shortly after the Vance trip accused the US of making unrealistic proposals “only to create a pretext for talking about Soviet intransigence.”⁴⁵⁵ The Soviets were even more unhappy when Carter gave a press conference that criticized the Soviet government before Vance had even returned to Washington from Moscow. In

⁴⁵² Presidential Directive / NSC-7, “SALT Negotiations,” March 23, 1977, Digital National Security Archive..

⁴⁵³ Korniyenko, “Missed Opportunity,” 141.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ As quoted in Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “Soviet US-Relations: A Six-Month Perspective,” August 15, 1977, Digital National Security Archive.

response Gromyko gave a scathing and wide-ranging press conference the next day that blasted the Carter Administration and announced a hardening of the Soviet position.⁴⁵⁶

Why were the Soviets so upset at Carter's proposals? Soviet leaders were bothered by Carter's grand reductions package because they felt that they had already made a major concession at Vladivostok in 1974 when they dropped their demand for compensation in SALT for American forward-bases systems. This had been a difficult psychological shift for the Soviet leadership, and Brezhnev had shed "political blood" to obtain support for this change within the Politburo. When Vance announced Carter's proposal for sweeping cuts, it was like he was ripping off the bandage over a raw wound. Moreover, from the Soviet perspective, deeper reductions in intercontinental systems would only increase the prominence of European-based nuclear systems and further expose the Soviet Union to attack from American forward-based systems. The role of these systems, Gromyko stated, "would grow to the detriment of the USSR's security." If the Soviets went along with Carter's ultimate goal and agreed to eliminate all intercontinental nuclear systems, they would find themselves in a terrible situation. Gromyko explained this thinking:

After such an operation, as a result of which the USSR would be deprived of systems that could reach US territory, US forward-based nuclear systems (about 800 missile-carrying aircraft and land-based missiles) would still be in immediate proximity to the Soviet Union, American aircraft carriers with planes capable of delivering offensive nuclear weapons (more than 500 planes) would still ply the waters, the American allies, some of which have their own strategic weapons, would remain, etc.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ A transcript of the Gromyko press conference on March 31 can be found in *Pravda*, April 1, 1977, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ *Pravda*, April 1, 1977, 1-2.

“Such a prospect,” he concluded, “would suit the Pentagon generals very well, of course—but after all, in serious talks one cannot count on the naiveté of one’s partners.”⁴⁵⁸

The Soviets were also displeased that Carter’s less ambitious proposal still attempted to place limits on the Backfire bomber, which they insisted was not a strategic weapon, and to exclude American cruise missiles, which they claimed was. Gromyko charged Carter with “high-sounding but false words” because his proposal would place limits on three aspects of the strategic competition—ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers—while allowing a “fourth component of strategic arms” to be created, “i.e., thousands upon thousands of long-range cruise missiles threatening people with nuclear death.” Gromyko argued that the two sides had been very close to solving both of these issues at the end of the Ford Administration but that Carter had returned to earlier positions that were designed to be rejected and guaranteed to produce stalemate.⁴⁵⁹

If the Soviets were upset about Carter’s bold proposals, one might expect America’s NATO allies to be pleased with them. But this was not the case. European leaders were deeply worried about Carter’s SALT priorities. Like the Soviet leadership, many Europeans believed that reductions in intercontinental systems would increase the importance of European-oriented systems, but Soviet and European leaders drew the exact opposition conclusion from this belief. While Soviet leaders believed that an increase in the importance of these systems would

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

make the *Soviet* security situation worse, European leaders believed that it would make the *European* security situation worse. The Soviets were worried about an increase in importance for European theater nuclear systems because they believed that NATO held a clear advantage in these systems; they pointed to the 7,000 American nuclear warheads in Europe, US Carrier-based aircraft, and the nuclear weapons in the hands of US allies. But Europeans, looking through the other end of the telescope, concluded that the Soviet Union held a clear advantage over NATO in nuclear weapons related to the European theater. They tended to minimize the effectiveness of NATO systems, the weapons so feared by the Soviets, and maximize the threat posed by Soviet systems targeted at Europe, especially the new Backfire bomber and the SS-20 missile. The United States attempted to placate these fears by reminding Europe that the ultimate guarantee of European security was American intercontinental systems—not NATO theater systems—but Europeans were not comforted by these assurances. They could never be one hundred percent certain that the United States would really use its intercontinental nuclear systems against the Soviet Union if a nuclear war broke out in Europe because doing so would guarantee a retaliatory strike by the Soviet Union against American territory. Based on this European-focused view of the overall balance of nuclear forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, European leaders worried that Carter's pursuit of major reductions in intercontinental systems might translate into a worsened security situation for Europe. These general concerns were further heightened by specific American proposals related to the Backfire bomber and the SS-20 missile, proposals that seemed to prioritize American security over the security of Europe.

Carter's primary concern related to both the Backfire bomber and the SS-20 missile was not how these systems impacted European security; his chief focus was to ensure that neither weapon could be used to attack the United States. During the Nixon and Ford presidencies, the American government had been divided over the range of the Backfire bomber—the State Department had believed that it was a medium-range bomber designed for use against European targets, but the Air Force and the Department of Defense had argued that the Backfire had enough range to drop nuclear bombs over the United States. In the hopes of resolving this controversy, in 1976 the CIA hired the aerospace company McDonnell Douglas to conduct a new, top-secret study of the Backfire bomber. The study concluded that the aircraft was clearly designed to be a medium-range bomber for use against Europe, not an intercontinental system for use against the United States.⁴⁶⁰ When Carter assumed office in 1977, he and his top advisors adopted this interpretation of the Backfire's range. In a memorandum to Carter in March, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor, told the President that the Backfire was "not a militarily significant weapons system."⁴⁶¹ Based on this conclusion, Carter was willing to drop the long-standing American insistence that Backfire bombers be included in SALT. Vance told Gromyko that the US would be "willing to consider the

⁴⁶⁰ Director of Central Intelligence, "NIE 11-3/8-76: Soviet Forces for Intercontinental Conflict through the Mid-1980s," December 21, 1976, Central Intelligence Agency, Digital National Security Archive.

⁴⁶¹ Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, March 18, 1976, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 33, SALT II, document 154.

Soviet position on the Backfire bomber, provided in no instance the Backfire [be] deployed as a strategic weapon.”⁴⁶²

Carter’s position on the SS-20 mirrored his position on the Backfire bomber—his primary concern was to make sure that the intermediate-range missile could never be converted to an intercontinental weapon. Since the SS-20 missile was built using the first two rocket stages of the three-stage, intercontinental SS-16 missile, Carter worried that the SS-16 could be disguised as an SS-20, which would enable the Soviets to cheat when it came to counting strategic systems in SALT, or that the SS-20 could be quickly converted into an intercontinental missile by adding the SS-16’s third stage to it. Carter wanted some kind of assurance from the Soviets that they would not attempt either scenario. Just days after his inauguration, Carter asked Dobrynin how the US would be able to “confirm the difference between the two” systems,⁴⁶³ and in March Vance told Gromyko that “the real problem” with the SS-20 missile was that “some assurance was necessary against upgrading the missile by adding a third stage and thereby converting it to an ICBM.”⁴⁶⁴ In April Brzezinski told reporters that the US was pushing Moscow to make “some arrangements whereby we could clearly differentiate the two.”⁴⁶⁵

These positions on the Backfire bomber and the SS-20 missile show that in early 1977 the Carter administration had little regard for European anxieties over

⁴⁶² Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting of the National Security Council, March 22, 1977, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 33, SALT II, document 155.

⁴⁶³ Memorandum of Conversation, Jimmy Carter and Anatoly Dobrynin, February 1, 1977, FRUS 69-76, Vol. 33, SALT II, document 148.

⁴⁶⁴ Telegram, Secretary of State Vance in Moscow to President Jimmy Carter, “SALT Discussions,” March 28, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-22-1-37-9.

⁴⁶⁵ *Aviation Weekly*, April 18, 1977, 34.

the growth in Soviet systems aimed at Europe. While Europeans worried about the Backfire bomber's ability to rain down nuclear decimation on NATO capitals, Brzezinski said that it was "not a militarily significant weapons system" and Vance offered to exclude it from SALT. While Europeans expressed alarm at the SS-20's ability to flatten almost all of Europe, the Carter administration said that the "real problem" with the SS-20 was that it might be converted into an intercontinental missile.

These positions were deeply troubling to European leaders. After Vance's trip to Moscow in March, a member of the Soviet Politburo expressed what many were feeling at the time when he told a visiting European that the US proposals on SALT were "the greatest display of cynicism imaginable" because they "traded on European nuclear vulnerability while guaranteeing immunity to the US."⁴⁶⁶

After the Vance fiasco in March, the Carter administration began moderating its SALT positions, and this opened the way for movement in the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union. But Carter's new SALT positions continued to worry Europeans, as Carter still seemed to focus on American security at the expense of European security. From May 18-20 Vance met with Gromyko in Geneva, and during this time they made considerable headway toward an overall framework for a future SALT treaty. Carter was very pleased with this progress toward a SALT agreement, but when Ambassador Paul Warnke, Chief US SALT negotiator, briefed NATO Permanent Representatives on the details of this framework on May 23, they were not happy with what they heard.

⁴⁶⁶ Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Soviet US-Relations: A Six-Month Perspective," August 15, 1977, Digital National Security Archive.

Warnke informed the NATO officials that Gromyko and Vance had agreed to a three-piece structure for a future SALT treaty. The first piece would be a treaty based on the agreement at Vladivostok. Neither Backfire bombers nor cruise missiles would be included in this treaty, which would last until 1985. The second piece of the framework would be a shorter, three-year agreement that would temporarily cover some of the issues that had paralyzed the negotiations in recent years, including cruise missiles. Cruise missiles remained a contentious issue, but the two sides had agreed to place limits on air-launched cruise missiles on bombers. In addition, the United States expressed a willingness to ban ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles over 600 km if the Soviets would accept additional limits on some of their intercontinental “heavy” missiles. The third piece of the framework would be a joint statement of principles, in which the two sides would pledge to negotiate another SALT treaty in the future that would include “significant reductions” in intercontinental delivery vehicles. Warnke also informed the NATO representatives that the United States would not endeavor to place any limits on Backfire bombers or SS-20 missiles in any of the three pieces of the framework if the Soviet Union provided the US with “high level assurances” that neither system would be “deployed or used” as a strategic weapon, i.e., a weapon capable of reaching the United States.⁴⁶⁷

According to James Thompson, a member of Carter’s National Security Council, Warnke’s briefing and the details of the three-piece framework produced “a

⁴⁶⁷ Message, NATO 3980/1 to US SAL II Delegation, “Ambassador Warnke’s May 23 Presentation to Special Session of NATO Permanent Representatives on Secretary Vance’s SALT Discussions with Gromyko,” May 24, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-22-2-52-1.

strong and negative” reaction from the NATO allies.⁴⁶⁸ Once again, the US seemed eager to ensure that Backfire bombers and SS-20 missiles would never be used against the United States but entirely insensitive to the fact that these weapons would be able to devastate Europe. In addition, the United States was now willing to place limits on sea- and ground-launched cruise missiles, two systems that some NATO officials believed might eventually be of great value to Europe. According to Thompson, to many European officials at the time, the United States “appeared to be more concerned about limiting the nuclear threat to the United States than the nuclear threat to Europe, and to be willing to bargain away weapons important to Europe to obtain limits on Soviet strategic forces.”⁴⁶⁹

Cruise Missile Controversy

After the Warnke briefing on the three-piece framework, European leaders, led by the British and West Germans, made their concerns known to Carter.⁴⁷⁰ They asked for more frequent and transparent consultations on the direction of the SALT negotiations, and, according to Thompson, they “intensified earlier requests for technical and operational American analyses on the Cruise missile issue.”⁴⁷¹ European officials were worried that Carter would negotiate away cruise missiles, and they wanted to learn more about the potential of these missiles in order to make their position known to the President. “Up to then,” Cyrus Vance writes in his memoirs, “we had not given our allies adequate information about the state of development of these weapons, nor had we made clear to them our strategy in

⁴⁶⁸ Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 87

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ As quoted in Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 87.

negotiating short-term limits on the deployment of cruise missiles at the May talks in Geneva.”⁴⁷²

The European interest in learning more about cruise missiles stemmed in part from information that they had received from American military officials during the Ford administration. During the Ford presidency, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and other members of the military had concluded that ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) might eventually become a powerful addition to NATO’s nuclear arsenal. George Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, had argued that NATO might be able to use GLCMs to “cover all NATO targets from Germany and Turkey.”⁴⁷³ The US did not have any programs in place to develop ground-launched cruise missiles in 1976, but Brown argued that the US had to protect the potential of these weapons.⁴⁷⁴ Based on this view, Rumsfeld and Brown had succeeded in preventing Kissinger from allowing any limits to be placed on cruise missiles in SALT. In addition, Rumsfeld had succeeded in piquing European interest in these weapons. After Rumsfeld gave a top-secret briefing on cruise missiles to the NATO Nuclear Planning Group in Hamburg on January 21, 1976, the British Secretary of

⁴⁷² Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 66. Vance claims that this was due to the fact that, according to Carter administration estimates, cruise missiles were still five years away from being ready to be deployed.

⁴⁷³ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, January 8, 1976, Ford Presidential Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/760108.pdf> [accessed 11/2/13].

⁴⁷⁴ Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, July 30, 1976, Ford Presidential Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0312/760730.pdf> [accessed 04/24/14].

State for Defense suggested that “cruise missiles may in time serve as Europe’s counterpart to Soviet IRBMs.”⁴⁷⁵

Rumsfeld had been eager to share information about cruise missiles with the allies, but Carter was not. At the start of the Carter presidency, Carter refused European requests for additional briefings on the state of American programs to develop cruise missiles “for fear they would whet European appetite for the missiles.”⁴⁷⁶ Unlike Rumsfeld and Brown, Carter did not think that the allies needed cruise missiles in Europe to counter Soviet IRBMs, and he did not want to increase European interest in a weapon that he had no desire to deploy in Europe. In addition, Carter wanted the freedom to use cruise missiles as a bargaining chip to trade with the Soviets for reductions in Soviet heavy ICBMs in SALT. Maynard Glitman, the Deputy Chief at the US Mission to NATO, writes, “The US view at this point was that US nuclear forces then assigned to NATO—essentially aircraft, shorter range missiles, and artillery along with the strategic forces backing them—were sufficient to deter the Soviets and their new SS-20s. Thus we saw no military need to deploy additional nuclear forces in Europe. Also we did not wish to limit our flexibility in SALT.”⁴⁷⁷

Carter officials labored to convince Europeans leaders that the SS-20 missile did not significantly change their security situation and that Europe, therefore, did not need cruise missiles. Deputy National Security Advisor David Aaron assured

⁴⁷⁵ Memorandum, US Secretary of State to Commander in Chief, United States Army, Europe, “NPG Ministerial—Highlights,” January 23, 1976, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File, 1973--1976, National Archives AAD [accessed 12/14/13].

⁴⁷⁶ As quoted in Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 87.

⁴⁷⁷ Glitman, *The Last Battle*, 20.

German and British officials that there was actually a “disparity in NATO’s favor when Soviet theater weapons are compared to weapons available to the U.S. to cover targets of interest to NATO.”⁴⁷⁸ Aaron argued that the SS-20 and Backfire did not “pose a qualitatively new threat” and assured his German and British counterparts that the “theater nuclear situation” was “greatly overshadowed by the immense number of strategic weapons at the disposal of each side.” Even if the US agreed in SALT to large reductions of its intercontinental systems, these “SALT limits would not cause any target coverage problems, even with an unconstrained Soviet theater force, given the versatility of [American] strategic programs and the growing number of weapons available to the US.” But European leaders remained unconvinced. The West German Political Director rejected Aaron’s arguments, asserting that a disparity already existed in favor of the Soviet Union in “medium range capabilities in Europe” and that “further reductions in the strategic level, without some change in the medium range situation, would lead to further, dramatic disparities in the theater as the Soviets deploy the SS-20.”⁴⁷⁹

Carter was reluctant to brief the allies on cruise missiles, but he felt compelled to do so when the three-piece framework produced such a “strong and negative” response and European leaders intensified their requests for information. In coordination with Brzezinski, Carter decided on a multi-pronged strategy to

⁴⁷⁸ This matches the arguments made by Soviet officials prior to deploying the SS-20—that there was a “disparity in NATO’s favor when Soviet theater weapons are compared to weapons available to the US to cover targets of interest to NATO” (Telegram, US Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn, “Consultations with Allies on SALT and Western Security,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library 2010, NLC-16-110-7-9-6).

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. Letter, Ambassador Kingman Brewster to Zbigniew Brzezinski, February 6, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-12-2-40-6.

bringing the allies in line the administration's thinking on cruise missiles. Defense Secretary Brown would discuss the matter with NATO ministers at the NATO NPG meeting on June 10 in Ottawa, Paul Warnke would clarify the US position to the Allies during a visit to Europe in late June, and the State Department would produce a balanced paper on cruise missiles to distribute to the allies.⁴⁸⁰ None of these efforts, however, eliminated European interest in cruise missiles or strengthened European confidence in Carter's priorities.

After the June 10 NATO NPG in Ottawa, the NATO Ministers continued to be "concerned about the SS-20 and see cruise missiles as a possible NATO response."⁴⁸¹ Leslie Gelb's report did nothing to diminish this view. One of the paper's principle architects, James Goodby, was opposed to the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe and this opposition came through in the supposedly-balanced report. European leaders rejected the paper as being overly critical toward cruise missiles and took issue with the conclusion that the coverage provided by American intercontinental missiles made cruise missiles in Europe unnecessary.⁴⁸²

When the NATO NPG met again on October 10-11 in Bari, Italy, several of the European Ministers urged Defense Secretary Brown not to allow the US government to negotiate away the right to deploy cruise missiles in Europe. "We cannot forgo such weaponry," Pierre E. Champenois, politico-military-affairs counselor in the

⁴⁸⁰ Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Summary Report for Your Information and Reaction of the Special Coordinating Committee Meeting," June 7, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-17-4-2-3-4. Haslam, *Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 87. Memorandum, Marshall Brent to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Soviet Union Chronology," January 13, 1980, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-SAFE 39 D-34-81-1-1.

⁴⁸¹ Memorandum, Policy Analysis Cluster to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Evening Report," June 10, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-10-3-2-18-6.

⁴⁸² Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 87-88.

Belgian Foreign Ministry, remarked after meeting Brown.⁴⁸³ West German officials tabled a proposal for the United States to alter its SALT position to allow cruise missiles. When the US “brusquely” rejected the proposal, West German officials were furious.⁴⁸⁴

Three weeks later, the West German Chancellor himself responded. On October 28, in a speech at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, Helmut Schmidt gave European concerns about the Soviet SS-20 their most prominent voice to that point in time. Schmidt argued that by codifying the strategic nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union, SALT actually neutralized the strategic capabilities of the two sides. The result of this neutralization, Smith argued, was a magnification of the significance of the disparities between East and West in nuclear tactical and conventional weapons. “[S]trategic arms limitations confined to the United States and the Soviet Union,” Schmidt stated, “will inevitably impair the security of the West European members of the Alliance vis-à-vis Soviet military superiority in Europe if we do not succeed in removing the disparities of military power in Europe parallel to the SALT negotiations.”⁴⁸⁵

Carter found himself faced with a dilemma after Schmidt’s speech. He believed such a high profile statement by the leader of one of America’s most important NATO allies required a response. According to Maynard Glitman, Carter concluded at this time that “Allied concerns, particularly among the Germans...could

⁴⁸³ *Newsweek*, “The New Math of SALT,” October 24, 1977, 53.

⁴⁸⁴ Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, 89.

⁴⁸⁵ The Schmidt speech is published in *Survival, The Journal of the Institute of Strategic Studies* (Jan/Feb 1978): 2-10.

not be ignored.”⁴⁸⁶ But Carter did not know how to respond. The chief difficulty in formulating a response that would be palatable for both Carter and European leaders was that Carter still did not accept the speech’s central tenants.

Carter’s views were buttressed by a CIA report that Brzezinski sent to him one month after Schmidt’s speech. The report argued that European security concerns were more about “economic vulnerability, weak governments, lack of influence in the world,” and uncertainties about “how important they are to Americans” and less about actual military threats from the Soviet Union. Europeans’ “worries about new weapons and arms control,” the report concluded, were “compounded and exaggerated” by “an amalgam of concerns that feed upon one each other.”⁴⁸⁷ Shortly after Schmidt’s speech, Vance sent a secret message to American officials at NATO headquarters that echoed this assessment. Vance informed these officials that “the US did not accept [the] pessimistic assessment of [the] Schmidt IISS speech that [the] strategic deterrent was neutralized.” Vance believed that Schmidt’s inaccurate view of the situation created a political problem for the West Germans, a “problem of political perception.” Nevertheless, although the US did not accept Schmidt’s view, Carter and Vance still felt compelled to find a way “to deal with the political problem posed, particularly for the FRG, by the modernization of Soviet theater forces which, even if they only added to the

⁴⁸⁶ Glitman, *The Last Battle*, 20.

⁴⁸⁷ Memorandum, “Security Issues and the Alliance: Main Currents in European Thinking,” December 7, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-8-12-3-2-5.

redundancy of Soviet force, had aroused German concern.”⁴⁸⁸ Carter did not believe that the problem was real, but he believed that he needed to help in some way. He was, however, reluctant to agree to a military response—the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe—to a problem that he viewed as primarily political and psychological. He also did not want to sidetrack US-Soviet strategic arms negotiations by attempting to negotiate limits on intermediate-range SS-20 missiles in the already complex SALT II negotiations. He was very aware of the fact that previous efforts to deal with the medium-range Backfire bomber in SALT had paralyzed the negotiations for years. With Europeans clamoring for some type of action, Carter found himself in a quandary. How should he respond to a problem that he did not believe was real?

The Neutron Bomb Fiasco

As Europeans pressed the American government for a response to the SS-20 missile, the Carter administration found itself in the midst of another crisis—a growing controversy surrounding American plans to deploy newly-developed “enhanced radiation warheads” (ERWs) on short-range nuclear missiles in Europe as part of pre-existing NATO modernization plans authorized by President Ford. Walter Pincus, a staff writer for the *Washington Post*, brought this new warhead to public attention with an article in the *Post* on June 7, 1977. Pincus described how the new warhead was designed “to kill people on the battlefield through the release of neutrons” while doing minimal damage to the surrounding buildings and

⁴⁸⁸ Message, US Secretary of State to US Missions NATO, US Missions Geneva, and American Embassies in Paris, London, and Bonn, “Consultations with French on SALT,” January 31, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-5-48-5.

equipment. The enhanced radiation warhead, Pincus explained, released very little explosive blast and heat, but it maximized the “killing dose of neutron radiation.”⁴⁸⁹ Pincus revealed that funding for the new weapon was buried in a \$102 billion public works appropriation bill before Congress. The day after Pincus’ story, the *Washington Post* published an editorial in which it denounced the new weapon, describing it as “devilishly seductive—and dead wrong.”⁴⁹⁰ Many who read these reports found the enhanced radiation warhead deeply disturbing. The weapon quickly acquired the sci-fi-sounding name “neutron bomb,” and creative journalists around the country competed to see who could describe the weapon in the most horrifying terms.⁴⁹¹ *The Boston Globe*, for example, compared it to nerve gas, claimed that it was “on the other side of sanity,” and described how Hitler would have used the weapon to “wipe out all Parisiens in Paris without even knocking Mona Lisa from the Louvre wall.”⁴⁹² These American news articles were quickly picked up in the European press, which, in the words of US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, “set off an explosion of political and public reaction” across Europe.⁴⁹³ The Soviet Union also reacted swiftly to news of the neutron bomb, describing it as an

⁴⁸⁹ *Washington Post*, “Carter Weighing Radiation Warhead,” June 7, 1977, A5.

⁴⁹⁰ *Washington Post*, “A New Warhead We Don’t Need,” June 8, 1977, A22.

⁴⁹¹ One of the most frightening and graphic articles came from Pincus himself. Pincus wrote a detailed article about how the US government tested the effects of neutron radiation on monkeys. Pincus reported that government scientists had trained monkeys to run on treadmills and then put them into a “squeeze box” where they exposed to a “whole-body dose of mixed gamma-neutron radiation.” This article must have reinforced the growing impression that this weapon was created by evil geniuses gone mad. *Washington Post*, “Monkey’s Get Radiation in Neutron Bomb Tests,” June 22, 1977, A10.

⁴⁹² *The Boston Globe*, “The True Precision Bomb,” June 9, 1977, 20.

⁴⁹³ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices*, 68.

inhuman, “chemical-warfare weapon”⁴⁹⁴ and launching a sustained, international campaign against it.⁴⁹⁵

The Pincus story and the storm that followed it caught the Carter administration by surprise. A few weeks after the first story broke, Carter admitted that when he gave his support for the appropriations bill before Congress, he had not even known that the neutron bomb was in it.⁴⁹⁶ To justify how this oversight could be possible, Carter explained that the enhanced radiation warhead was not really a new weapon; it had been in development for almost twenty years. President Ford had authorized the development of the weapon with zero fanfare. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld had then informed NATO ministers in January of 1976 of the US intention to develop the weapon for deployment in Europe, and the NATO Nuclear Planning Group had endorsed the US decision in June of 1976 with “no substantive debate at either the Ministerial or technical level of the pros and cons of the enhanced radiation concept.”⁴⁹⁷ The NATO Ministers assumed that “there would be no public discussion of the weapons systems, and that it could be integrated quietly with the rest of the theater nuclear posture.”⁴⁹⁸ When Carter took office, he followed

⁴⁹⁴ *Pravda*, June 19, 1977, 4. (CDSP).

⁴⁹⁵ Details of the Soviet response can be found in the editorial comments in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, (formerly *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*), No. 31, Vol. 29, (August 31, 1977): 16; and No. 32, Vol. 29 (September 07, 1977): 14.

⁴⁹⁶ Transcript, News Conference with President Jimmy Carter, July 12, 1977, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7786&st=tactical&st1> [accessed 12/14/13].

⁴⁹⁷ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, “European Attitudes toward the ‘Neutron Bomb,’” July 25, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 16, Folder: “Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 6-8/77.”

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the pattern of the NATO Ministers and approved the program to develop the weapon but, according to Pentagon sources, “did not go into the specifics of the Lance neutron warhead.”⁴⁹⁹ Thus, the Pincus story and the resulting controversy found Carter flat-footed. Several weeks after story broke, Carter announced that although he approved development of the weapon in order to keep US options open, he had “not yet decided whether to advocate deployment of the neutron bomb.”⁵⁰⁰

One Solution for Two Crises

At the end of 1977, Carter found himself faced with two crises—European outcry at the apparent lack of American concern over the SS-20 missile and an international backlash against the neutron bomb. Struggling to find solutions to both predicaments, Carter made the ill-fated decision to attempt to solve both problems by combining them together. In November Carter approved a three-step plan for dealing with both the SS-20 and the neutron bomb: 1) the US would announce that it would proceed with production of the enhanced radiation warhead; 2) this announcement would be accompanied by a simultaneous public announcement by NATO in favor of deploying the weapon in Europe; and 3) the US would offer not to deploy the neutron bomb if the Soviet Union refrained from deploying the SS-20 missile.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ *Washington Post*, “Carter Weighing Radiation Warhead,” June 7, 1977, A5.

⁵⁰⁰ Transcript, News Conference with President Jimmy Carter, July 12, 1977, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7786&st=tactical&st1> [accessed 12/14/13].

⁵⁰¹ A Special Coordinating Committee composed of the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, NSC Director, CIA Director, ACDA Director, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and other top advisors developed this strategy on November 16. Shortly after this, Carter approved this plan. See Summary of Conclusions, Special Coordination Committee Meeting, November

Carter believed that an arms control proposal that linked the neutron bomb with the SS-20 would kill numerous birds with one stone. The offer to forgo deployment of the neutron bomb would have “political advantages” and improve the “political climate” in Europe by demonstrating that the US was serious about arms control.⁵⁰² If the Soviets accepted the offer, then the US would have succeeded in eliminating the SS-20, which would “go far to calm European concerns about a decisive shift in the theater nuclear balance.”⁵⁰³ If the Soviets rejected the offer, their refusal would undermine their propaganda campaign against the neutron bomb, quiet the storm surrounding it, and open the way for the deployment of the weapon in Europe.⁵⁰⁴ Deploying the weapon in Europe would then demonstrate that the US was serious about strengthening European security. Furthermore, as part of the strategy for implementing the plan, the US would publicly compare the neutron bomb with the SS-20 to show that the SS-20 was a “destabilizing and destructive system” and a far “more threatening weapon” than the neutron bomb.⁵⁰⁵ This would “shift the public spotlight to Soviet deployments of new theater systems.”⁵⁰⁶ On

16, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-124-7-7-4. In the margin of this document, Carter wrote by hand, “ok—with ER tied to SS20.”

⁵⁰² Telegram, David Aaron to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 15, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-127-3-19-1.

⁵⁰³ Memorandum, Reginald Bartholomew to Robert Bowie, David Gompert, Spurgeon Keeny, Walter Slocombe, and W. Y. Smith, “New Steps with ER Issues,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-31-174-3-2-0.

⁵⁰⁴ Telegram, From Secretary of State Washington to White House, Brzezinski Only, “Consultations with Blech: Enhanced Radiation,” December 22, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-3-28-9.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. Telegram, Secretary of State Washington, DC to American Embassy Bonn, “Preparations for NAC Consultations on SALT,” February 28, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-111-1-12-7

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

paper, the plan seemed like a win-win solution for dealing with both crises facing the Carter administration.

The problem was that Europeans, for whom the plan was concocted, did not like it. The first step of the plan called for an American announcement in favor of producing the neutron bomb, but many in Europe did not like the neutron bomb and were fundamentally opposed to it. Protests against the neutron bomb swept across Europe, and most of America's allies faced intense political pressure to oppose it. The American Ambassador to West Germany, Walter Stoessel, Jr., told Cyrus Vance that the neutron bomb elicited "a strong emotional, negative response" and sparked a "rather intense public controversy" in West Germany. Those left of center, Stoessel wrote, were "arrayed against the weapon in varying degrees of emotion."⁵⁰⁷ Brewster Kingman, US Ambassador to Britain, informed Vance that the British government faced "a vigorous campaign against deployment of the neutron bomb by local Labor parties." Kingman reported that for "domestic political reasons" the British "would support, perhaps even prefer, an alliance decision not to deploy."⁵⁰⁸ Loud protests also broke out against the neutron bomb in the Netherlands, and both

⁵⁰⁷ Telegram, American Embassy Bonn to Secretary of State Washington, "German Attitudes on Neutron Warhead," August 13, 1977 National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 16, Folder: "Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 6-8/77," Carter Presidential Library.

⁵⁰⁸ Report, "Current Reports," November 16, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-SAFE 17 B-6-28-5-3.

Denmark and Norway invoked their traditional opposition to peacetime deployments of nuclear weapons on their soil.⁵⁰⁹

The second step of the American plan—the announcement of a NATO decision to deploy the neutron bomb at the same time as the announcement of a US decision to produce it—was even more problematic for European leaders. They pointed out that by making the American decision to produce the neutron bomb contingent upon a European decision to deploy it, the Americans were actually asking the Europeans to make the production decision. The West German Political Director told American officials that “it had been customary for the US to make production decisions unilaterally, and to consult only on the deployment of weapons.” Involving the Europeans “in the production decision was particularly difficult,” he said.⁵¹⁰ When an American official asked Rolf Pauls, the West German Ambassador to Washington, whether Schmidt would “give public support to deployment if a production decision was made,” Pauls’ answer was “a flat no.”⁵¹¹ Several other allied governments had a similar response.⁵¹²

Numerous European officials also questioned step three of the American proposal—an arms control initiative to trade the neutron bomb for the SS-20

⁵⁰⁹ Memorandum, Reginald Bartholomew to Robert Bowie, David Gompert, Spurgeon Keeny, Walter Slocombe, and W. Y. Smith, “New Steps with ER Issues,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-31-174-3-2-0.

⁵¹⁰ Telegram, From Secretary of State Washington to White House, Brzezinski Only, “Consultations with Blech: Enhanced Radiation,” December 22, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-3-28-9.

⁵¹¹ Telegram, Laurence Legere to Harold Brown, “Discussion of ERW with FRG Ambassador Pauls,” December 27, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-13-7-21-1.

⁵¹² Telegram, US Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn, “Consultations with Allies on SALT and Western Security,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library 2010, NLC-16-110-7-9-6.

missile. The concern for many Europeans about this proposed trade was that the offer simply did not seem plausible because the weapons systems were too different. German, British, and French officials all told the US that they were “skeptical of [the] proposed linkage of the SS-20 and ERW, since they view them as distinctly different classes of weapons.”⁵¹³ The neutron bomb was a warhead for short-range, battlefield missiles and artillery shells, whereas the SS-20 was a MIRVed missile with enough range to cover all of Europe. As one NATO official put it, equating the two systems was like comparing “battlefield oranges” with “strategic regional apples.”⁵¹⁴ Carter officials acknowledged that the neutron bomb did not have the same military value as the SS-20, but they argued that the “political controversy” surrounding the neutron bomb had “raised its *apparent* value.”⁵¹⁵ The massive Soviet campaign against the weapon, they argued, had increased the psychological and political importance of the weapon. The US could, therefore, “exploit the Soviet propaganda campaign” and “extract a significant price” from the Soviets for agreeing not to deploy it.⁵¹⁶ Many Europeans, however, remained unconvinced by this logic, worrying that the neutron bomb/SS-20 connection would be “seen as a cynical propaganda ploy.”⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ Telegram, US Secretary of State to American Embassy Paris, “Consultations with French on SALT,” January 31, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-5-48-5. NSC Staff Analysis, “Next Steps with the ER Issue,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-31-174-3-2-0.

⁵¹⁴ Telegram, US Mission US NATO to US Secretary of State, “Preparations for NAC Consultations on SALT,” February 18, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-23-5-20-2.

⁵¹⁵ Emphasis added. NSC Staff Analysis, “Next Steps with the ER Issue,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-31-174-3-2-0.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

Despite the fact that European leaders expressed strong reservations, if not complete opposition, to all three parts of the American plan, the Carter administration pressed ahead with it. Throughout the final two months of 1977, officials from the State Department and the National Security Council met with European leaders numerous times to promote the plan.⁵¹⁸ These meetings were followed by a Carter trip through Europe in late December and early January. On December 30 Carter gave a press conference in Poland, in which he publicly tested several aspects of his three-part strategy. Carter announced that he hoped that in the future, the Soviet Union would be willing to engage in arms control negotiations on tactical nuclear weapons, “of which the enhanced radiation or neutron bomb would be one.” Carter then immediately compared the neutron bomb with the SS-20: “This weapon [the neutron bomb] is much less destabilizing in its effect, if it should be deployed, than, for instance, some of the advanced new Soviet weapons like the SS-20 missile, which is much more destructive than any weapon held by the NATO allies and has a much greater range.” Carter also assured the gathered European journalists that the US would not deploy the neutron bomb “unless it was an agreement by our NATO allies,” and then he emphasized again, “But there are other new weapons, including the SS-20, much more threatening to the balance that

⁵¹⁸ For records of these meetings, see Telegram, US Secretary of State to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “SALT Consultations with HMG,” December 7, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-1-36-2. Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #38,” December 2, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-126-1-10-4. Telegram, From Secretary of State Washington to White House, Brzezinski Only, “Consultations with Blech: Enhanced Radiation,” December 22, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-110-3-28-9. Telegram, Laurence Legere to Harold Brown, “Discussion of ERW with FRG Ambassador Pauls,” December 27, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-13-7-21-1. Carter Presidential Library 2010 173,

presently exists.”⁵¹⁹ On January 6, Carter presented these arguments privately and in more detail to a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, Belgium.⁵²⁰

Despite these efforts, the European allies still withheld support for the three-step plan. On January 16 Schmidt reiterated to Ambassador Stoessel that he hoped Carter would “take the decision on production without linking it to deployment.” Schmidt “felt it was unwise to expect Europeans—and especially the FRG—in effect to decide on production and introduction of a nuclear weapon.”⁵²¹

Faced with lingering allied reluctance, key American State, Defense, and NSC aides worked intensively throughout the next month to win allied support for the US program. Their strategy, Vance writes, was to hammer hard “on the theme that the President had personally decided that NATO should go forward with production and deployment of the ERW.”⁵²² In early February these efforts finally began to bear fruit. David Owen, the British Foreign Secretary, told Vance that while the UK “strongly opposed” any NATO announcement related to the neutron bomb until the end of the year, “if an ERW move in NATO linked to SS-20 was tolerable to [the] NATO allies, the British would ride with the rest.”⁵²³ Around the same time, the FRG offered a compromise proposal that they believed might be acceptable to both the

⁵¹⁹ Jimmy Carter: “The President’s News Conference,” December 30, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7075> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁵²⁰ Telegram, US Mission, US NATO to Secretary of State Washington, “President Carter’s Meeting with North Atlantic Council January 6, 1978,” January 8, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-23-3-26-8.

⁵²¹ Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Information Items,” January 26, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-1-5-2-38-2.

⁵²² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 93.

⁵²³ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, February 14, 1978, Carter Presidential Library 2010, NLC-128-13-5-8-2.

US and the NATO allies in Europe. The Germans suggested that the United States make a formal arms control initiative related to the neutron bomb and a public announcement of a decision in favor of producing it. If the US took these two steps, the FRG would announce at the same time a willingness to accept deployment of the neutron bomb two years after the production decision if the arms control initiative failed.⁵²⁴ The difference between this proposal and the original American plan was that the NATO deployment decision would be linked to a two-year delay and could be withdrawn if the Soviets accepted the ERW/SS-20 arms control proposal.

In making this proposal, German officials were extremely worried that it could backfire on them politically. The West German Foreign Minister emphasized to Vance that the FRG could not be the only NATO country to support the plan,⁵²⁵ and the FRG Ambassador to NATO told American officials that the US had to hide the fact that this compromise solution originated with West Germany—the US would have to introduce the proposal as an American idea. The American Ambassador in Bonn informed Vance that the Germans did not want to give the impression, “even to other NATO country leaders,” that the FRG was taking the lead in supporting deployment of the neutron bomb, “for fear that it will leak to the press.” If news of the proposal leaked to the press, Schmidt worried that the left wing of the SPD (his

⁵²⁴ NSC Staff Analysis, “Next Steps with the ER Issue,” February 11, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-31-174-3-2-0.

⁵²⁵ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, February 14, 1978, Carter Presidential Library 2010, NLC-128-13-5-8-2.

own political party) would attack him. He estimated that as many as 52 SPD deputies might part company with him on this issue—"a risk he could not take."⁵²⁶

By the middle of February, the United States, West Germany, and the United Kingdom had reached a fragile agreement on how to proceed. According to Vance, the three countries then "worked energetically through February and early March to pull together an alliance consensus."⁵²⁷ Reaching this consensus, however, faced major barriers. On March 7 David Owen, the British Foreign Minister, informed Washington that the British government still had doubts about the plausibility of offering to trade the neutron bomb for SS-20 missiles. They preferred an arms control proposal that offered to trade the neutron bomb for reductions in Soviet tanks—a trade-off that seemed to make more sense.⁵²⁸ The next day the Dutch Parliament passed a resolution stating that production of the neutron bomb was undesirable and asking the Dutch government to communicate this view to the US and other NATO countries.⁵²⁹ The NATO General Secretary, after speaking with Dutch politicians, told American officials in Brussels that "Soviet propaganda on ERW had so affected [the] church communities of [the] Netherlands and, through

⁵²⁶ Telegram, American Embassy Bonn to Secretary of State Washington, February 23, 1978. Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-23-5-29-3.

⁵²⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 93.

⁵²⁸ Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Neutron Bomb," March 7, 1978. National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 17, Folder: "Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 9/77—1/78."

⁵²⁹ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, March 8, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-13-6-6-3.

them, political parties, that [the] Dutch were now locked into an anti-ERW position.”⁵³⁰

Not to be deterred—Vance, Brzezinski, and a slew of officials from the State Department and the National Security Council continued to push for NATO acceptance of the new American position. By mid-March, a tenuous agreement began to take shape. “[A]fter strenuous effort,” Vance writes, “we had gained an agreement from the Dutch, Belgians, and Scandinavians not to object to an alliance statement of collective support for the arms control approach and for deployment, if necessary, when this decision would be announced.”⁵³¹ After another “nerve-racking week of nonstop consultations,” the US, FRG, and UK agreed to a phased plan to resolve, at last, the neutron bomb affair. The three countries would come up with the text of a NATO statement. This statement would be circulated, discussed, and finalized at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council on March 20. Two days later, President Carter would announce the US intention to produce the neutron bomb together with an offer to defer deployment if the Soviet Union withdrew its SS-20 missiles. On March 22, the same day as the Carter announcement, the North Atlantic Council would meet again, and at the close of their meeting, they would announce

⁵³⁰ Telegram, US Mission, US NATO to Secretary of State Washington, “NATO Consultations on ERW,” March 28, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-23-6-16-6. Western politicians frequently overestimated the influence of the Soviet Union’s public diplomacy on the peace movement in Europe and the United States. European and American anti-nuclear activism had its own motivations and expressions and was not simply an adjunct of Soviet propaganda—even if the Soviets and the anti-nuclear movement agreed on the neutron bomb. See, Holger Nehring and Benjamin Ziemann. “Do all paths lead to Moscow? The NATO Dual-track Decision and the Peace Movement – A Critique.” *Cold War History* 12:1 (February 2012): 1-24.

⁵³¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 93.

their willingness to deploy the neutron bomb after two years if US-Soviet arms control negotiations failed.

On March 18 National Security Advisor Brzezinski sent President Carter a letter to inform him that everything was in place to take the final steps to resolve the neutron bomb affair. The President was on a fishing trip on St. Simon's Island in his home state of Georgia. Brzezinski's letter began, "Hate to spoil your fishing with thoughts like these, but you should know that we are about to take the final steps to implement with the Allies the three part policy on Enhanced Radiation Warheads." Brzezinski's letter included copies of the text of a prepared White House Press release announcing Carter's decision to produce the weapon, the text of the NATO statement in support of arms control and deployment, and a memo from Vance and Defense Secretary Brown that described how the statements and NATO meetings would be coordinated. Brzezinski concluded his letter by assuring the President that Carter's Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Advisory were "in unanimous agreement that the time has come to put this issue behind us, and we have a good chance of doing it in the next days."⁵³²

One can imagine Carter, sitting on a fishing boat, waiting for the fish to bite, considering Brzezinski's letter, and searching his own soul. Alone on an island, he

⁵³² Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Enhanced Radiation warhead Implementation," March 18, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 17, Folder: "Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 9/77—1/78." Memorandum, Harold Brown and Cyrus Vance, "[redacted] and Alliance Consultations," date redacted, Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 17, Folder: "Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 9/77—1/78."

decided to reverse course. In the upper right corner of Brzezinski's letter, Carter wrote a hand-written response: *To Zbig, Re: production, etc. Do not act until after consultation with me. J.C.* In the upper corner of the memo from Vance and Brown, he penned: *Do not issue any statement. J.C.* And above the text of the White House press release, he wrote: *No— Hold J.*⁵³³ With a few strokes of his pen, Carter overthrew hundreds of hours of intense trans-Atlantic negotiations.

After Carter's hand-written notes to his advisors, Vance recalls how "Brown, Brzezinski, and [Vance] argued strenuously that it was imperative for the cohesion of the alliance and for his political standing that he go ahead as planned," but Carter refused to do so. At the urging of these advisors and the West German Foreign Minister, Carter did attempt to reduce the fallout caused by his decision by announcing on April 7 that he had decided merely to defer producing the neutron bomb (as opposed to deciding once-and-for-all against production).⁵³⁴ But multiple administration sources leaked to the press that the President had made up his mind; Carter would not produce the neutron bomb.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ Ibid. See also the accompanying documents in the same folder.

⁵³⁴ For the German role, see Memorandum, The Situation Room to Rick Inderfurth for DR. Brzezinski, April 2, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-4-11-2-18-4; and Telegram, Secretary of State Washington to US Delegation Secretary, "Timing and Scenario for ERW Announcement," April 1, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-111-5-1-5. For the role of Carter's advisors, see Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "ER Weapons," April 4, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Subject File: Debate Briefing Materials—Domestic through Enhanced Radiation Weapons, Collection #7, Box 16, Folder: "Enhanced Radiation Weapons and Radiological Warfare, 6-8/77."

⁵³⁵ The first story to report that Carter had made a definite decision not to produce the enhanced radiation warhead was *The New York Times*, "Aides Report Carter Bans Neutron Bomb; Some Seek Reversal," April 4, 1978, 1. The article claimed "administration officials" as its main source. *Newsweek* reported on April 17 that it had learned that the *New York Times* story also had been based on a leaked State Department cable to Warren Christopher that said flatly, "The President has reached [a] judgment not to produce the enhanced-

Carter's last-minute change of heart was a disaster on multiple levels.⁵³⁶ It was a boon to the Soviet Union and a blow to Europe. Upon learning of Carter's decision, Soviet officials were elated. They believed that their efforts to stir up opposition to the neutron bomb had forced the president to change course, and this belief was widely shared outside the Soviet Union. "The United States would appear to give way to Soviet pressure and to have gained nothing in return," wrote *The New York Times*.⁵³⁷ *The Daily Telegraph* concluded that Carter had handed the Soviets one of its "biggest propaganda successes since Yalta."⁵³⁸ Franz-Joseph Strauss, a West German politician, called the decision "the first instance in which an American President has publicly heeled before a Russian czar."⁵³⁹ When Schmidt learned from Warren Christopher that Carter had changed his mind, he was furious. *Newsweek* magazine described his reaction in a lengthy article on the debacle:

The atmosphere in Schmidt's book-and record-lined lounge became "icy at best," an aide recalled later. The stunned German leader took a pinch of his favorite snuff and disbelievingly asked his guest to "double-check" with Washington. Then Schmidt walked Christopher to his car, strolled back sadly, shook his head and sighed: "What next?"⁵⁴⁰

Schmidt had gone out on a limb, expending considerable political capital, in announcing that he would support deployment of the neutron bomb, and now

radiation weapon." *Newsweek*, "Furor over the Neutron Bomb," April 17, 1978, 34. The leaked document in question may be Telegram, Secretary of State Washington to US Delegation Secretary, "Enhanced Radiation: Talking Points for Deputy Secretary," March 29, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-111-4-13-3.

⁵³⁶ *New York Times*, April 1, 1978.

⁵³⁷ *New York Times*, April 6, 1978.

⁵³⁸ *The Daily Telegraph*, April 11, 1978.

⁵³⁹ Memorandum, The Situation Room to Dr. Brzezinski, "Additional Information Items," April 12, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-1-5-7-49-5.

⁵⁴⁰ *Newsweek*, April 17, 1978, 34.

Carter forced him to pay a second price, “being made to look foolish.”⁵⁴¹ The neutron bomb affair, in the words of a *New York Times* reporter, “left a deep scar in Alliance relations.”⁵⁴² Europeans now had serious doubts about Carter’s willingness and ability to lead the Alliance. “This chopping and changing and sheer unpredictability makes one wonder whether a foreign policy actually exists in Washington at this moment,” complained a top Schmidt aide.⁵⁴³

To explain how the President could change his mind and wreak such havoc upon transatlantic relations, several Carter officials said that the decision to deploy the neutron bomb would have violated “some deeply held convictions.”⁵⁴⁴ Vance later wrote that Carter’s “innermost self rebelled, and he rejected the logic of the previous six months of arduous negotiations within the alliance.”⁵⁴⁵ While clearly true, these explanations overlook the more obvious explanation—Carter never really believed in the scheme in the first place. In fact, he never really believed in the problem that the plan was designed to solve. Carter developed an improvised solution to a European problem that he did not believe was real. In addition, the Europeans, for whom the solution was developed, did not believe that the solution matched the problem and went along with it with great reluctance and persistent misgivings.

⁵⁴¹ *New York Times*, April 6, 1978.

⁵⁴² *New York Times*, April 1, 1978.

⁵⁴³ *Newsweek*, April 17, 1978, 34.

⁵⁴⁴ *New York Times*, April 4, 1978, 1.

⁵⁴⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 96.

Conclusion

The neutron bomb fiasco illustrates the way in which the different Cold War protagonists viewed the same situation in different ways. The Soviet Union believed that American forward-based systems were strategic weapons for which they had no answer. They viewed the deployment of their SS-20 missiles as a response to these systems. By deploying their SS-20 missiles, they believed they were restoring the equilibrium and bringing the arms race back into balance. The Europeans did not put much stock in American forward-based systems, but the SS-20 missiles loomed large in their consideration. They viewed this new Soviet weapon as a blatant attempt by the Soviets to achieve superiority in the arms race, and they called for the United States to respond. The United States tended to minimize the weight of nuclear weapons in Europe, including their own forward-based systems, in the overall balance of strategic weapons between the United States and the Soviet Union. Consequently, they were not initially very concerned about the Soviet SS-20 missile, pointing out that it did not compare with the American triad of intercontinental nuclear weapons.

Lacking the conviction that the SS-20 missile fundamentally altered the greater strategic balance, Carter's first attempt at appeasing European concerns was a complete flop. His second attempt would have greater success.

CHAPTER SIX

**THE NATO DUAL-TRACK
DECISION,
1978-1980**

Both the Soviet Union and NATO learned from the neutron bomb affair, and the lessons that they learned would have significant ramifications for the future of the nuclear arms race in Europe. The Soviet Union, triumphant in their presumed victory, concluded that they could use public diplomacy and incite protests among sympathetic parties in Europe to block the deployment of new NATO nuclear weapons. This belief would shape their response in the years to come when NATO revisited the question of strengthening its European nuclear forces. The United States and its allies in Europe, embarrassed and reeling, concluded in mid-1978 that they had to find a way to work together to resolve West German security concerns, even if they disagreed about the nature of these concerns.

This newfound resolve enabled them to reach a decision at the end of 1979 to pursue a two-pronged strategy for strengthening European security—diplomacy and deployment. The alliance would use arms negotiations to try to convince the Soviet Union to remove its SS-20; if this diplomatic track failed, they would deploy new cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe in three years.

The vote to adopt the dual-track decision was unanimous, but deep tensions pulsed below the surface. President Carter still did not entirely accept Schmidt's view of the impact of the SS-20 on European security, and the ambiguous language of the unanimous decision hid major reservations on the part of some of the smaller European countries in NATO. Moreover, right at the time that the allies were struggling to determine the best way to implement their new dual-track decision, two major international crises exacerbated tensions between the United States and Europe.

Repairing NATO Solidarity

After the backlash from European leaders in response to Carter's apparent neutron bomb reversal, Carter realized that he needed to take steps to repair the damaged relationship with Europe. This included showing greater sensitivity to European perceptions and politics and engaging in real consultations with European leaders regarding possible solutions to their concerns. General Alexander Haig, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, expressed the administration's newly-enlightened attitude toward Europe. "These are all areas of great sensitivity for the Europeans," Haig said. "We in the United States must recognize—in fact, I think we already have—that the level and degree of consultation with the European allies...must be increasingly intimate, flexible and responsive to European concerns."⁵⁴⁶ In May of 1978 both President Carter and Vice President Mondale expressed solidarity with Europe by making public statements that condemned Soviet SS-20 deployment. Mondale called the SS-20 a "new departure in destructive power" and a "substantial increase in the nuclear threat of the Soviet Union."⁵⁴⁷ Carter said that the Soviet Union now posed "a military threat to our alliance which far exceeds their legitimate security needs."⁵⁴⁸

In addition to sympathetic statements, Carter and his advisors sought to repair the damage caused by the neutron bomb controversy through a series of meetings with NATO leaders. On May 30-31 Carter personally hosted a summit of

⁵⁴⁶ *US News and World Report*, "Europe's New Balance—A Warning from the NATO Chief," June 5, 1978, 20.

⁵⁴⁷ *US News and World Report*, "Russia and the US at the UN—Head-to-Head on Arms Race," June 5, 1978, 22.

⁵⁴⁸ *US News and World Report*, "Why Carter Puzzles Europe," June 5, 1978, 22.

NATO heads of state in Washington. On the eve of the summit, a presidential spokesman announced—clearly with a European audience in mind—that Carter’s main purpose in playing host to the high-level meeting was to demonstrate “the direct importance of Europe to the United States and the need for basic strength of the alliance in all areas.”⁵⁴⁹ During the summit, NATO leaders took the unprecedented step of devoting an entire day to discussing European defense needs. Informed observers described the summit as a “closing or ranks” for NATO.⁵⁵⁰

Through a flurry of bilateral meetings in June with British, French, and German officials, Carter representatives sought to reassure the Europeans further. Carter officials used these sessions to repeatedly convey one basic message: “The US recognizes European concerns about the implications of Soviet TNF [theater nuclear forces] modernization combined with strategic parity, and is giving serious attention to the theater problem.”⁵⁵¹ These consultations led to additional discussions in the North Atlantic Council in July and “more substantive” bilateral discussions on European theater systems in the fall. After a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, a Norwegian official observed, “the US seemed more genuinely open to European views and appears to aim for as broad allied support as

⁵⁴⁹ *US News and World Report*, “Why Carter Puzzles Europe,” June 5, 1978, 22.

⁵⁵⁰ *US News and World Report*, “NATO’s Answer to Soviet Challenge,” June 12, 1979, 26.

⁵⁵¹ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, “Your State Visit to the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin, July 14-16, 1978,” July 2, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-111-5-10-6. *TNF* stands for “Theater Nuclear Forces” and was the preferred acronym of the Carter administration for medium and intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. During the Reagan presidency, the same missiles were called intermediate-range nuclear forces and received the acronym INF. Soviet leaders called these same missiles “medium-range missiles.”

possible.”⁵⁵² Carter’s efforts seemed to be slowly mending the broken nets of transatlantic relations.

A Political Decision for a Perceptual Problem

As these consultations were taking place, Carter’s position on theater nuclear weapons was evolving. This evolution was shaped by his talks with European leaders as well as by a series of US government studies on TNF that were published at this time. These studies showed that the SS-20 missile and the Backfire bomber would give the Soviet Union a significant advantage in one specific type of theater systems—long-range theater nuclear forces (LRTNF). A CIA report estimated that by 1985 the Soviet Union would have 2.8 times as many LRTNF as NATO.⁵⁵³ These kind of estimates deeply concerned Europeans who concluded that this advantage in LRTNF would give the Soviet Union clear superiority over NATO in theater nuclear weapons. Shortly after the completion of the CIA study, however, Carter aids completed their own study of theater nuclear weapons, and this study did not share the CIA assessment. This report argued that prior to the new Soviet deployments, NATO had possessed a clear advantage over the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union’s new deployments, therefore, did not give it superiority; it simply allowed the Soviets to erase the previous NATO advantage and to achieve parity in theater nuclear weapons.⁵⁵⁴ This interpretation closely mirrored the Soviet Union’s own view—that

⁵⁵² Minutes, “NPG High Level Group Meeting in Brussels,” October 16-17, 1978, Norwegian Ministry of Defense, Translated by Lars Unar Stordal Vegstein. Published in Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, “Euromissiles Reader.”

⁵⁵³ Briefing Paper, CIA for Special Group meeting, “Soviet Long Range Theater Nuclear Forces,” April 6, 1978, CIA ERR.

⁵⁵⁴ Memorandum, National Security Council Staff Secretary Christine Dodson to Vice President et al, “SCC [Special Coordinating Committee] Meeting, PRM-38, Tuesday, August

Soviet SS-20 deployment merely rectified a previous imbalance that had favored NATO. In a strikingly candid interview in June of 1978, General Alexander Haig, now Supreme Allied Commander Europe, summarized this perspective. “We no longer have an advantage in theater nuclear systems,” Haig announced. “You will remember,” he continued, “that, only three or four years ago, the Brookings Institution was saying that our 7,000 theater nuclear weapons were far in excess of our needs. Today, we are at a point of parity with the Soviets.”⁵⁵⁵

Europeans argued that despite the American interpretation that parity existed in the overall balance of theater nuclear weapons—an interpretation that they disputed—the Soviet advantage in the subcategory of long-range theater nuclear forces exposed a “gap” between NATO’s short-range, tactical nuclear weapons and America’s intercontinental systems. Without more long-range theater nuclear systems, NATO lacked an “escalation option” between European theater war and intercontinental war between the US and USSR.⁵⁵⁶ If the Soviet Union believed that the US would be reluctant to bridge that gap and launch a retaliatory strike against the Soviet Union if the Soviet Union attacked Europe, then this belief would undermine NATO’s nuclear deterrent in Europe. Based on this logic, at the end of April a NATO “High Level Group” (HLG) had cautiously recommended “an

22, 1978," 18 August 1978, enclosing final draft of response to PRM/NSC-38, National Security Archive,

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc01.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

⁵⁵⁵ *US News and World Report*, “Europe’s New Balance—A Warning from the NATO Chief,” June 5, 1978, 20.

⁵⁵⁶ Memorandum, National Security Council Staff Secretary Christine Dodson to Vice President et al, "SCC [Special Coordinating Committee] Meeting, PRM-38, Tuesday, August 22, 1978," 18 August 1978, enclosing final draft of response to PRM/NSC-38, National Security Archive,

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc01.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

evolutionary adjustment in NATO TNF that would provide somewhat more in-theater long-range capability than at present.”⁵⁵⁷ The Carter administration’s own study of this situation, however, dismissed the logic. It argued that NATO’s “current mix of short and long-range systems” was “adequate” and that there was no doubt that the United States would protect Europe in the event of a theater nuclear war.⁵⁵⁸

The Carter study dismissed the European logic for deploying more LRTNF in Europe, but then it argued that the US, nevertheless, should support deployment. Why did it make this seemingly contradictory argument? The report explained its decision in this way: “force-matching is mostly a political and perceptual matter.”⁵⁵⁹ Soviet SS-20 deployment did not give the Soviet Union an actual military advantage in theater nuclear forces, but the Europeans perceived that it did. This perception, in turn, had political consequences. “The degree to which NATO TNF should balance, quantitatively and qualitatively, the nuclear forces of the Soviet Union is primarily a political question,” the report argued.⁵⁶⁰ For political reasons, the United States needed to support the FRG, and the FRG believed that NATO should deploy more LRTNF. As one American analysis of the situation put it, “The SS-20 both catalyzes,

⁵⁵⁷ Cable, State Department to U.S. Mission NATO, “Statement for November 20 NAC on TFN Issues,” November 18, 1978, Secret, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc05.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

⁵⁵⁸ Memorandum, National Security Council Staff Secretary Christine Dodson to Vice President et al, “SCC [Special Coordinating Committee] Meeting, PRM-38, Tuesday, August 22, 1978,” 18 August 1978, enclosing final draft of response to PRM/NSC-38, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc01.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

and symbolizes German anxieties: arguing that it adds only marginally to Soviet military capability to devastate Europe does not solve the problem."⁵⁶¹

Carter eventually accepted the logic of this report, and, during the fall of 1978, he decided to accept the recommendation of the NATO High Level Group to deploy new long-range theater nuclear weapons in Europe.⁵⁶² Thus, despite the fact that the US government believed that parity now existed in overall theater nuclear weapons, it decided to embark on a program to deploy new missiles in Europe for the sake of European perceptions and politics.

Tensions between the US and Germany

To the surprise and frustration of the Carter administration, Carter's decision was not met with declarations of immediate support from the FRG. Although Schmidt had sounded the alarm most loudly regarding the SS-20 threat and numerous West German officials had expressed a definite interest in American cruise missiles for Europe, when Carter informed Schmidt that he was prepared to deploy cruise missiles in Europe, Schmidt introduced several qualifications that would have to be met before the FRG would accept this deployment. Schmidt informed Carter's representatives that any move to strengthen NATO nuclear forces in Europe would have to be accompanied by an effort to limit the SS-20 missile through arms control. Carter had been exploring ways to include theater nuclear

⁵⁶¹ Richard A. Ericson, Acting Assistant Secretary for Politico-Military Affairs and George S. Vest, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs to the Secretary of State, "SCC Meeting on PRM-38, August 23," August 16, 1978, Secret, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc02.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

⁵⁶² Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Information Items," August 23, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-1-7-6-28-7. Interagency Paper, "U.S. Objectives in Bilateral Consultations on Theater Nuclear Issues," September 8, 1978, NLC-31-147-7-14-3.

missiles in the future SALT III negotiations since mid-1977, so he had no problem with embracing Schmidt's call for arms control negotiations on theater nuclear forces.⁵⁶³ The complication was that Schmidt did not want American cruise missiles to be included in these negotiations. Carter did not believe that it would be possible to include SS-20 missiles in the SALT III negotiations without also including American cruise missiles. Schmidt also had another qualification that proved even more difficult for American officials to swallow. Schmidt announced that the FRG would not allow cruise missile deployment on West German territory unless another European continental country also accepted them.⁵⁶⁴ When no other country immediately came forward to accept cruise missile deployment, Schmidt delayed making a definite decision regarding deployment for more than a year.⁵⁶⁵

In his memoirs, Schmidt portrays himself as the principal architect and an unequivocal supporter of the NATO dual track decision of 1979.⁵⁶⁶ The Carter administration, however, did not view Schmidt in this way. They saw him as a source of frequent frustration on the path to the dual-track decision. Brzezinski

⁵⁶³ Memorandum, Paul Warnke to Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Proposed Interagency Study Group on Grey-Area Systems," September 30, 1977, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-132-147-4-2-6-23.

⁵⁶⁴ A country other than Britain or France who possessed their own nuclear weapons. Memorandum, National Security Council Staff Secretary Christine Dodson to Vice President et al, "SCC [Special Coordinating Committee] Meeting, PRM-38, Tuesday, August 22, 1978," 18 August 1978, enclosing final draft of response to PRM/NSC-38, National Security Archive,

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc01.pdf> [accessed 04/1/14].

Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, "Your State Visit to the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin, July 14-16, 1978," July 2, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-111-5-10-6.

⁵⁶⁵ The Carter administration made a decision to support the HLG group decision regarding modernization of NATO's LRTNF in late August/early September of 1978. The FRG did not agree to accept cruise missiles until October of 1979.

⁵⁶⁶ Schmidt, *Men and Powers*, 184-191.

captures the consensus Carter administration perspective when he writes of Schmidt, "Throughout he was the one who was most concerned about the Soviet nuclear threat in Europe and the least inclined to agree to any firm response."⁵⁶⁷ Brzezinski and others believed that Schmidt and his colleagues were "unprepared to face" the "political and strategic responsibilities" that Schmidt unleashed with his speech on theater nuclear weapons in November 1977. Almost a full year after this speech, Brzezinski met with Schmidt to discuss theater nuclear weapons. At the close of this meeting, Brzezinski told Carter that Schmidt still had a primitive understanding of the subject. "It was evident," Brzezinski wrote, "that Schmidt's thinking on this issue was not advanced, that he was groping for solutions to a problem which he had not yet clearly formulated."⁵⁶⁸ When Schmidt hesitated month after month to make a definite decision on whether to deploy American cruise missiles in Germany, some Carter officials concluded that he was too worried about offending the Soviets. Robert Hunter, National Security Council Director of West European Affairs, noted "bafflement and anxiety" within the Carter administration over "the extent to which Schmidt felt obliged to take account of Soviet attitudes."⁵⁶⁹ After "a tough conversation" between Schmidt and Carter in January of 1979, in which Schmidt insisted again that "only with others in Europe would he ever permit the deployment" of cruise missile in the FRG, Carter said that he was "particularly impressed and somewhat concerned about the attitude of

⁵⁶⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: The Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), 295.

⁵⁶⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Zbigniew Brzezinski and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, October 3, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-9-15-12-1.

⁵⁶⁹ Meeting Summary, German Working Group Meeting, October 13, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-17-51-2-7-8.

Helmut toward appeasing the Soviets.”⁵⁷⁰ Others believed that Schmidt’s reluctance to make a decision was primarily political. “Schmidt’s domestic situation encourages procrastination and equivocation on his part,” Vance and Brown concluded.⁵⁷¹

American frustration with Schmidt was matched by considerable German dissatisfaction with Carter. FRG officials had persistent doubts about the quality of US leadership and did not think that the Americans had the correct understanding of the ramifications of Soviet SS-20 deployment. The Carter administration’s belief that the SS-20 was mainly a problem of politics and perspective bothered the Germans and led to several tense encounters. When senior US State Department officials met with their West German counterparts on October 11, FRG officials argued that the US did not comprehend the real state of the theater nuclear arms race. They argued that it was incorrect for the US to say that the strategic situation had “not fundamentally changed” and to “emphasize the continuation of parity” in its projections of the overall levels of nuclear warheads between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The “reality was changed,” a West German Defense Ministry official insisted. West German officials also argued during this meeting that NATO needed to change its definition of “strategic” in order to take into consideration the role of theater nuclear weapons. “The Alliance had to devise an equation,” one German

⁵⁷⁰ Meeting Notes, President Carter’s notes from a meeting with Helmut Schmidt, Valery Giscard d’Estaing, and James Callaghan, January 5, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-4-12-3-9.

⁵⁷¹ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown to Jimmy Carter, “TNF Modernization—US Diplomacy, Your Role, and the Schmidt Visit,” May 9, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110473> [accessed 12/12/13]. Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Vance/Brown Memo on TNF,” May 17, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110473> [accessed 12/12/13].

representative argued, “with which to compare the two sides’ forces, and which recognized the contribution of TNF to the strategic balance and to deterrence.” The alliance definition of strategic, they argued, should be changed to include “all Soviets systems which can reach the US and FRG.” American officials quickly rejected this suggestion, pointing out that the German definition of *strategic* too closely mirrored the Soviet definition. Accepting this definition would “play to the Soviet notion of equal security” they said.⁵⁷² During a meeting between Carter, Schmidt, and the heads of state of Great Britain and France in January of 1979, Schmidt again questioned the American understanding of theater nuclear weapons. At one point, Schmidt interrupted Carter in frustration, “What is the NATO military strategy?” The implication was that either NATO did not have one or that Carter did not know what it was.⁵⁷³

The disagreements between the United States and the FRG during this critical time in alliance relations were not helped by the fact that Carter and Schmidt simply did not get along. One understated Carter aide succinctly described the problem in April of 1978: “personal relations between the President and the Chancellor were not excellent.”⁵⁷⁴ Others spoke of a “personality clash,” and meetings between the

⁵⁷² Cable, State Department to U.S. Embassy Bonn, "Bilateral with the FRG on TNF Issues, 16 October 1978, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/doc04.pdf> [accessed 04/05/14].

⁵⁷³ Meeting Notes, President Carter’s notes from a meeting with Helmut Schmidt, Valery Giscard d’Estaing, and James Callaghan, January 5, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-4-12-3-9.

⁵⁷⁴ Meeting Summary, German Working Group Meeting, October 13, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-17-51-2-7-8.

two were frequently “quite contentious.”⁵⁷⁵ After Carter and Schmidt quarreled in front of the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the French head of state told the two men that “the strain between the US and the FRG was uncomfortable.”⁵⁷⁶

Carter Takes the Lead and Thatcher Supports Him

The inability of the Germans and Americans to reconcile their differences seemed likely to sabotage any hopes of reaching an alliance consensus, but two events in May of 1979 helped turn the balance in NATO's favor. The first thing that happened is that Carter decided to make a definite decision and take a strong leadership role in the alliance regarding the modernization of theater nuclear weapons in Europe. For months, Carter's advisors had been consulting with the allies and listening to their concerns, trying to decipher a consensus among the allies from these consultations. Vance, Brown, and Brzezinski all worried that this approach would lead to another neutron bomb fiasco. On May 9 Vance and Brown warned Carter, “The Europeans will not come independently to a consensus within the Alliance.” “Obtaining a consensus” would only be possible with “steady guidance from [the United States] in the face of Allied wavering.” Specifically, they urged Carter to “personally become engaged now” and to “take a strong lead now to lead the alliance to a consensus.” Until Carter had personally and publicly declared his views, the allies would remain ambivalent. Most of the allies were “influenced by the legacy of the neutron bomb affair,” but if they saw clear US leadership, they would

⁵⁷⁵ Meeting Summary, German Working Group Meeting, October 13, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-17-51-2-7-8. *US News and World Report*, “Why Carter Puzzles Europe,” June 5, 1978, 22.

⁵⁷⁶ Meeting Notes, President Carter's notes from a meeting with Helmut Schmidt, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and James Callaghan, January 5, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-4-12-3-9.

“assume that in the end NATO will decide for deployment, and they will begin to work toward that end.”⁵⁷⁷ On May 17 Brzezinski confirmed this assessment of the situation, advising Carter to go on record publicly “to set the tone for the debate.”⁵⁷⁸ Some European officials also hoped Carter would take a strong lead within NATO. One West German official charged the President, “if it ever comes to a choice between consulting and deciding, decide!”⁵⁷⁹ Vance, Brown, and Brzezinski also agreed that Carter should push for a definite alliance decision by December of 1979, just six months away.

Unlike during the neutron bomb affair, in this instance Carter accepted the counsel of his senior advisors. On May 18 he approved the strategy laid out by Vance, Brown, and Brzezinski and began aggressively implementing it.⁵⁸⁰ During the second half of 1979, Carter became far more personally engaged and repeatedly told his NATO colleagues that the US had made a definite decision to deploy new long-range nuclear weapons in Europe and that he expected the allies to rally around this decision. On June 1 Carter informed Schmidt, “I am ready to do my part to lead the

⁵⁷⁷ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance and Harold Brown to Jimmy Carter, “TNF Modernization—US Diplomacy, Your Role and the Schmidt Visit,” May 9, 1979. NSC Brzezinski Files, Box 20, Carter Presidential Library. This document is also available online in the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110473> [accessed 05/02/14].

⁵⁷⁸ Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Vance/Brown Memo on TNF,” May 17, 1979, May 9, 1979. NSC Brzezinski Files, Box 20, Carter Presidential Library. This document is also available online the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110473> [accessed 05/02/14].

⁵⁷⁹ Memorandum, NSC Group on Western Europe to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Evening Report,” Carter Presidential Library, NLC-10-11-4-19-4.

⁵⁸⁰ Memorandum, Jimmy Carter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Vance/Brown Memo on TNF,” May 17, 1979, NSC Brzezinski Files, Box 20, Carter Presidential Library. This document is also available online in the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110473> [accessed 05/02/14]. Cable, Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn, “Presidential Letter to Chancellor Schmidt,” June 1, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-116-6-5-5.

alliance to a consensus.”⁵⁸¹ NATO officials immediately took note of the new American attitude. After a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, the FRG Defense Secretary observed, “The US had shown itself ready to accept its role as alliance leader and nuclear super-power.”⁵⁸²

The second thing that happened in May that proved critical to the diplomacy leading to the dual-track decision was the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Great Britain on May 4. When Carter began asserting himself in favor of deploying new weapons in Europe, Thatcher unreservedly and publicly backed him. During a critical period preceding the dual-track decision, Thatcher was an unwavering ally of the United States, strongly promoting deployment and pressuring the other allies to accept the American plan.

From the American perspective, the staunch support of the Thatcher-led British government contrasted sharply with the hesitation and qualifications of the Schmidt-led FRG. On July 18 David Aaron toured Europe and met bilaterally with representatives from five European countries that the US had designated as candidates for hosting new long-range nuclear missiles. Aaron informed each country of the specific number of GLCM launchers that the US had slotted for it: 36 launchers for the UK, 28 for the FRG, 28 for Italy, 12 for the Netherlands, and 12 for Belgium. Each launcher would hold 4 warheads for a total of 464 GLCM warheads. The US also wanted to replace on a one-for-one basis 108 Pershing I missiles in

⁵⁸¹ Cable, Secretary of State to American Embassy Bonn, “Presidential Letter to Chancellor Schmidt,” June 1, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-116-6-5-5.

⁵⁸² Memorandum, UK Delegation NATO to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “EuroGroup Ministerial Meeting, TNF Modernisation/Grey Areas” May 15, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/112574> [accessed 05/05/14].

West Germany with new Pershing II missiles.⁵⁸³ When Aaron presented these specific numbers to representatives of the five countries, all of the countries, “with the exception of the UK,” “moved quickly to the political situation and the political difficulties posed by TNF.”⁵⁸⁴ FRG representatives continued to stress that certain requirements would have to be met before the FRG could accept the American plan. West German officials again informed Aaron that they wanted the alliance decision on force modernization “to be accompanied by a specific arms control proposal, not just a commitment to enter discussions.”⁵⁸⁵ The US supported a parallel arms control track, but they did not think that it would be possible to win alliance consensus for a specific arms control proposal by December, especially since the German ideas on arms control were “complex, not well thought out, and would take some time to be refined.”⁵⁸⁶ Aaron stressed to FRG representatives that it was imperative for the alliance to reach a decision by December and that this would require better cooperation from the FRG. Aaron charged one of Schmidt’s foreign policy advisors to take a firm stance in support of the December deadline. “If you seem uncertain,” he said, the other members of the alliance “will seize upon your

⁵⁸³ The specific numerical breakdown by country of the US plan is still redacted in most American sources but can be found in recently-declassified British sources. See Record of Conversation, Meeting between UK Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington and David Aaron, July 17, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112583> [accessed 05/02/14]. The US did not expect Denmark, Norway, Turkey, or Greece to be involved in basing new systems.

⁵⁸⁴ Memorandum, Jim Thomson to David Aaron, “Your letter to Ruhfus,” July 24, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-122-5-15-8.

⁵⁸⁵ Record of Conversation, Meeting between UK Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington and David Aaron, July 17, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112583> [accessed 05/02/14].

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

uncertainty as a reason for procrastination.”⁵⁸⁷ FRG officials also continued to assert that they could accept basing of new systems on their territory only if Italy, the Netherlands, or Belgium also agreed. American officials urged their FRG counterparts to “moderate their two country condition,” arguing that the UK had already expressed a willingness to deploy cruise missiles and that UK acceptance should be enough for the FRG to make a decision.⁵⁸⁸ When Schmidt refused to drop his qualifications, an NSC official complained to Brzezinski on August 7, “To be sure, Schmidt et al have put us in an awkward position, simultaneously pumping up the Soviet threat and imposing conditions upon our capacity to deal with it.”⁵⁸⁹

In contrast to the multiple qualifications raised by the FRG, UK officials quickly supported the Carter program and even offered to help sway the Germans. When Aaron met with Carrington (the British Foreign Secretary), Carrington asked how the British could help with the Germans. Aaron told Carrington that “he hoped some influence could be brought to bear on the Germans to bring their arms control ideas down to a more practical level.”⁵⁹⁰ While Schmidt delayed taking a clear stance in favor of a December deadline, Thatcher told Carter, “I share your view of the importance for the Alliance of reaching a firm decision this year to modernize long range theatre nuclear systems in Europe. You can count on our support in trying to

⁵⁸⁷ Memorandum, Jim Thomson to David Aaron, “Your letter to Ruhfus,” July 24, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-122-5-15-8.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Memorandum, Jim Rentschler to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “TNF and US Leadership,” August 7, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-23-5-4-1-6.

⁵⁹⁰ Record of Conversation, Meeting between UK Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington and David Aaron, July 17, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112583> [accessed 05/02/14].

achieve the necessary Alliance consensus.”⁵⁹¹ On September 17 Francis Pym, Thatcher’s Defense Minister, advised her to accept the American plan, noting that it would be “helpful to the Alliance to take this decision now.”⁵⁹² Thatcher strongly agreed.

In addition to resolutely supporting American initiatives, the UK was also willing to make concessions to the FRG in order gain FRG support. When Schmidt initially argued that arms control would have to accompany any proposed deployment, the British were “extremely skeptical” and “uniformly negative about the prospects, feasibility or need for arms control on long-range TNF.”⁵⁹³ They pointed to the fact that NATO did not have any systems that it was willing to trade with the Soviets for limits on its SS-20 missiles and worried that arms control efforts, if launched too soon, could “undermine efforts to get approval from Parliaments and publics for modernization.”⁵⁹⁴ They also worried that negotiations on TNF might lead to limits on Britain’s own nuclear weapons.⁵⁹⁵ Despite these initial views regarding arms control, the UK eventually concluded that the FRG needed a parallel arms control initiative in order to win political support for

⁵⁹¹ Letter, Margaret Thatcher to Jimmy Carter, July 28, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margareththatcher.org/document/112230> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁵⁹² Minute, Francis Pym to Margaret Thatcher, “Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Forces,” September 17, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margareththatcher.org/document/112587> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁵⁹³ Cable, State Department to US Embassy London, “TNF Bilateral with UK,” October 11, 1978, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb301/index.htm#doc3> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid. Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Weekly Report #74,” October 6, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-9-15-13-0.

⁵⁹⁵ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, “Your State Visit to the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin, July 14-16, 1978,” July 2, 1978, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-15-111-5-10-6.

deployment. Based on this conclusion, they dropped their opposition to the arms control part of the developing dual-track strategy. On June 12 one of Carter's advisors observed, "UK reservations (about TNF arms control) have been muted...evidently in recognition of FRG political requirements."⁵⁹⁶

In September the UK accommodated the FRG again. In the US plan, the FRG would deploy 28 GLCM launchers—the same number as Italy and 16 more than both the Netherlands and Belgium. FRG officials, however, informed the US that they did not want to accept more launchers than any of the other countries. To remove this problem, the UK decided to take 16 extra GLCM launchers. This would mean that the UK would accept 52, Italy would take 28, and the FRG, the Netherlands, and Belgium would each deploy 12. Pym informed the FRG Defense Minister that "although GLCM deployment is not without domestic difficulties" for the Thatcher government, the UK was prepared to accept an extra flight of cruise missiles "on the understanding that this will enable the Federal Republic" to join the UK "in firm support for a collective Alliance decision this year in favor of the US deployment plan."⁵⁹⁷

On September 21 the NATO High Level Group endorsed the American plan for GLCM deployment in Europe, including revised numbers for each country. The HLG argued that the proposed number of new long-range missiles (572) would "make evident that there are no weak links in the spectrum of military options

⁵⁹⁶ Analysis, NSC analysis of June 12, 1977 mini-SCC meeting and outstanding issues related to TNF, undated, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-132-104-10-11-6.

⁵⁹⁷ Minute, Francis Pym to Margaret Thatcher, "US Ground Launched Cruise Missiles in the UK," September 20, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112589> [accessed 05/02/14].

available to NATO that the Soviets might exploit” and provide “the necessary incentive for the Soviets to enter into serious arms control negotiations.”⁵⁹⁸ Three weeks later, the FRG cabinet voted to approve the HLG recommendation, and the FRG was finally officially on board.⁵⁹⁹

Italy, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium

Once the US, UK, and FRG were on the same page, the three countries labored to win the support of the three other countries projected to receive American cruise missiles—Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium. To demonstrate alliance resolve and solidarity, the US, UK, and FRG wanted a unanimous NATO decision by the middle of December. Despite fears of a “largely orchestrated Soviet propaganda offensive,” Italy decided in favor of deployment relatively quickly.⁶⁰⁰ Belgium indicated its preliminary support but informed its allies that its final decision would be linked to that of the Netherlands because “Flemish speaking Socialists in the North would want to keep step with the Dutch.”⁶⁰¹ Dutch leaders informed Carter officials that they were “acutely aware of the need for the Dutch government to take part in the new long-range TNF in a concrete way, especially basing” but that the decision

⁵⁹⁸ Memorandum, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, October 15, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-128-14-12-9-2.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ "Memorandum of conversation between Dutch Prime-Minister Van Agt and Italian Prime-Minister Francesco Cossiga" October 13, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Center, University Nijmegen. Translation from the Dutch and footnotes: Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam, Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111279> [accessed 05/02/14].

Memorandum, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #114,” October 26, 1979, Brzezinski Donated Files, Box 42, Carter Presidential Library, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/110500> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁶⁰¹ Record of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Belgium Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, September 12, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112586> [accessed 05/05/14].

would be “extremely difficult” due to the political climate in the Netherlands, which included only a two-vote majority, declining popularity in the polls, and a large and vocal anti-nuclear element.⁶⁰² The only way that the Dutch would be able to support deployment in the Netherlands, Dutch Prime Minister Van Agt told Carter, was if the SALT II treaty was ratified first and if the allies agreed to reduce the proposed number of warheads by fifty percent.⁶⁰³ In an attempt to win Dutch support, Carter proposed that NATO destroy 1,000 of its warheads on short-range missiles. In light of this offer, the Dutch dropped their insistence on cutting the number of proposed warheads by 50%, but then they introduced a new idea. The Dutch Prime Minister recommended that “the decision to modernize long range TNF should be limited at this stage to a decision to produce the weapon, while a decision on a possible basing in a number of European countries should be taken at a later stage when we will be

⁶⁰² Telegram, David Aaron to Zbigniew Brzezinski, March 15, 1979, Carter Presidential Library, NLC-16-127-3-19-1.

⁶⁰³ "Summary of Dutch Position on TNF Modernization for a Meeting Between US Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and Dutch Defense Minister Willem Scholten" October 2, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Center, University Nijmegen. Translation from the Dutch and footnotes: Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110110> [accessed 05/05/14].

"Memorandum of conversation between Dutch Defense Minister Willem Scholten and US Deputy National Security Advisor David Aaron" October 22, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Center, University Nijmegen. Translation from the Dutch and footnotes: Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111280> [accessed 05/04/14].

"Memorandum of conversation between Dutch Prime-Minister Van Agt and Italian Prime-Minister Francesco Cossiga" October 13, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Center, University Nijmegen. Translation from the Dutch and footnotes: Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111279> [accessed 02/15/14].

able to judge the results of arms control negotiations.”⁶⁰⁴ Almost all the allies rejected this proposal. The UK Secretary of Defense explained, “A British Prime Minister of past days used to say it is unwise to cross a chasm in two leaps.”⁶⁰⁵ As the deadline to make a decision came closer, Denmark also introduced a surprise initiative. The Danes argued on November 28 that the allies were not yet in agreement and that a decision should be delayed for six months. Belgium was the only country that seemed drawn to this proposal. A week later—just six days before NATO was scheduled to vote on the dual-track decision—the Dutch Prime Minister found himself completely torn between his desire to support the NATO decision and the realities of Dutch politics. Van Agt told Consiglio Cossiga (President of Italy) that the political turmoil in the Netherlands had “elements of a mass psychotic development.” Van Agt said that the best that he could offer NATO was a Dutch “commitment to commit”—the Netherlands would agree to accept GLCM on its soil “when at the end of 1981 it would have to conclude that the negotiations with the Soviet Union, opened in the meantime, have not produced satisfying results.”⁶⁰⁶ This formula would allow the Dutch not to oppose the NATO decision at the upcoming

⁶⁰⁴ "Letter from Prime Minister Van Agt to President Carter" November 26, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive A.A.M. van Agt box 41: TNF Dossier, Catholic Documentation Center, Radboud University, Nijmegen. Contributed by Ruud van Dijk. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113529> [accessed 02/14/14].

⁶⁰⁵ "Letter from the Dutch Minister of Defense to the Defense Ministers of Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, and UK." December, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive A.A.M. van Agt box 41: TNF Dossier, Catholic Documentation Center, Radboud University, Nijmegen. Contributed by Ruud van Dijk. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113532> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁶⁰⁶ "Report of the conversation between Italian Presidente del Consiglio Cossiga and Prime-Minister van Agt" December 06, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Centre, University Nijmegen. Translated from the Dutch by Ruud van Dijk. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112820> [accessed 01/01/14].

vote. On December 11, one day before this vote, the Belgian Cabinet voted to postpone making any decision on deployment in Belgium for six months.⁶⁰⁷ Thus, on the eve of the NATO vote, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium all had major reservations and qualifications.

A Fragile Decision

On the next day, however, NATO announced that it had voted unanimously in favor of a two-pronged strategy of seeking to place limits on theater nuclear forces through arms control and of modernizing NATO's long-range theater nuclear forces through the deployment in Europe of 108 Pershing II launchers and 464 ground-launched cruise missiles in 1983.

The NATO dual-track decision was a major victory for the alliance. Carter had shown that he was willing to lead NATO through difficult consultations to make a major decision to strengthen NATO's defenses. Thatcher called the process a "model of Alliance collective discussion and planning."⁶⁰⁸ But not everyone was fooled by the unanimous decision and the declarations of victory. An article in the conservative German newspaper *Die Welt* pointed out that NATO had managed to push through the decision only "by the skin of its teeth." The solidarity of the alliance had been "maintained outwardly to some extent," but there were "cracks

⁶⁰⁷ "Result deliberations Belgian core-cabinet" December 11, 1979, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of A.A.M. van Agt, box 41, TNF file, Catholic Documentation Center, University Nijmegen. Translation from the Dutch, and footnotes: Ruud van Dijk, University of Amsterdam. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110328> [accessed 12/15/14].

⁶⁰⁸ Letter, Margaret Thatcher to Jimmy Carter, November 1, 1979, Thatcher MSS, Churchill Archive Centre: THCR 3/1/4 (Personal Message T132/79T). Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112239> [accessed 12/15/14].

from within that had to be covered over by an arduous finessing of words.”⁶⁰⁹ The only way that NATO had been able to reach a unanimous decision was by fudging the language of the decision. The final communiqué did not mention which specific countries would host the new weapons, adopting instead more ambiguous language. The communiqué simply said, “the missiles will be stationed in selected countries.”⁶¹⁰ This language disguised the fact that the Netherlands and Belgium still had major reservations about the NATO plan.

With considerable disagreement hidden just below the surface, the NATO dual-track decision was just the first step; the real battle—implementing the decision—would play out over the next 3-4 years. Carter had been able to lead the alliance to make the dual-track decision, but would he be able to lead the alliance to carry it out? The *Die Welt* article had doubts, forecasting troubled waters for future transatlantic relations.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Wolfram von Raven, “Das Zeichen von Brüssel” [“The Sign from Brussels”], *Die Welt*, December 14, 1979. Translation: Allison Brown. German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1128 [accessed 12/13/13].

⁶¹⁰ Communiqué, Special Meeting of NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers, December 12, 1979, NATO e-Library, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27040.htm?selectedLocale=en [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶¹¹ Wolfram von Raven, “Das Zeichen von Brüssel” [“The Sign from Brussels”], *Die Welt*, December 14, 1979. Translation: Allison Brown. German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1128 [accessed 12/13/13].

Strains to Transatlantic Relations⁶¹²

In fact, the storms did not wait long to break. At almost the exact moment that NATO was voting on the dual-track decision, two international crises plunged the alliance into turmoil. On November 4, militant Iranian students stormed the American embassy in Tehran and took 69 American hostages. Then, on December 27, the U.S.S.R. sent its massive army across its southern border and into Afghanistan. Carter's poor management of both crises—the Iran hostage affair and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—severely tested transatlantic relations and raised even greater doubts about his ability to lead the alliance.

For more than six months after the Iranian students took the 69 Americans hostage, the U.S. and its allies disagreed over how to properly respond. Their disagreement stemmed from diverging national interests but was exacerbated by Carter's erratic policies, diplomatic gaffes, and unilateral actions.

Shortly after the hostage crisis began, Carter asked Thatcher, Giscard, and Schmidt to consider joining a trade embargo against Iran. According to Carter, Thatcher "promised her full backing," but Giscard and Schmidt promised only to issue supportive statements and to condemn Iran's actions.⁶¹³ Seeking more than words, Carter dispatched Cyrus Vance to Europe. Vance asked the allies to support a concerted freeze against Iranian financial assets and, again, to join the U.S. in a trade

⁶¹² This section (pages 312-324) was originally published in Joe Renouard and D. Nathan Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership in a Time of Peace: Jimmy Carter and Western Europe, 1977-1981," in *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, eds. Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, (Washington, DC: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 324-331. This material is copyright Cambridge University Press. Reprinted with permission.

⁶¹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 465.

embargo against Iran. When Vance's private appeals were met with resistance, the administration grew impatient. Defense Secretary Harold Brown publicly urged Europe to take immediate action, declaring, "It is now appropriate for our allies and friends, indeed for the world community, to reflect its disapproval through concrete diplomatic and economic steps."⁶¹⁴ In January the United States brought its desire for sanctions to the United Nations. When the matter was brought to a vote, the E.C. members voted unanimously in favor of sanctions. Their votes of support, however, were predictably overruled by a Soviet veto.

Although their efforts at the U.N. had failed, the U.S. continued to pressure its European friends to support economic sanctions. But while Europe had been willing to support U.N.-sponsored sanctions, they were unwilling to do so without the U.N. By March, according to Vance, Carter was "angry about our allies' hedging on sanctions and putting strong political pressure on Iran."⁶¹⁵ On March 26, Carter wrote again to Thatcher, Schmidt, and Giscard, strongly requesting their support for sanctions. When these leaders continued to balk, Carter moved unilaterally. On April 7, he severed diplomatic relations with Iran and imposed full-scale sanctions.

With unilateral sanctions in place, the administration increased its efforts to bring Europe on board. U.S. ambassadors in all the E.C. capitals delivered detailed lists of requests to their respective foreign ministers, and Vance met with numerous European ambassadors, stressing to them that "American patience was wearing thin."⁶¹⁶ On April 10, Carter repeated a familiar refrain in pointed remarks to

⁶¹⁴ *Washington Post*, December 12, 1979, A34.

⁶¹⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 407.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Europe: "Nations ask us for leadership," he said, "but at the same time they demand their own independence of action. They ask for aid, but they reject any interference...Some ask for protection, but are wary of the obligations of alliance."⁶¹⁷

On April 22, Europe finally gave America what it had been demanding. The foreign ministers of the nine E.C. nations voted to impose economic sanctions on May 17 unless "decisive progress" was made to free the American hostages.

Carter blamed Europe's delayed decision on selfish motives. "It soon became apparent," Carter later wrote, "that even our closest allies in Europe were not going to expose themselves to potential oil boycotts...for the sake of American hostages."⁶¹⁸ Carter's evaluation of European motives was partly correct, for the E.C. members had significant economic ties to Iran. Germany, for example, had \$1.2 billion in trade with Iran in 1979.⁶¹⁹ Even as late as April of 1980, six months after the crisis began, Germany was receiving twelve percent of its oil imports from Iran, while Britain's monthly trade with Iran exceeded \$40 million.⁶²⁰

But economic interests do not tell the whole story. European leaders also had major doubts about the effectiveness of sanctions without U.N. support. They further questioned whether the Khomeini regime could be moved by rational calculations and feared that a Western trade embargo might drive Iran into the arms of the Soviet Union. When the E.C. members eventually committed to sanctions, they did so reluctantly. Horst Ehmke, a leading German Social Democrat, reflected this

⁶¹⁷ Carter, "American Society of Newspaper Editors Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Society's Annual Convention, April 10th, 1980," *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 1980, 632.

⁶¹⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 466.

⁶¹⁹ *Washington Post*, April 10, 1980, A1.

⁶²⁰ *The Economist*, April 19, 1980, 47; *Washington Post*, April 10, 1980, A1.

pessimistic view when he concluded, "Under certain circumstances, we have to support American policies even when we doubt they have much point."⁶²¹

The erratic nature of American policy made it even more difficult for Europe to sacrifice its interests on behalf of the United States. Carter's position changed numerous times before sanctions were eventually imposed. After sending Vance to Europe in December to seek support for a trade embargo, Carter tabled sanctions on January 1 and decided to give U.N. General Secretary Waldheim a chance to negotiate a diplomatic solution. Eleven days later, the U.S. asked the U.N. to vote on sanctions against Iran. Twelve days after that, Carter abandoned the sanctions idea again, this time in favor of working for a solution through two French lawyers who had connections in Iran. When this scheme did not work, sanctions were back on again. This vacillation prompted *Newsweek's* Paris bureau chief to write that Carter had "an Iranian strategy that oscillates between toughness and conciliation and haughtily requires the allies to follow each and every twist."⁶²² Theo Sommer, editor of *Die Zeit*, captured the uncomfortable predicament of European leaders as they began to realize that they would eventually have to back the American president: "No matter how amateurish, erratic and incompetent they may privately think he is, they know that in the last analysis they will have to go along with him in order to save the vital American connection."⁶²³

And Carter frequently did things that, in retrospect, appear "amateurish, erratic, and incompetent." In April the president announced to a group of European

⁶²¹ *The Economist*, April 19, 1980, 47; April 26, 1980, 39.

⁶²² *Newsweek*, May 12, 1980, 48.

⁶²³ *The Economist*, April 19, 1980, 47.

television correspondents that he had sent E.C. leaders a “specific date” by which he expected them to approve sanctions and cut diplomatic ties with Iran. The correspondents immediately reported this announcement to their respective television audiences, and European leaders were flooded with questions about the new Carter deadline. But when the European leaders were asked about Carter’s “specific date,” they did not know anything about it. Carter had failed to inform them of his plan before announcing it to the world media. Even Margaret Thatcher, America’s staunchest ally during the period, had to publicly expose the president. “We have not been sent a date by which our American allies want us to act,” she confessed to the press.⁶²⁴

European leaders also took offense at Carter’s ill-fated April 24 hostage rescue attempt. The botched attempt particularly stung the allies because just two days earlier the E.C. had agreed to levy sanctions on Iran, doing so in the belief that its decision would prevent the U.S. from taking any form of military action. In private correspondence with Carter, Schmidt had made clear that he strongly opposed any kind of military action.⁶²⁵ But as U.S. demands for sanctions went unheeded in Europe, U.S. officials repeatedly warned European leaders that the U.S. might resort to military force. “We warned them,” Vance later wrote, “that without active support from our friends, unilateral action more severe than those the president had described to their heads of government would be forthcoming.” The

⁶²⁴ Margaret Thatcher, HC S, April 14, 1980, Margaret Thatcher, Complete Public Statements, 1945-1990. Database and Compilation (Oxford, 1999).

⁶²⁵ Letter, Helmut Schmidt to Jimmy Carter, January 18, 1980, “Germany, Federal Republic of: Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, 6-10/79” folder, Box 23, Brzezinski Collection, Carter Presidential Library.

reaction to this warning, according to Vance, “was quite negative.” European ambassadors in the U.S. “expressed grave reservations about the consequences if we should resort to force,”⁶²⁶ and British Deputy Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd warned of “the immense, manifold dangers throughout the Islamic world of attempting to treat this matter in a military way.”⁶²⁷ When U.S. threats of force increased, however, the Europeans had to make a choice, and on April 22 they chose sanctions over force. Thus, it was a great shock when Carter sent U.S. helicopters into Iran two days later. “The timing was horribly bad,” observed Pierre Lellouche, a strategy expert at the Institut Francais des Relations Internationales. “May 18 would have been perfect, but doing it this way is really taking us Europeans for idiots.”⁶²⁸

The rescue attempt was a call to action for Europe. Not only had Carter demonstrated a willingness to use force, but the rescue attempt had also triggered the resignation of Cyrus Vance, who was widely respected in Europe for his “quiet diplomacy and preference for negotiated solutions.”⁶²⁹ European leaders now realized that if they did not become more involved in the formation of American policy, Carter might continue to make risky, unilateral decisions.⁶³⁰ So after initial expressions of disapproval, both Giscard and Schmidt issued strong statements of support.⁶³¹ By expressing solidarity with America, Germany and France hoped to

⁶²⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 407.

⁶²⁷ *Washington Post*, April 25, 1980, A1.

⁶²⁸ *Business Week*, May 12, 1980, 26.

⁶²⁹ Following Vance’s resignation, Schmidt told reporters that “regret in the circle of [European] heads of government and foreign ministers about the resignation of Cy Vance is general.” *Washington Post*, April 29, 1980, A9.

⁶³⁰ Prior to the rescue attempt, Thatcher was the only European leader whom Carter had informed of his plans.

⁶³¹ *Associated Press*, April 28, 1980, AM Cycle, International News.

obtain greater access to the American president. European leaders also decided to improve the transatlantic dialogue through bilateral Anglo-American contacts, such as an upcoming trip to Washington by British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington, and through multilateral fora, such as the NATO council of foreign secretaries and the Venice economic summit. At the economic summit, the leaders issued public statements of mutual support, and soon thereafter the individual European nations finally passed various sanctions packages against Iran.

Another major event also strained transatlantic relations during the final year of the Carter presidency—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Knowing that a sizeable portion of the American public fostered strong anti-Soviet sentiments, struggling with a hostage crisis that daily made him appear helpless, and facing an election in which he was not even guaranteed the nomination of his own party, Carter seized upon the Soviet invasion to demonstrate to the American people that he could be a strong leader.⁶³² Calling the Soviet invasion “the most serious threat to world peace since World War II,” Carter took a number of steps to punish the Soviets, including a grain embargo, tighter controls on technology exports, the withdrawal of SALT II, and a boycott of the Olympics in Moscow. He also called for additional increases in U.S. defense spending and outlined a new blueprint for

⁶³² William Stueck, “Placing Jimmy Carter’s Foreign Policy,” in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, eds. Gary M. Gink and Hugh David Graham, Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1998, 258.

handling conflicts in the Persian Gulf region that came to be known as “the Carter Doctrine.”⁶³³

The chief influences on Carter’s reaction to Afghanistan were domestic political concerns, Carter’s disillusionment with the Soviet Union, and the new dominance of Zbigniew Brzezinski over the formation of American foreign policy. European leaders had no significant influence on Carter’s decisions, but he still expected Europe’s active support.⁶³⁴ Yet, just as during the hostage crisis, America’s allies had their own ideas and interests, and they responded to Carter’s requests accordingly. Of the three leading European nations, France’s response was the coolest, and Franco-American relations during this period were characterized by mistrust. Britain’s response was by far the most positive, and Anglo-American relations remained strong throughout the final year of Carter’s presidency. Germany’s reaction fell somewhere between that of France and Britain, but several Carter-Schmidt clashes ensured that German-American relations during this time would remain contentious.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter grew exasperated with the French. Two months after the invasion, Carter wrote critically in his diary of “the rapidly changing French foreign policy.” He noted that France’s public position had changed at least five times, and he concluded in frustration, “I don’t know what’s

⁶³³ Don Richardson, ed. *Conversations with Carter* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 182. Jimmy Carter, “The State of the Union Address, Delivered before a Joint Session of Congress, January 23, 1980,” *Public Papers, 1980*, 194-203.

⁶³⁴ For a detailed list that includes all of the ways in which Carter expected the members of NATO to respond to the Soviet invasion, see Telegram, Carter to Schmidt, March 27, 1980, “3-8/80” folder, Box 23, Brzezinski Collection, Carter Presidential Library.

going on in France.”⁶³⁵ Carter’s mistrust steadily increased, becoming so pronounced that he sought to avoid dealing with the French altogether. He even began excluding Giscard from telegrams that he sent to Schmidt and Thatcher. In one such telegram, Carter expressed reservations about convening a meeting of NATO members, because “a NATO summit would raise the now familiar problem of the level of French participation.”⁶³⁶

France’s chief East-West concern was the continuation of détente. An official French statement released shortly after the invasion read, “France does not intend to renounce the search for détente...whose alternative is the return to the Cold War.” As a reflection of this policy, France collaborated with the United States in an international financial consortium to assist Pakistan but refused to join the Olympic boycott or declare economic sanctions against the U.S.S.R. French Foreign Minister Jean Francois-Poncet argued that it would be a “grave error” to “Westernize the Afghan affair.”⁶³⁷ In fact, rather than cut off diplomatic ties with the Soviets as the U.S. requested, Giscard met with Brezhnev on May 19. The following day the American secretary of state sharply scolded the French for arranging this meeting without consulting their allies, to which Francois-Poncet curtly replied, France did not need to seek anyone’s “prior approval” for the way in which it dealt with the Soviets.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 487.

⁶³⁶ Telegram, Jimmy Carter to Helmut Schmidt, March 27, 1980, “3-8/80” folder, Box 23, Brzezinski Collection, Carter Presidential Library.

⁶³⁷ *Washington Post*, January 10, 1982, A32.

⁶³⁸ *New York Times*, May 22, 1980, 10.

By contrast, the British response to America's tough approach was, in Carter's words, "staunch and always helpful."⁶³⁹ In addition to backing Carter's call for an Olympic boycott, Thatcher strengthened British relations with China, Turkey, and Pakistan and expanded British air and naval capacities in the Indian Ocean.⁶⁴⁰ Thatcher also reduced official contacts between the U.S.S.R. and the U.K., canceled military exchanges between the two countries, and refused to renew Anglo-Soviet credit arrangements.

Thatcher also sought to rally other European nations to America's cause, calling the United States "the ultimate guarantor of European security."⁶⁴¹ When it became clear that the French were reluctant to back America's new Soviet policies, Thatcher firmly admonished them to do so. In a rebuke of Giscard, Thatcher told the British House of Commons that she remembered "the superb response that General de Gaulle gave to President Kennedy's representative at the time of the Cuban missile crisis." De Gaulle had said, "You may tell the President that France will support him," and Thatcher concluded, "Europe should send the same message today."⁶⁴²

The German response to Carter's Afghanistan policy fell somewhere between the policies of France and Britain. Chancellor Schmidt shared many of the French views regarding preserving détente and maintaining channels of communication with the Soviets, but he also agreed with Thatcher's position on an Olympic boycott,

⁶³⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 486.

⁶⁴⁰ Thatcher was unable, however, to deliver a British boycott of the Olympics. The British Olympic Committee sent the athletes against her wishes.

⁶⁴¹ Margaret Thatcher, HC S, 2/28/80, *Margaret Thatcher: Complete Public Statements 1945-1990. Database and Compilation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), UDN: 80_017.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

considering this issue “a matter of morality.”⁶⁴³ Schmidt believed that allied solidarity was a critical prerequisite to effectively dealing with the Soviet challenge, and he assured Vance, “We want to, and we will, be on board the American ship.” “But,” he cautioned, “the engine should not be fired up to full strength before knowing where the journey is to lead.”⁶⁴⁴ Schmidt’s statement highlights his central concern during this period: he simply did not trust that Carter knew what he was doing. “Though we had only minor objections to the individual steps,” Schmidt later wrote, “we saw clearly that there was no logical and self-contained strategy for managing the crisis.”⁶⁴⁵ In fact, Schmidt seriously questioned whether Carter was even sincere in his efforts to obtain a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In his memoir Schmidt claimed to have asked Carter what he would do if the Soviets remained in Afghanistan even after an Olympic boycott. According to Schmidt, “Carter replied with disarming candor that he did not believe the Soviets would leave Afghanistan.” Mortified by this reply, Schmidt went on to write, “I began to understand that what he was after was domestic prestige. For the sake of his prestige, Giscard and I were supposed to give up ours . . . [Therefore,] I determined to make no more concessions.”⁶⁴⁶

Ultimately, Schmidt did support Carter’s decision to boycott the Olympics, but he remained convinced that Carter neither cared for Europe’s interests nor appreciated Europe’s sacrifices. Several times in the early months of the crisis, Schmidt asked Carter Administration representatives whether the U.S. was planning

⁶⁴³ Schmidt, *Men and Powers*, 78.

⁶⁴⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 205.

⁶⁴⁵ Schmidt, *Men and Powers*, 203.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

a boycott. He was repeatedly told that there would be no boycott, and he informed the German Olympic Committee accordingly. "It was, then," wrote Schmidt, "a total surprise when Carter announced the boycott after all and, without consideration of the domestic humiliation he was causing his allies, demanded that they cooperate with his decision."⁶⁴⁷

The American policy with which Schmidt most disagreed was Carter's decision to cut off diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Shortly after the invasion, Schmidt had warned Carter that "we can only keep the current crisis...under control if communication is maintained with the Soviet Union." Only when allied positions were "unmistakably explained to the other side," Schmidt cautioned, "is there any prospect of understanding one another properly" and avoiding "the danger of escalation merely through misunderstanding."⁶⁴⁸

Schmidt's belief in the necessity of clear communication led him to arrange a meeting with Brezhnev for June of 1980. This planned meeting troubled Carter, for Schmidt had been publicly tossing around the idea of a three-year cessation of theater nuclear missile deployments, an idea that seemed to fly directly in the face of the dual-track decision and all the difficult diplomacy that went into it. Concerned that Schmidt might unilaterally sabotage the dual-track decision, Carter sent him a strongly worded letter, cautioning him against suggesting such a freeze to Brezhnev. The letter made Schmidt irate. He resented Carter's tone, interpreting it as a challenge to his integrity and loyalty to the Alliance. He was even more upset when

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁶⁴⁸ Letter, Schmidt to Carter, 1/18/80, "Germany, Federal Republic of: Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, 6-10/79" folder, Box 23, ZBC, Carter Presidential Library.

the letter was leaked to the press. This seemed to him to be a clear attempt by Carter to publicly embarrass him.

When Schmidt and Carter met in Venice on June 21, Schmidt erupted. He told Carter that his “famous letter” was “close to an insult” and “very destructive.” The implication that Schmidt had reneged on any of his pledges related to theater nuclear forces was offensive and inaccurate. “I am the one...who started it—and will stick to it,” he declared. Further, Schmidt said that “he was not in doubt as to whether Carter really wanted to negotiate with the Soviets on arms control on this issue.” Carter countered that Schmidt’s freeze proposal was creating confusion and that the US would not agree not to deploy for three years. At one point in the conversation, Brzezinski jumped in and attacked Schmidt for criticizing key American officials. Schmidt became “quite agitated.” He responded that “one should be prepared to be criticized,” and then said to Brzezinski, “I can fight.” Brzezinski answered back, “the fight can be reciprocal and...there are some on the US side who know how to do that too.” Carter then stepped in, waved his hands, and tried to “cool the situation,” but the verbal sparring continued. Carter later claimed that this conversation was “the most unpleasant personal exchange” that he ever had with a foreign leader.⁶⁴⁹ The two men eventually emerged from their altercation with a positive statement for the press, but their relationship never recovered.

Conclusion

When Carter became President in 1977, the Soviet Union was in the middle of deploying two new theater nuclear systems—the Backfire bomber and the SS-20

⁶⁴⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 538.

missile. These two weapons, the SS-20 in particular, terrified many in Europe. From their perspective, the Soviet Union was upending the nuclear balance in Europe and throwing a dark shadow of nuclear supremacy over the continent. Carter did not share these concerns. He focused his efforts on finalizing a SALT treaty that would place limits on intercontinental systems. When he did turn his attention to the arms race in Europe, he concluded that the new Soviet weapons did not qualitatively change the nuclear balance. NATO had plenty of nuclear weapons opposite the Warsaw Pact, and American intercontinental weapons provided the ultimate guarantee of Europe's security. When Europeans continue to press their case and to call for some kind of response to the SS-20 threat, Carter came up with an improvised and half-hearted scheme to trade the neutron bomb for the SS-20. Almost no one believed that this trade made sense, but skeptical European leaders went along nonetheless. When Carter reversed course and dropped his plan to deploy enhanced radiation warheads, Europeans were baffled and embarrassed. The backlash over the neutron bomb fiasco helped motivate Carter to adopt the recommendation of a NATO High Level Group to deploy new American long-range missiles in Europe, but there is little evidence that Carter's view of the nuclear balance in Europe ever really changed. He decided to help Europeans with their perceptual and political problem, but he never entirely bought into the idea that the SS-20 missile upended the nuclear balance in Europe or created a "gap" in the "escalation continuum." The irony of this is that when Carter sought to rally European support for this decision, many Europeans balked at it.

Eventually the alliance reached a “unanimous” decision to deploy new long-range nuclear missiles in Europe to counter the SS-20 missile. But the consensus was shaky at best. Even without the strains of the following two years, it seems unlikely that Carter would have been able to lead the alliance through the even more difficult process of actually implementing the dual-track strategy. Carter’s management of the Iran hostage affair and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan inflicted more wounds on fragile transatlantic relations, and the Carter-Schmidt clash in Vienna poisoned the waters even more. Based on Carter’s track record and the state of transatlantic relations at the end of 1980, if Carter had been elected to a second term in office, it is hard to imagine that he would have been able to successfully implement either track of the dual-track decision. We know, of course, that Carter was never given a chance to prove this supposition wrong. He lost the election of 1980 to Ronald Reagan. It would be up to Reagan to repair transatlantic relations and carry out the dual-track decision.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**REAGAN, THATCHER,
AND NATO DEPLOYMENT
1981-1983**

When NATO leaders adopted the dual-track decision at the end of 1979, Soviet leaders were not unduly worried. They believed that they had succeeded in blocking the deployment of the neutron bomb in 1978, and they believed that they would be able to prevent the deployment of American missiles in Europe in 1983. Shortly after NATO announced the dual-track decision, the Soviet Union launched a massive, international propaganda campaign to frustrate its implementation.

European leaders, by contrast, were not sure that the alliance would be able to prevail against this Soviet propaganda offensive. Helmut Schmidt confided to Margaret Thatcher that he worried that the Soviets might be able to “arouse European opinion against the reintroduction of ground launched missiles, just as it had done with such success on the neutron bomb issue.” Thatcher agreed that “the psychological battle” would be fierce.⁶⁵⁰

The final year of the Carter presidency intensified these concerns. Overcoming Soviet opposition would require decisive American leadership and exceptional alliance unity. Both requirements were absent in 1980, as two international crises strained transatlantic relations and European leaders increasingly questioned Carter’s competency. Thatcher suppressed her annoyance with the vacillating president and dutifully filled the role of America’s best ally in Europe, but the antipathy between Schmidt and Carter poisoned transatlantic relations.

⁶⁵⁰ Record of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Schmidt, May 11, 1979, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/112572> [accessed 12/12/13].

This dismal situation radically changed when Ronald Reagan became fortieth president of the United States in 1981. Although Reagan frequently did things that frustrated (and even frightened) his European allies, the special relationship between Reagan and Thatcher held the alliance together, overcame the Soviet public relations offensive, and led to the successful deployment of new American intermediate-range missiles in Europe at the end of 1983. At several key junctures between 1981 and 1983, Thatcher used her relationship with Reagan to educate the President regarding European concerns and to nudge him to adopt positions that would best support the implementation of the dual-track decision. Thatcher's efforts were largely successful, and NATO managed to overcome the Soviet public relations offensive and the opposition of a growing peace movement in Europe. At the end of 1983, American missiles began arriving in the UK, Italy, and the FRG.

Advocating the 1979 NATO Dual Track Decision

One month after Ronald Reagan became the fortieth president of the United States, Margaret Thatcher visited him in Washington, inaugurating what would prove to be an exceptionally close relationship between the two leaders. In the weeks preceding the visit, Reagan and Thatcher exchanged several cordial letters, highlighting the long history of the "special relationship" between the United States and Britain and calling for a continuation and development of this relationship. In one such letter, dated February 2, 1981, the President told the Prime Minister that he believed that Anglo-American relations were poised for "an extended period of cooperation and close consultation." Reagan also told Thatcher that he awaited her

visit with “greatest anticipation.”⁶⁵¹ In public statements on the eve of her trip to Washington, Thatcher expressed high hopes for her visit and for Anglo-American relations during the Reagan presidency. On January 29, she declared, “[T]he Atlantic partnership is and will remain by far the most important bulwark in the worldwide defence of liberty and democracy.”⁶⁵² Two weeks later she told a group of American journalists, “We share the same cultural heritage, we share the same background, we share the same ideals.” And, pointing to the ideological proximity between herself and the American President, she continued, “I am very happy that added to that special relationship there should be a particularly happy relationship...between the two Heads of Government...Just look at his speeches and mine. There are certain things in common and a very good thing too. We are both right!”⁶⁵³

On February 25, Thatcher arrived in Washington. Both Reagan and Thatcher expressed strong satisfaction with their time together and were effusive about the closeness of American and British relations. The President declared, “Great Britain and the United States are kindred nations of like-minded people and must face their tests together. We are bound by common language and linked in history. We share laws and literature, blood, and moral fiber. The responsibility for freedom is ours to share.” And the Prime Minister answered, “The message I have brought across the Atlantic is that we, in Britain, stand with you. America’s successes will be our

⁶⁵¹ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, February 2, 1981, (Thatcher: Cables [1]), Box 34, NSA Head of State File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁶⁵² Margaret Thatcher, “Speech at the Pilgrims Dinner,” January 29, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/114377> [accessed 12/12/12].

⁶⁵³ Margaret Thatcher, “Press Conference for Association of American Correspondents in London,” February 16, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/114395> [accessed 12/12/12].

successes. Your problems will be our problems, and when you look for friends we will be there.”⁶⁵⁴ At the end of the visit, in the words of White House Press Secretary James S. Brady, “It was difficult to pry them away from each other. Their chemistry is right....They hit it off.”⁶⁵⁵

Rich in atmospherics and ripe with inflated rhetoric, the first meeting between President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher also dealt with important matters of substance. For Thatcher did not come to Washington with sweet words alone; she also came with a serious agenda. Foremost on this agenda was the future deployment of American nuclear missiles in Europe. This was a subject about which Thatcher felt passionately.

When Thatcher arrived in Washington for her visit with the American president, the Reagan administration was in the midst of a debate over whether to support the 1979 NATO decision. Opposition to both tracks of the strategy existed among the president’s advisers. Richard Perle, Paul Warnke, and Paul Nitze—three influential voices in the field of nuclear weapons policy—all had questions about the military value of deploying cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe. They pointed out, just as many Carter officials had done in 1977, that American strategic forces had the ability to cover the same targets. These advisers believed that deployment in Europe was “an excessively expensive and potentially divisive salve intended to

⁶⁵⁴ Reagan and Thatcher, “Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom,” February 26, 1981, *Public Papers of the President of the United States, Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (digital collection).

⁶⁵⁵ *Washington Post*, March 1, 1981, A1.

calm the nerves of jittery European leaders.”⁶⁵⁶ Other American officials voiced reservations about the other half of the dual-track strategy—entering nuclear arms negotiations with the Soviet Union on theater nuclear weapons. Caspar Weinberger, Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, believed that undue attention to negotiations might unnecessarily delay deployment. Even the Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, had adopted a confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union. In a press conference on January 28, Haig expressed reservations about hastily entering talks with the Soviets, accusing the Soviet Union of supporting “international terrorism” around the world and charging that Moscow had reserved the right to “commit any crime, to cheat, [and] to lie” to achieve its goal of “world revolution.”⁶⁵⁷ Resumption of negotiations, Haig announced, should depend upon how the U.S.S.R. behaved in other arenas. “The United States cannot contemplate negotiations or ratifications of arms-control agreements exclusive of consideration of the conduct and the activities of the Soviet Union outside the sphere of arms control,” Haig asserted.⁶⁵⁸

Thatcher’s advisors hoped that she would be able to use her influence with Reagan to convince him to take a public stance in support of both tracks of the NATO dual track decision. They believed that her visit to Washington would “provide a valuable opportunity to exploit the Prime Minister’s high standing in the USA” to “influence American policies” in the direction of the UK while Reagan’s policies were

⁶⁵⁶ Keith L. Shimko, *Images and Arms Control: Perceptions of the Soviet Union in the Reagan Administration*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991, 150.

⁶⁵⁷ *New York Times*, February 2, 1981, A1.

⁶⁵⁸ *Newsweek*, February 9, 1981, International, 45.

still at a “formative stage.”⁶⁵⁹ Geoffrey Smith, *London Times* reporter and author of *Reagan and Thatcher*, claims that top officials within the U.S. State Department who supported the NATO dual track strategy also supported this endeavor. Before Thatcher arrived in Washington, these officials alerted her to the debate that was raging in the Reagan administration over the NATO strategy. “[T]hey were in effect enlisting Thatcher in the struggle against the Pentagon, knowing how much Reagan would respect her view” Smith writes.⁶⁶⁰

Helmut Schmidt also hoped Thatcher would use her influence with Reagan to persuade him to pursue arms control with the Soviets as well as deployment of new weapons in Europe. One day before Thatcher flew to Washington, she called Schmidt to discuss her visit. During this phone call, Schmidt implored Thatcher to urge Reagan to “stick to the words” of the dual-track decision. Schmidt worried that Reagan would pursue deployment but neglect arms control negotiations. “Both are necessary,” Schmidt stressed, “and the Americans must not give the impression to the European public, neither to the Dutch, nor the Belgians, nor the Germans, nor the Italians that the second half of the decision does not really matter and what matters is just the first half.” If Reagan neglected arms control, “this would make it very, very difficult to get [deployment] ‘swallowed’ domestically.” If the alliance failed to carry out the dual-track decision, Schmidt concluded, NATO would suffer “a major blow from which it might not easily recover.” Thatcher agreed with Schmidt’s

⁶⁵⁹ Memorandum, Robert Armstrong to Margaret Thatcher, “Prime Minister’s Visit to the United States: 25-28 February,” February 3, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive. <http://margarethatcher.org/document/127287> [accessed 01/14/14].

⁶⁶⁰ Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*. London: Bodley Head, Ltd., 1990, 47.

assessment and assured him that she would do her part to persuade Reagan to support both arms control and deployment.⁶⁶¹

Thus, prior to Thatcher arrival in Washington, Thatcher's advisors, a group of State Department officials, the FRG Chancellor, and Thatcher herself all agreed that one of Thatcher's central goals should be to persuade the President to support both tracks of the 1979 NATO agreement.

During Thatcher's meeting with Reagan, she carried out this strategy, stressing to Reagan the "importance of maintaining both halves of NATO's double decision." This was "particularly significant," she emphasized for the Germans, who were politically vulnerable.⁶⁶² Eager to please his closest ally, Reagan emerged from his talks with Thatcher speaking the Prime Minister's language. In a public statement with Thatcher immediately following their meetings, Reagan expressed unequivocal support for both tracks of NATO's 1979 decision. "We're determined," he said, "to consult closely with each other and with the rest of our allies on all matters involving our common security. In that connection, we affirmed our support for the Alliance's decision of December 1979 to modernize long-range theater nuclear forces and to pursue arms control efforts at the same time, in parallel." "For our part," Reagan continued, "we certainly have an interest in pursuing serious,

⁶⁶¹ Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Schmidt, February 24, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/121509> [accessed 01/14/14].

⁶⁶² Memorandum, Unknown Author to Margaret Thatcher, "Points to Cover in Your Talks with President Reagan," February 26, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/113944> [accessed 01/14/14]. Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and other, "Record of a Meeting Held at the White House on Thursday 26 February at 1145 A.M.," February 26, 1981, , Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/113943> [accessed 01/14/14].

constructive dialog with the Soviets on those issues which divide us.”⁶⁶³ Commenting on the President’s statements, Leonard Downie, Jr. of the *Washington Post*, concluded, “This is what the Europeans wanted to hear.”⁶⁶⁴ Clearly, this is what Thatcher had wanted to hear, and she left Washington knowing that her visit had been a success.

Thatcher’s first visit would set the pattern for many future visits. While the American administration was in the midst of a crucial debate or leaning toward a position at odds with Thatcher’s own position, Thatcher would arrive in Washington, sing the praises of the special relationship, meet privately with the President, influence the President’s thinking, and then persuade Reagan to issue a public statement that clearly supported her position.

Supporting the Zero Option

In the months following Reagan’s public statement, Thatcher and her colleagues in Europe endeavored to ensure that deeds matched words—that America did, in fact, pursue dialogue with the Soviets and that American missiles were, in actuality, deployed in Europe by the end of 1983. Accomplishing these two goals involved overcoming considerable opposition. Protests against nuclear deployment continually erupted throughout Europe and the United States from October of 1981 until the end of 1983, European leaders wavered over whether to deploy American missiles on their soils, and Reagan sent mixed signals concerning

⁶⁶³ Reagan and Thatcher, “Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom Following Their Meetings,” February 26, 1981, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁶⁶⁴ *Washington Post*, February 28, 1981, A1.

his willingness to negotiate—vacillating between provocative anti-Soviet rhetoric and radical arms reduction proposals.

Once the Soviet Union learned that the United States intended to deploy new long-range nuclear missiles in Europe, it launched an international campaign to try to prevent this from happening. Throughout the first three years of the Reagan presidency, Soviet officials repeatedly argued that new American deployments in Europe would upset the existing balance of nuclear forces in the European theater. To support this argument, they cited the results of a new Soviet study completed in 1981. The study concluded that NATO had approximately 1,000 nuclear systems capable of reaching the Soviet Union and that recent Soviet SS-20 deployments brought Soviet systems capable of reaching Europe up to roughly 1,000 systems.⁶⁶⁵ Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko argued that the only way that the US could claim that the Soviet Union had superiority was by “excluding American aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean and American bombers in Europe.” “The American military,” Gromyko continued, “were no friends of the truth, and European statesmen were victims of deceit or misinformation....The United States was deliberately deceiving its allies while pressing ahead with one half of the 1979 decision”.⁶⁶⁶ In addition to spreading these arguments across Europe, Brezhnev seized the moral high ground by introducing the first arms control proposal on theater nuclear forces of the Reagan era. At the 26th CPSU Congress on February 23, 1981, Brezhnev urged the

⁶⁶⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “The ‘Eurostrategic’ Balance: New Soviet Numbers, An Intelligence Memorandum,” August 1981, Digital National Security Archive.

⁶⁶⁶ Telegram, UK Embassy Moscow to FCO, “Secretary of State’s Talks with Gromyko: TNF,” July 6, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/125410> [accessed 01/14/14].

West to resume negotiations on the control of nuclear weapons in Europe. In the meantime, he argued, a moratorium should be imposed on the deployment of any new theater nuclear missiles by either side.⁶⁶⁷ Once these proposals were on the table, Soviet leaders publicly repeated them again and again. They also called upon fellow Communist parties in Europe to repeat these arguments and endeavored to incite and support protests among anti-nuclear groups around the world.

These efforts began to reap results by the end of 1981, when protestors took to the streets across Europe. On October 10, 1981, 200,000 protestors demonstrated in the West German capital of Bonn. The event's organizer announced in a press conference before the demonstration that he did not believe that the Soviet Union's deployment of its SS-20s warranted a quid pro quo deployment of American missiles in Europe. Following this statement, an editorial in the *Rheinische Post* of Dusseldorf concluded that, "The cat's out of the bag, and there's no talking around it. Whoever is demonstrating...has the U.S. in his sights." The West German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, recognized that the protestors also sought to persuade his government not to support American deployment. He described the protests as a "declaration of war against the Government."⁶⁶⁸

Faced with growing domestic opposition to American deployment, Thatcher and other European leaders pressed the United States to begin negotiations with the Soviets on theater nuclear weapons. These leaders believed that a proactive American stance in favor of arms reduction negotiations would undermine some of

⁶⁶⁷ Report, Radio Free Europe Research, "Europe in Search of a Missile Equilibrium," May 5, 1981. Digital Archival Laboratory, Open Society Archive, <http://fa.osaarchivum.org/background-reports?col=8&id=43524> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶⁶⁸ *New York Times*, October 22, 1981, A7; October 9, 1981, A6.

the strength of the opposition movement.⁶⁶⁹ UK officials argued that “the early opening of arms control negotiations [would be] important to the political management of growing neutralism in Western Europe.”⁶⁷⁰

Reagan, however, repeatedly added fuel to the fires of opposition. In early August he announced that the United States would resume production of the neutron bomb for eventual deployment on Lance missiles in Europe. Then on October 16, 1981, he told a group of newspaper editors that he could envision the possibility of limited nuclear war in Europe. In response to an editor’s question, Reagan said that he could imagine a situation in which “you could have the exchange of tactical [nuclear] weapons against troops in the field without it bringing either one of the major powers to pushing the button.”⁶⁷¹ Reagan’s comments produced an immediate outcry in Britain and across Europe.⁶⁷² The General Secretary of the British Labor Party, Ron Hayward, declared that his party was “horrified and appalled” by Reagan’s remarks. The *Daily Telegraph* commented, “Mr. Reagan has a nasty knack of putting his finger on the uglier side of truth and standing back in

⁶⁶⁹ Record of Conversation, Margaret Thatcher and Signor G Spadolini, “Record of Plenary Discussion between the Prime Minister and the Italian Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street on 9 November 1981 at 1430 Hrs,” November 9, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/126220> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶⁷⁰ Memorandum, Alexander Haig to Ronald Reagan, “Your dinner this evening with Lord Carrington at the home of Senator and Mrs. John Sherman Cooper, July 16, 1981, Folder: United Kingdom vol. 1 1/20/81-8/13/81, Box: 20, Collection: Executive Secretariat, NSC Records Country File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁶⁷¹ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Working Luncheon with Out-of-Town Editors,” October 16, 1981, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (digital collection).

⁶⁷² It also played right into the Soviet strategy of creating the impression in Europe that the US wanted to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe in order to confine any nuclear exchange to European territory and thus spare the United States from damage. For more on this Soviet strategy, see Central Intelligence Agency, National Intelligence Council Memorandum, “Evolving Soviet Strategy Toward LRTNF Negotiations,” September 1981, CIA ERR.

feigned surprise while we squirm in anguish at what he is telling us.”⁶⁷³ And even the conservative London *Evening Standard* lamented that “almost casually, in ham-fisted language outdone only by his ham-fisted timing, President Reagan had breathed life into the specter of nuclear war in Europe.” “President Reagan has, in fact, struck a more damaging blow to his own cause than the Russians could have hoped in their wildest dreams.”⁶⁷⁴ A week after Reagan’s remarks, 125,000 demonstrators marched through London’s Hyde Park to protest the deployment of American missiles on British soil. This was the largest antinuclear demonstration in London since 1960.⁶⁷⁵ One protestor declared:

Ronald Reagan says there can be a limited nuclear war. But any idea of limited nuclear war in Europe is an insanity and an outrage. We will take this message from one corner of Britain to the other, from one corner of Europe to the other, from one corner of the world to the other until we rid the world of nuclear weapons.⁶⁷⁶

While protests raged in public, European leaders worried in private. During a meeting between British and Italian officials in late 1981, Lord Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary told that the Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini that he detected “widespread disillusionment” and “strong anti-American sentiment” in the UK. Carrington said that “the generation that had given the Americans the benefit of the doubt was now disappearing.” Thatcher added that “some people in the UK were treating their biggest ally as if we were non-allied.” Prime Minister Spadolini agreed with his British colleagues, observing that “injudicious US

⁶⁷³ *New York Times*, October 22, 1981, A7.

⁶⁷⁴ *Associated Press*, October 20, 1981, AM Cycle, International News.

⁶⁷⁵ *Washington Post*, October 25, 1981, A1; *New York Times*, October 22, 1981, A7. Similar protests took place in Paris at the same time.

⁶⁷⁶ *New York Times*, “150,000 in London Rally Against the Bomb,” October 25, 1981, A3.

statements” were causing some in Western Europe to treat the US and USSR “as if they were on the same level.” “The result, he feared, “could be creeping Findlandisation.”⁶⁷⁷

Against the backdrop of public protests and private anxieties, Caspar Weinberger, U.S. Secretary of Defense, and Richard Perle, his chief advisor, toured European capitals to consult with the allies on implementing the dual-track decision. During this tour, European officials encouraged the Defense Secretary to consider a new proposal, dubbed the “zero option.” Under this option, NATO allies would forgo the deployment of American nuclear missiles in Europe if the Soviets would reduce to zero the number of their SS-20 intermediate-range missiles and SS-4 and SS-5 medium range missiles.⁶⁷⁸ Most American officials did not like this proposal, but in late October, at a meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, NATO defense ministers endorsed the zero option as a possible negotiating proposal, despite American opposition.⁶⁷⁹ Following this endorsement, European leaders pushed for an American commitment to the zero option. A month later, they got it. On

⁶⁷⁷ “Findlandization” was a pejorative Cold War term used by many in the West to refer to the process whereby countries might become like Finland—i.e., under the strong influence of the Soviet Union. Record of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Prime Minister Spadolini of Italy, November 9, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/126220> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶⁷⁸ For Helmut Schmidt’s support of the zero option, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 10, 1981. “Schmidt: The Youth should also take the Worries of our Generation Seriously / Warnings about ‘Dodgy’ Demonstrators in Bonn / Kohl: Two Different Worlds within the SPD,” translated by Allison Brown. German History in Documents and Images, <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Chapter12Doc8Intro.pdf> [accessed 12/12/13]. The British and Italian views are represented in Record of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Prime Minister Spadolini of Italy, November 9, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/126220> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶⁷⁹ *Washington Post*, October 25, 1981, A1; *Washington Post*, November 20, 1981, A1. West German, Italian, and Dutch officials were the strongest proponents of this option.

November 18, 1981, in a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, Reagan announced that the U.S. delegation would make the following proposal to the Soviets: "The United States is prepared to cancel its deployment of Pershing II and ground-launch cruise missiles if the Soviets will dismantle their SS-20, SS-4, and SS-5 missiles." In his speech, Reagan claimed that the inspiration for this proposal came to him a few months earlier when he was convalescing in a hospital bed after being shot in the chest in an assassination attempt.⁶⁸⁰ European leaders, however, knew that their voices had been heard in Washington and that their pressure on the American government had been successful.⁶⁸¹

Thatcher immediately announced her support for the American proposal. "I formally welcome President Reagan's great initiative in proposing not merely a limitation of nuclear arms but an actual reduction both in nuclear arms and conventional forces," she said.⁶⁸² Thatcher hoped that this "most important initiative" would lead to productive negotiations with the Soviets and believed that it would "receive a warm welcome not only in political circles but in the hearts and minds of people across Europe."⁶⁸³ On December 9, Thatcher told Weinberger that she was "absolutely delighted" with Reagan's zero-option proposal.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁰ On March 30, 1981 a lone gunman, John Hinckley, Jr. fired several shots at the president as he was walking from a hotel lobby to his car. One of the bullets lodged in Reagan's chest. Reagan spent almost two weeks in the hospital recovering.

⁶⁸¹ *Washington Post*, November 19, 1981, A1.

⁶⁸² Thatcher, "House of Commons PQs," November 19, 1981, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archives (digital collection).

⁶⁸³ *Washington Post*, November 19, 1981, A1.

⁶⁸⁴ Memorandum, James W. Nance to Ronald Reagan, "Secretary Weinberger's Meeting with Mrs. Thatcher," December 11, 1981, Folder: United Kingdom vol. II 9/1/81-3/31/82, Box: 20, Collection: Executive Secretariat, NSC Records Country File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

But, contrary to European hopes, Reagan's new proposal was soundly rejected by the Soviets and did little to quiet opposition to deployment in Europe. TASS, the official news agency of the U.S.S.R., called the proposal "a mere propaganda ploy" and Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, mocked the zero option. "Those in the United States who advance this kind of 'proposal,'" he argued, "apparently do not for a minute expect that the Soviet Union might agree to them." Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, told George Shultz, US Secretary of State, that the zero option could never be the basis for a U.S.-Soviet agreement. Since Soviet missiles had already been deployed and American missiles had not, the zero option would amount to "unilateral disarmament."⁶⁸⁵ Many in the peace movement also doubted the sincerity of the new proposal, and protests throughout Europe continued. Demonstrations in Rome included close to half a million people; 20,000 people formed a human "ring of peace" around a U.S. base in Britain, and large groups of protestors gathered outside 50 U.S. military bases in West Germany.⁶⁸⁶

Public Support, Private Influence

By the end of 1982 European leaders were under considerable pressure to oppose the deployment of U.S. missiles in Europe. In Britain, Thatcher faced a

⁶⁸⁵ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 348. Memorandum, Hugh Montgomery to The Secretary, "INF: The Soviet Approach," November 20, 1981, Digital National Security Archive. Dusko Doder, the Moscow correspondent for the *Washington Post*, writes that he was unable to find one person willing to discuss this proposal seriously. "They saw it," Doder says, "as an easily understood formula tailored for the Western man in the street and an ingenious device to put the Russians on the propaganda defensive. The Russians were convinced that the Americans were determined to deploy their missiles and had no interest in the ongoing talks in Geneva." Dusko Doder, *Shadows and Whispers: Power Politics Inside the Kremlin from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (New York: Random House, 1986), 179-180.

⁶⁸⁶ *Financial Times*, January 12, 1982, I3; *New York Times*, December 14, 1982, A12.

growing peace movement, led by a group of women who had set up camp outside Greenham Common, a Royal Air Force base where U.S. missiles were scheduled to be deployed. The women had been camping outside the base, in rain or shine, for fifteen months and had attracted considerable media attention. Their message to Thatcher and the world was simple: we “don’t want the world blown up.”⁶⁸⁷ Their message found resonance with the British public. A Gallop poll conducted at the end of 1982 found that 72 percent of the British electorate was worried about nuclear weapons, and the American ambassador in London informed the President that 91 percent of the British public questioned the judgment of U.S. leaders and 60 percent opposed cruise missile deployment.⁶⁸⁸

Opposition to deployment in Europe caused several European leaders to call publicly for Reagan to abandon the zero option and put forward some form of an interim proposal. Many also began seriously to question the political wisdom of allowing the Americans to deploy missiles in Europe. Thatcher, however, remained firm in her public support of the President. In an interview for British television on January 16, Thatcher declared that the Alliance should continue to take a “firm approach” to negotiations and should not abandon the zero option. When asked about the peace movement in Britain, she answered, “I do wish people who brought pressure on Greenham Common and everywhere else would understand there’s no public opinion in the Soviet Union.” She also argued for the value of nuclear deterrence, calling it “a great saviour of peace” and concluding that “deterrence

⁶⁸⁷ *New York Times*, January 11, 1983, A12.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.* Cable, American Embassy London to George Shultz, February 10, 1983, (United Kingdom, Vol, IV, 1 of 5), Box 20, NSC Executive Secretariat, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

works.”⁶⁸⁹ In an analysis of the Prime Minister’s remarks, the *Washington Post* called Thatcher the “most unequivocal booster in the alliance of going ahead with deployments,” and concluded, “Thatcher’s strong support should be welcomed with relief in Washington.”⁶⁹⁰ Indeed, it was. During this period, Washington officials repeatedly expressed appreciation for Thatcher’s unflinching support. After visiting Thatcher in London at the end of 1982, Shultz predicted that in 1983 “the special relationship between America and Britain was going to be stronger than ever...because it was flanked by the Reagan-Thatcher personal relationship, which was as close as any imaginable between two major leaders.”⁶⁹¹ A classified National Security Council report on Anglo-American relations at this time concluded, “U.S.-U.K. relations are extremely sound.”⁶⁹² And the American Ambassador in London reported to Washington that although opposition in Britain was fierce, the United States could rest assured that Thatcher had everything under control. “Leave the fight to Thatcher in Britain,” he advised—“she is gearing up for a major public affairs effort.”⁶⁹³

Thus, looking forward to 1983 and to cruise missile deployment in Britain in December, the American Administration was very pleased with Thatcher’s support and the state of Anglo-American relations. The Reagan-Thatcher relationship was

⁶⁸⁹ Margaret Thatcher, “TV Interview for London Weekend Television Weekend World (‘Victorian Values’),” January 16, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

⁶⁹⁰ *Washington Post*, January 17, 1983, A15.

⁶⁹¹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 154.

⁶⁹² Memorandum, Donald R. Fortier to William P. Clark, March 9, 1983, (United Kingdom, Vol. IV, 5 of 5), Box 20, NSC Executive Secretariat, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁶⁹³ , American Embassy London to George Shultz, February 10, 1983, (United Kingdom, Vol, IV, 1 of 5), Box 20, NSC Executive Secretariat, Country Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

strong, and Thatcher could be trusted to defend American interests in Europe. America's analysis suited Thatcher well and played into her two-part strategy for influencing American policy—to support unequivocally Reagan's policies in public while seeking to alter these policies in private. Geoffrey Howe, U.K. Foreign Minister, characterized this strategy, which Thatcher employed repeatedly throughout the Reagan presidency, as “Margaret's technique of influencing American thinking by starting from a premise of loudly proclaiming loyalty.”⁶⁹⁴ Having successfully executed the first part of her strategy—public support—she set about to accomplish the second—private influence.

Calling for an Interim Proposal

Although Thatcher continued to support Reagan's zero option publicly, her objective in her private contacts with Reagan and other American officials during the first half of 1983 was to persuade Reagan to abandon the zero option temporarily and to put forward an “interim proposal.” When Reagan first announced the zero option proposal, Soviet leaders had immediately rejected it, and they continued to do so over the next two years. During this time, they continued to argue that the zero option would amount to unilateral disarmament for the Soviet Union. Moreover, Reagan's zero option proposal did not include American forward-based systems. If the Soviet Union accepted the zero option proposal and removed their SS-20 missiles, the US would still have their forward-based systems targeted at the Soviet Union. Countering American FBS was the whole reason that the Soviet

⁶⁹⁴ Geoffrey Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 393. Thatcher also refers to this two-pronged approach to influencing American policy in her memoirs. See, Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 270.

Union had deployed their SS-20 missiles in the first place, so this outcome was completely unacceptable. Throughout the first two years of the Reagan presidency, the Soviet Union seemed to be winning the propaganda competition over European theater nuclear weapons. Thus, by early 1983, Thatcher believed that they US needed to make a new arms control proposal. In top-secret memoranda between UK officials, they argued that the United States needed to “show signs of flexibility soon.” If they did not, “Western public opinion could increasingly turn against them.” “It was in the United Kingdom’s interest,” Thatcher’s advisor’s concluded “that there should be a fairly early initiative on the part of the United States, without abandoning the “zero option” as the ultimate aim.”⁶⁹⁵

Vice President Bush planned to visit Europe in early February, and Thatcher decided to use this visit to make her case to the US for an interim proposal. Prior to Bush’s meeting with Thatcher, the Vice President met with Schmidt in West Germany. During his time in the FRG, Bush announced that President Reagan was prepared to hold a summit meeting with Yuri Andropov, the new First Secretary in the Soviet Union, to sign an agreement to ban all intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF).⁶⁹⁶ Lord Carrington privately described the announcement as “somewhat clumsy attempt by the United States Administration to regain the propaganda initiative.” He doubted “whether it had helped to reinforce the Alliance’s negotiating

⁶⁹⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, “Note of a discussion at Chequers on Sunday 30th January 1983 at 10.30 am,” February 1, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128466> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁶⁹⁶ Andropov replaced Brezhnev on November 10, 1982, when Brezhnev died.

position on INF in the eyes of European opinion.”⁶⁹⁷ Clearly, the Americans needed help. During Thatcher’s meeting with Bush, she told him that “the credibility of the United States negotiating position could be put at risk, with serious effects on the cohesion of the Alliance, if the United States did not take a new initiative in the INF negotiations in the direction she indicated.”⁶⁹⁸ On February 16, in response to Thatcher’s meeting with Bush, Reagan told Thatcher that he was impressed with her proposal to “make a new initiative at some finite level of weapons above zero and considered it at some length.” He also informed Thatcher that he wanted to proceed in a way that would be “most helpful to [her] in sustaining the INF deployment schedule.” However, Reagan also told her that he was not yet willing to budge on the zero option, considering the “commitment to zero-zero as the optimal and most moral outcome.”⁶⁹⁹

Undeterred, Thatcher continued her private campaign to change Reagan’s mind. On February 18, she sent Reagan a lengthy telegram that explained all of the reasons that Reagan should announce an interim proposal, including specific instructions for when and how he should make the announcement and detailed

⁶⁹⁷ Meeting Minutes, “Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Thursday 10 February 1983 at 10:30 am,” February 10, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128279> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁶⁹⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, “Note of a discussion at Chequers on Sunday 30th January 1983 at 10.30 am,” February 1, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128466> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁶⁹⁹ Letter, Reagan to Thatcher, February 16, 1983, (Thatcher: Cables [2]), Box 34, NSA Head of State File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Reagan indicated that his decision to delay the announcement of any interim proposal was due, in part, to the upcoming West German elections. FRG officials were divided on whether they wanted the US to make such a move, so Schmidt asked Reagan to postpone any decision until after the elections. Thatcher recognized the merits of this argument but urged Reagan to consider such an initiative “soon after those elections.” Telegram, Margaret Thatcher to Ronald Reagan, February 18, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128125> [accessed 01/15/14].

instructions regarding the precise language that he should and should not use.⁷⁰⁰ On March 3 Thatcher sent UK Defense Secretary Francis Pym to California where he presented these arguments again to US Secretary of State George Schultz.⁷⁰¹ On March 14, she heard back from the President again. This time the news was to her liking. Reagan reiterated that his “foremost concern” was to proceed in a way that would complement Thatcher’s efforts and sustain “support for both tracks of the December ’79 decision.” “Toward that end,” Reagan told the Prime Minister, “I have directed that a prompt review of our position be undertaken discreetly.” Reagan said that he expected that this review would provide for the introduction of an interim proposal. Of course, he explained, “I will keep you informed and will...seek your comments before reaching any decision.”⁷⁰²

On March 23 Reagan reported to Thatcher the results of the Administration’s review. While not abandoning zero-zero as a long-term solution, the U.S. was considering informing the Soviet delegation in Geneva that the United States would substantially reduce its planned deployment of Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles, provided that the Soviet Union reduced the number of warheads on its INF missiles to an equal extent. Reagan asked for Thatcher’s “personal views” of this “tentative plan” so that he would “benefit from them before making a final

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid. On the same day, the Prime Minister of Norway made the same argument to Reagan during a meeting with Reagan in Washington. See, Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkely, ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 132.

⁷⁰¹ Telegram, UK Embassy San Francisco to FCO, “Secretary of State’s Meeting with Schultz at Paolo [sic] Alto on 3 March: INF,” March 4, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarethatcher.org/document/128468> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷⁰² Letter, Reagan to Thatcher, March 14, 1983, (Thatcher: Cables [2]), Box 34, NSA Head of State File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

decision.”⁷⁰³ On March 28 Paul Nitze officially tabled this proposal at the INF negotiations in Geneva, and on March 30 Reagan announced the decision during a nationally televised statement from the East Room of the White House.

Prior to the televised statement, Reagan called all the ambassadors of the various countries of the NATO alliance to the Cabinet Room of the White House. Flanked by the Vice President, the Secretaries of Defense and State, and almost all the top White House advisors, Reagan gave the ambassadors a preview of his speech and praised the alliance consultations that had led up to it and the allied unity that lent it authority. The gathered dignitaries were then escorted to the East Room of the White House, where they were joined by an even more impressive array of Administration officials and where Reagan delivered his speech. He announced, “When it comes to intermediate nuclear missiles in Europe it would be better to have none than to have some. But, if there must be some, it is better to have few than to have many. If the Soviets will not now agree to the total elimination of these weapons, I hope they will agree to join us in an interim agreement that would substantially reduce these forces to equal levels on both sides.” Reagan then concluded his statement with a tribute to the alliance and the process of consultations that had framed the new US position. He called the process a “model for how a free alliance should work together” and “one of the most intensive and productive in the history of the North Atlantic alliance.”⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰³ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, March 23, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarettatcher.org/document/128128> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks Announcing a Proposed Interim Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Reduction Agreement,” March 30, 1983, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Wilson*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (digital collection).

The British ambassador realized that the whole affair contained a considerable “element of theater” and that Reagan had “certainly put on the dog” to enable him to make his statement with “maximum symbolic and visual demonstration of allied unity.”⁷⁰⁵ He also believed, nonetheless, that allied consultations had, in fact, played a significant role in shaping the President’s thinking. Reagan confirmed this interpretation to Thatcher on the eve of his theatrical announcement. He wrote, “Margaret, our close collaboration...has demonstrated the vitality and strength of the relationship between our two nations.”⁷⁰⁶ Thatcher was clearly pleased with Reagan’s decision.⁷⁰⁷ Her efforts to prod Reagan in this direction had been almost entirely hidden, but, nevertheless, by May 1983 informed observers were concluding that Thatcher had “played a subdued but significant role in persuading Reagan to shelve his ‘zero-option’ proposal and seek an agreement sharply reducing European missiles instead of eliminating them all at once.”⁷⁰⁸

Obtaining a Strong Security Statement at the Williamsburg Summit

Thatcher’s next success on the road to deployment came two months later at the G7 Summit held in Williamsburg, Virginia on May 28-31, 1983. Thatcher hoped

⁷⁰⁵ Telegram, UK Embassy Washington to FCO, “INF: New US Proposal,” March 30, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128475> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷⁰⁶ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, March 23, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128128> [accessed 01/15/14]. In the months that followed, Reagan continued to highlight the importance of alliance consultations in leading to his decision. He did this not just publicly, but also in classified documents. See for example, Ronald Reagan, “National Security Department Directive 104,” September 21, 1983, Digital National Security Archive.

⁷⁰⁷ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 270.

⁷⁰⁸ *Associated Press*, May 27, 1983, PM Cycle, International News.

that this summit, normally dedicated solely to economic matters, would produce a joint security statement that strongly supported the deployment of American missiles in Europe. Helmut Kohl of Germany, Francois Mitterrand of France, and even Reagan himself were unsure about issuing such a statement.⁷⁰⁹ Kohl, the FRG Chancellor who succeeded Schmidt, faced considerable opposition to deployment within West Germany, and his government was still vacillating, even at this late date, on whether to accept American missiles. Mitterrand opposed such a statement on the grounds that security matters should not be discussed at an economic summit. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was conducting its own public diplomacy aimed at weakening support for American deployment and disrupting the Williamsburg summit. On May 27, a day before the summit began, *Pravda* issued a warning, which read,

The decision of the United States and NATO to start the deployment of new American missiles in Europe, if it will be carried out, will force the Soviet Union to reconsider the decision it adopted last year concerning the unilateral moratorium on the further deployment of medium-range systems in the European zone....It would also be necessary, as it has been repeatedly warned by the Soviet side, to take other necessary reply measures with a view to the territory of the United States itself.⁷¹⁰

In accordance with Reagan's instructions, the summit commenced without any pre-negotiated communiqué—Reagan wanted whatever emerged from the summit to be the product of the summit itself.⁷¹¹ Thatcher, however, did not entirely

⁷⁰⁹ Minute, Cole to Margaret Thatcher, "Saturday Evening Dinner: Discussion of Arms Control," May 26, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarethatcher.org/document/130930> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷¹⁰ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 351.

⁷¹¹ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, October 17, 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarethatcher.org/document/123507> [accessed 01/15/14].

support this notion, so she came to the summit with a prepared draft of a possible security statement. Once the summit got underway, Thatcher quickly presented her draft to the American delegation and proceeded to lobby the leaders of Germany and France to support it. Thatcher told her colleagues that she had discovered over the last few weeks that the British public responded well to “firm statements on the basic case for strong defences and the multilateralist approach.”⁷¹² She now charged her colleagues to make such a statement. That night Shultz gave Thatcher’s paper to Rick Burt, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, and asked him to work on producing a statement that would be ready by the following morning. Burt delivered a draft to Shultz the next day, and Shultz brought it to the foreign ministers’ meeting. Everyone except the French representative approved the draft, and Shultz then submitted it to the heads of state. When it became clear that Mitterrand was unwilling to support the statement, Reagan got upset, at one point throwing his pencil down on the table in exasperation. Shultz then spent the remainder of the morning rewrites several paragraphs in the statement in the hopes of satisfying the French concerns. That afternoon, the French persisted in their opposition, and the negotiations reached a stalemate. Then, the Germans stepped in. During a break in the afternoon plenary session, Kohl informed Shultz and Reagan that the Germans had produced a draft that had gained the support of the French. The German proposal seemed to present a breakthrough, but now Thatcher was unhappy. Verbally assaulting Chancellor Kohl, she accused him of

⁷¹² Margaret Thatcher’s Speaking Notes, “Speaking Note, Dinner Saturday 28 May, Discussion of Arms Control,” May 28, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/130934> [accessed 01/15/14]. Thatcher’s speaking notes also include a copy of her proposed alliance security statement.

accepting a statement that was too soft. Kohl objected, and the two got into a heated exchange. Her patience growing thin, Thatcher yelled at Kohl, "I'm in the middle of an election. I bent over backwards for your election. Now it's your turn. I have taken a strong position, and I want a strong statement here." Kohl finally came around to Thatcher's position, but then the French withdrew their support again. Reagan was frustrated, but Thatcher persisted. During the dinner discussions that evening, Thatcher and Shultz withdrew with Mitterrand to a corner of the room to make a final attempt at compromise. Ultimately, three words provided a solution—the *countries concerned*. These three words gave the French a way to support a strong statement without seeming to make a commitment to deploy missiles on behalf of another country. The final statement of the summit declared that if negotiations with the Soviets failed to produce a balanced agreement, "the countries concerned will proceed with the planned deployment of U.S. systems in Europe at the end of 1983."⁷¹³

Both Reagan and Thatcher were very pleased with the outcome of the Williamsburg summit. The final statement contained the exact language that they had wanted. A month after Williamsburg, Reagan sent Thatcher a warm letter of appreciation. "Thanks to your contribution during Saturday's dinner discussion on INF," Reagan wrote, "we were able, in our statement, to send the Soviets a clear

⁷¹³ This account of the negotiations at the Williamsburg summit is based primarily upon Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 355-356. See also, Margaret Thatcher, "Notes of discussion at G7 Williamsburg summit," May 29, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarethatcher.org/document/130939> [accessed 12/12/13]. For the text of the statement produced at the summit, see "Williamsburg Economic Summit Conference Statement on Security Issues," May 29, 1983, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

signal of allied determination and unity.”⁷¹⁴ Reagan realized that, once again, Thatcher’s role had been critical.

Defending the British Nuclear Deterrent

The Williamsburg security statement was deeply disconcerting to the Soviets.⁷¹⁵ They understood the signal that it was intended to send: “Europe was sticking firmly and closely together.”⁷¹⁶ Yuri Andropov told Helmut Kohl in July that he “got the message that deployment would go ahead.”⁷¹⁷ However, if this happened, it would be a security disaster for the Soviets. Consequently, Soviet leaders began re-evaluating their INF negotiating position. For the first time, they decided to make an arms control proposal that would place limits on Soviet SS-20s but leave American FBS unrestrained. Given the history of US-Soviet arms negotiations from 1969-1983, this was a major shift.

In late August of 1983 Andropov gave an interview in *Pravda* in which he announced a new INF arms-reduction proposal. In a letter to President Reagan a few days later, Andropov repeated the new Soviet initiative. Andropov told Reagan that if the United States refrained from deploying its missiles in Europe, the Soviet Union would be willing “to liquidate in the European part of the U.S.S.R.” a substantial portion of its SS-20 missiles. Andropov’s proposal signified a major concession on

⁷¹⁴ Letter, Reagan to Thatcher, June 15, 1983, (Thatcher: Cables [3]) Box 35, NSA Head of State File, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁷¹⁵ Telegram, UK Embassy Moscow to FCO, “Messages from Andropov,” July 1, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128480> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁷¹⁶ Telephone Conversation, Helmut Kohl and Margaret Thatcher, “Chancellor Kohl: Visit to Moscow,” July 8, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128481> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

the part of the Soviet Union. It was offering to reduce unilaterally a significant number of nuclear weapons. But how many of its SS-20 missiles would it eliminate? Andropov informed Reagan that the Soviet Union would be willing to reduce all of its SS-20 missiles that were “in excess of the aggregate number of medium-range missiles of Britain and France.”⁷¹⁸

Upon learning of Andropov’s new offer, British and French officials immediately rejected it. Thatcher and Mitterrand argued that British and French forces should not be equated with Soviet forces because they were national strategic systems of last resort held independently of NATO and not meant for overall European defense. British and French officials also argued that the nuclear forces of their countries were far less powerful than Moscow’s mobile, multiple warhead systems. TASS, the official Soviet news agency, countered these arguments, claiming that British and French systems were comparable to Soviet medium-range missiles in terms of time of flight, range, and warhead yield. “And it does not change things in the least,” TASS added, “whether you call them strategic or medium-range, for they are the missiles of NATO countries—U.S. allies. The Soviet Union has always had a counterbalance to these systems and no one will be able to deprive us of it.”⁷¹⁹

Although the British and French quickly rejected the Soviet proposal, some other European nations saw some merit in it. On September 6, the Dutch Parliament

⁷¹⁸ Memorandum, Shultz to Reagan, “Andropov’s Proposal to Destroy Missiles,” August 29, 1983, Head of State Correspondence: US-U.S.S.R., Box 25, Jack Matlock Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Letter, Yuri Andropov to Ronald Reagan, August 27, 1983, Head of State Correspondence: US-U.S.S.R., Box 25, Jack Matlock Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. In May, Andropov made a similar, but less clearly stated offer to reduce Soviet missiles to the level of the British and French. Western officials claimed that they were unsure exactly what Andropov was offering. See, *New York Times*, May 4, 1983, A1.

⁷¹⁹ *United Press International*, August 31, 1983, PM Cycle.

approved a motion to “urge the United States and other allies, that in one way or another, British and French nuclear forces be taken into account either in the talks on intermediate range nuclear weapons or strategic weapons.”⁷²⁰ Two days later Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti told Schultz during private talks in Madrid that although he understood the “political and technical rationale” for excluding British and French systems “for the moment,” he believed that it was “not good for public opinion to ‘isolate’ them.” It was impossible to argue that these systems were not aimed at the USSR, so the British and French “ought to accept the necessity of discussing their systems at some time in the future.”⁷²¹ German officials also joined the Dutch and Italians in pressuring the British and French governments to adopt a more flexible position.⁷²²

Initially, the American government firmly rejected the Soviet offer, but as the Soviets persisted in their demands, and as negotiations in Geneva stalled, some American officials began to agree with the need for more flexibility. National Security Council documents sent to the President on September 27 supported the European calls for Britain to “be more explicit regarding their willingness to include their forces at some future time,” and recognized the need to review America’s long term strategy regarding British and French systems.⁷²³ In addition, on September

⁷²⁰ *Associated Press*, September 6, 1983, AM Cycle, International News.

⁷²¹ Memorandum, US Delegation Secretary to Secretary of State Washington, “Secretary’s Meeting with Italian Foreign Minister,” September 9, 1983, Folder: September 6-9, 1983 Shultz’s Trip to Madrid, End of Cold War Box 1, National Security Archive.

⁷²² Letter, FCO to Number 10, “INF,” September 5, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128488> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁷²³ NSC Briefing Paper, William Clark to Reagan, (Thatcher Visit - Sep 83), Box 90902, European & Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

28, Vice President Bush told reporters that “somewhere along the line” British and French nuclear weapons would have to be part of the negotiations with the Soviets. “There has to be an answer found for the British and French missiles,” Bush said, if the “idealistic goal of significant reductions” is to be achieved.⁷²⁴

One day after Bush’s remarks, Margaret Thatcher arrived in Washington for another visit with Reagan. Thatcher was intent on impressing the president with the importance of preserving the British nuclear deterrent.⁷²⁵ Britain’s nuclear weapons, Thatcher informed the President, constituted an “irreducible minimum” from the British point of view. They amounted to only 2.5% of the Soviet strategic arsenal, and the Soviet insistence on including Britain’s weapons “a device to divert attention from the American proposal for deep reductions.” Moreover, Thatcher explained, including British systems would logically mean that the United States would never have an equal number of missiles as the Soviets. “Would that really be acceptable to the United States?” Thatcher asked.⁷²⁶

By the end of their time together, Thatcher believed that the President had been swayed. “The president seemed to take my point, which I found reassuring,” Thatcher writes.⁷²⁷ What was even more reassuring was that, as with previous

“Talking Points for Meeting with Thatcher,” (Thatcher Visit - Sep 83), Box 90902, European & Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁷²⁴ *Associated Press*, September 28, PM Cycle, Washington Dateline.

⁷²⁵ Minute, -- Butler to Margaret Thatcher, “Checklist for MT’s discussion with Reagan,” September 28, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/131308> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁷²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, “Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States at the White House at 1137 hours on Thursday 29 September 1983,” September 29, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128206> [accessed 12/12/13]. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 323.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*

Thatcher visits to Washington, Reagan emerged from his meeting with Thatcher with a public statement that supported Thatcher's position. With Thatcher at his side, Reagan declared his "resolve to maintain a strong Western defense" and to "carry out [America's] commitments to the alliance, moving forward in the modernization of NATO's conventional and nuclear deterrent."⁷²⁸ Once again, Thatcher left Washington satisfied that Reagan had accepted her arguments and would consider British interests in his negotiations with the Soviets.⁷²⁹

Receiving American Cruise Missiles in Britain

While privately pressing the President to exclude British nuclear systems from negotiations with the Soviets, Thatcher also used her time in Washington to support publicly Reagan's nuclear policies. "It takes two to negotiate," Thatcher declared, "and the President has constantly put forward detailed proposals to the Soviet Union." Thatcher also displayed her support for American deployment in Europe. If Reagan's proposals were rejected by the Soviets, Thatcher warned the Soviets and promised the Americans, "the cruise and Pershing missiles will be deployed by the end of this year." "Our nerve is being tested," she concluded, "we must not falter now."⁷³⁰

⁷²⁸ Reagan and Thatcher, "Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom Following Their Meetings," September 29, 1983, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Wilson*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁷²⁹ Over the next three years, the Soviets repeatedly demanded that British nuclear forces be included in the INF negotiations, and Thatcher resolutely defended these forces. Reagan consistently sided with Thatcher, and on September 15, 1986 Gorbachev informed Reagan that the Soviet Union was dropping its insistence on counting British systems.

⁷³⁰ Reagan and Thatcher, "Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom Following Their Meetings," September 29, 1983, *Public Papers of the President, Ronald W. Wilson*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

After her statements in Washington, TASS concluded that Thatcher had “virtually assumed the role of Washington’s lobbyist;” the British newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*, derided her as “Little Miss Echo;” and protests continued to erupt throughout Europe and America.⁷³¹ Following ten days of demonstrations, close to a million people took to the streets in West Germany to protest against deployment. Sizeable protests also took place in London, Paris, Stockholm, Rome, Vienna, Washington, San Francisco, Orlando, and Austin.⁷³² Several officials from around the world sent Thatcher letters seeking to dissuade her. Greek officials sent a message urging the postponement of the deployment of American missiles in Europe for another six months to allow more time for negotiations.⁷³³ Andropov wrote to Thatcher, warning that if European countries accepted US missiles, then the USSR would “be compelled to take the necessary counter-measures.”⁷³⁴ German officials asked Thatcher if she would consider delaying the arrival of cruise missiles in Britain to accommodate a delay in the Bundestag debate that would approve or cancel deployment in the FRG.⁷³⁵ Deployment in West Germany was still far from

⁷³¹ Ibid. TASS statement quoted in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, October 3, 1983, SU/7454/A1/1. George Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusionment at the Court of Margaret Thatcher: An Insider’s View* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 53.

⁷³² *New York Times*, October 14, 1983, A3. *Washington Post*, October 23, 1983, A21. *New York Times*, October 23, 1983, Section 1, 17.

⁷³³ Telegram, FCO to UK Embassy Athens, “INF: Greek Proposal to Postpone NATO Deployment Programme,” August 19, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128478> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷³⁴ Letter, Yuri Andropov to Margaret Thatcher, August 27, 1983. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/128485> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷³⁵ Telegram, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, October 6, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/131567> [accessed 01/15/14]. Telegram, Margaret Thatcher to Helmut Kohl, October 10, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/131570> [accessed 01/15/14].

guaranteed, and, Reagan was uneasy about the situation there.⁷³⁶ But in Britain, Thatcher had things under control. In late September Reagan's National Security Council informed the President that Thatcher "had probably won the battle with the British peace movement."⁷³⁷

And she had. Although protests continued in London, on November 14, 1983, the first American cruise missiles arrived in Britain. This was a major victory for the Reagan Administration. And it was also a major victory for Thatcher. She had successfully guided Reagan onto the dual track of the NATO 1979 strategy, encouraged the president to offer an interim proposal, rallied European leaders around a strong statement in favor of deployment, defied the growing protests in Britain and Europe, and had paved the way for American missiles to be deployed in her country, the first European leader to do so.

Reaction to the arrival of American missiles in Britain varied widely. The American government was triumphant; the Soviet government was furious; and European leaders were bolstered. Moscow Radio declared, "Britain has become the first European hostage of the United States. The move is meant to press vacillating NATO allies into accepting the new American medium-range nuclear missiles.

⁷³⁶ "Talking Points for Meeting with Thatcher," (Thatcher Visit - Sep 83), Box 90902, European & Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. In June the FRG Bundestag passed a resolution that would give the Bundestag right of veto over INF deployments in West Germany. The resolution stated that as soon as possible after November 15, the Bundestag would have a chance to review the INF negotiations in Geneva and, in light of this review, vote on whether or not to deploy missiles in German. In June UK officials had concluded, "the German position over INF appears to be becoming increasingly shaky." Letter, FCO to Number 10, "German Position on INF," June 24, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margarethatcher.org/document/128478> [accessed 12/12/13].

⁷³⁷ NSC Briefing Paper, William Clark to Reagan, (Thatcher Visit - Sep 83), Box 90902, European & Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Britain has played a Trojan horse for Washington.”⁷³⁸ After American missiles arrived in Britain, Italy and West Germany followed suit. Two days after Britain received American missiles, Italy’s Chamber of Deputies voted 351 to 219 to deploy U.S. cruise missiles. Eight days after cruise missiles arrived in Britain, the West German Parliament voted to deploy Pershing II missiles. The next day, on January 23, the first Pershing II missiles arrived in West Germany. A few days later, the cruise missiles arrived in Italy. Having achieved her objective to counter the Soviet INF threat, Thatcher declared with apparent satisfaction:

We watched the Soviet Union deploy many, many warheads, some 800 or 900 SS20 warheads. We asked the Soviet Union to take them down. We negotiated with it for nearly four years, asking it to take them down. In the absence of the Soviet Union going to zero, we...put our own deterrent in place. We have done so and we shall continue with the programme of deploying cruise and Pershing missiles to protect the people of this country.⁷³⁹

When NATO endorsed the dual-track strategy in 1979, Soviet leaders believed that they could prevent the deployment of American missiles in Europe. They were wrong. “It is now clear,” write Soviet arms control experts Detinov and Savel’yev, “that the Soviet side overestimated the potential of the anti-war/anti-missile movement in Europe, which, in fact, failed to decisively influence the American and NATO plans. The Soviets noticed neither the weakness of the anti-missile movement nor the impact of its own SS-20/RSD-10 deployment, which continued apace.”⁷⁴⁰ Dobrynin confirms this assessment when he writes, “We had

⁷³⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, November 17, 1983, SU/7493/A1/1.

⁷³⁹ Thatcher, “Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet, November 14, 1983,” Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archives (digital collection). *U.S. News & World Report*, November 28, 1983, 15.

⁷⁴⁰ Detinov and Savel’yev, *The Big Five*, 68.

hoped that the popular movement against American missiles in Europe would make the United States and NATO drop the plan. But events had clearly proven us wrong.”⁷⁴¹ This error meant that NATO now had extremely accurate missiles deployed against the Soviet Union that could reach Moscow in six minutes. This was a devastating development for the Soviet Union. They had been profoundly worried about American FBS, but these new American missiles were far more deadly. Mikhail Gorbachev called the new Pershing II missiles “a pistol against our head.”⁷⁴²

Prior to the deployment of the new American missiles, the NATO countries of Europe had argued that Soviet SS-20 missiles had given the Soviet Union superiority and that new American missiles were necessary to rectify an imbalance and restore equality. Of course, this is not how the Soviet Union viewed these new missiles. Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov said that America’s new missiles caused “a qualitative change in the overall strategic situation in favor of the United States.”⁷⁴³

⁷⁴¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 557.

⁷⁴² Meeting Notes, “Anatoly Chernyaev’s Notes from Politburo Session on October 4, 1986,” Box 15, Russian and Eastern European Archive Document Database, National Security Archive.

⁷⁴³ Quoted by Gordievsky in Skinner, ed *Turning Points*, 67-68

CHAPTER EIGHT

**THE REAGAN PARADOX,
1981-1984**

While Reagan and Thatcher were cooperating to carry out the NATO dual-track decision from 1981-1983, US-Soviet relations were deteriorating. During Reagan's first term in office, he pursued a wide range of policies that he believed would increase American strength, both at home and abroad. Reagan hoped that his policies in pursuit of American strength would convince Soviet leaders that they could not win the Cold War, which, in turn, would lead to a moderation in Soviet policies and open the way for improved relations between the two superpowers. This, however, did not happen. Reagan's policies in pursuit of greater American power played into Soviet fears about America's aggressive, imperialistic tendencies. Despite the fact that Reagan hoped for this outcome, his militaristic policies combined with Soviet anxieties made Reagan's first four years as president one of the most volatile periods of the entire Cold War.

Reagan's Strength and Soviet Fears

The first three years of the Reagan presidency marked the lowest point in US-Soviet relations in the entire Cold War era. During this time, Reagan pursued a wide range of policies aimed at strengthening America's defenses, rolling back the global influence of communism, and weakening the Soviet state. He criticized détente, arguing that the Soviets had exploited it to overtake the United States in the arms race and gain strategic nuclear superiority. He announced that he would not be bound by the terms of the unratified SALT II treaty and that future negotiations would depend upon Soviet behavior in other arenas. Reagan also believed that America had become weak militarily during the 1970s and that this weakness might

entice the Soviets to attack the United States. Based on this view, he poured billions of dollars into improving America's military might. Shortly after taking office, Reagan revived the B-1 bomber program that had been cancelled by Carter, authorized production of the new MX intercontinental nuclear missile, and set in motion plans to build a 600-ship Navy. His goal was not mere parity with the Soviet Union in military strength; he wanted American to "regain and sustain military superiority over the Soviet Union."⁷⁴⁴ Reagan also looked for opportunities to support anti-communist movements around the world, a policy that became known as the Reagan Doctrine. In 1981 he began sending aid to anti-communist forces in Poland and increased American support for the Mujahidin who were fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. Reagan also authorized CIA Director Bill Casey to design and implement an extensive program of psychological operations (PSYOP) against the Soviet Union that sought to fuel indecision and sow fear among the Soviet leadership.⁷⁴⁵ As part of the PSYOP program, the United States would do things like periodically sending fighter jets screaming toward Soviet borders, only to reverse course at the last possible minute. The CIA also intentionally cultivated the image of Reagan as a loose cannon, a Cold War cowboy with his finger on the nuclear trigger. It was part of the administration's strategy, Richard Allen, Reagan's National Security Advisor, recalls, "to get the Soviets to think he was a little crazy."⁷⁴⁶ Reagan also engaged in rhetorical warfare against the Soviet Union, frequently giving

⁷⁴⁴ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 294.

⁷⁴⁵ For Reagan's support of Casey's approach, see entry for March 9, 1981, in Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 7.

⁷⁴⁶ Schweizer, *Victory*, 8.

speeches and making public statements in which he described Soviet leaders as being evil and immoral.

Reagan justified his militaristic policies by arguing that his ultimate goal was to create an international environment that would be most conducive to creating lasting peace with the Soviets. He argued that peace with the Soviets would come only through increased American strength. Reagan had been arguing for peace through strength since 1964, and he seems to have really believed that increased American strength could pave the way to peace.⁷⁴⁷ “I have to believe,” Reagan said in the middle of his first year as president, “that our greatest goal must be peace.”⁷⁴⁸ Strength, therefore, in Reagan’s mind was not an end in itself; the goal was peace. Reagan seemed to view the pursuit of peace as a kind of religious calling, and he was particularly intent on finding a way to reduce the risk of nuclear war.⁷⁴⁹ Consequently, as Reagan pursued a variety of programs to increase America’s strength, he also frequently made peace overtures toward Soviet leaders.

The problem with Reagan’s peace through strength strategy was that Soviet leaders simply could not believe that Reagan’s proposals in favor of peace were genuine, especially when they were made at the same time that America was so

⁷⁴⁷ Reagan’s adoption of the concept of “peace through strength” may have happened in 1964. During this year, the Republican Party spent close to five million dollars on television commercials that promoted the idea of “peace through strength” in support of Barry Goldwater’s candidacy for president (Steven A. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda, and Persuasion in Election Campaigns Around the World and Through History* (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2008), 76). Reagan used the expression “peace through strength” during a speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention.

⁷⁴⁸ Reagan made this statement on June 16, 1981. He is quoted in Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 3.

⁷⁴⁹ Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005), 6.

aggressively pursuing strength. For Soviet leaders, Reagan's proposals in favor of peace were entirely drowned out and undermined by his policies in pursuit of strength. Soviet leaders did not see a president who was ultimately striving for peace, they "saw an adversary engaged in reckless provocations and sweeping challenges to its legitimate interests, launching a massive arms race that at best sought to exhaust the USSR, and at worst was actually readying for nuclear attack."⁷⁵⁰ From Moscow's perspective, Reagan's quest for strength was not evidence that Reagan desired peace; it was proof that he was preparing for war.

Just nine days after becoming president, Reagan accused the Soviet Union of reserving "unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie and to cheat" in order to achieve their goal of a one-world Communist state.⁷⁵¹ According to Oleg Gordievsky, a former KGB official, when members of the Politburo heard Reagan's accusations, "Moscow was shocked."⁷⁵² Anatoly Dobrynin says that within a month of Reagan taking office, Soviet officials were "suddenly and deeply set against him."⁷⁵³ Members of the Politburo concluded rather quickly that Reagan's election "meant that the most unbridled forces of imperialism had come to power in the United States."⁷⁵⁴ KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov told Stasi officials, "Reagan's vulgar speeches show the true face of the military-industrial complex. They have long

⁷⁵⁰ Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 1.

⁷⁵¹ Ronald Reagan, "The President's News Conference," January 29, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=44101> [accessed 01/14/14].

⁷⁵² Gordievsky in Skinner ed., *Turning Points*, 66.

⁷⁵³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 486

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

sought such a figure. Now, they have finally found it in the form of Reagan.”⁷⁵⁵ A fear began to grow within the Politburo that Reagan might have plans to use America’s increased military might against the Soviet Union. Andropov believed that the “warlike statements made by the new president about crusades against communism and accusations of the Soviet Union’s guilt of all the deadly sins were merely a propagandistic background that shielded the development of an aggressive military and strategic course, the essence of which was the new role nuclear weapons would play.”⁷⁵⁶ Stated more simply, Andropov feared that Reagan might be preparing for a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union.

He feared this so much, in fact, that he launched a massive human intelligence gathering operation, codenamed Operation RYAN.⁷⁵⁷ The goal of Operation RYAN was to uncover “preparations by the adversary for a nuclear missile attack” and “to organize a continual watch...for indications of a decision being taken to use nuclear weapons against the USSR or immediate preparations

⁷⁵⁵ "Stasi Note on Meeting Between Minister Mielke and KGB Deputy Chairman Kryuchkov" September 19, 1983, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU), MfS, ZAIG 5306, 1-19. Translated from German for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer. Wilson Center Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115718> [accessed 12/15/13].

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁷ RYAN stands for *Raketno-Yadernoe Napadenie* (Ракетно ядерное нападение), which is translated “Nuclear Missile Attack.” Report, KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov to General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, "Report of the Work of the KGB in 1981," May 10, 1982, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 426, ed. Nate Jones, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/> [accessed 01/15/14]. Report, Victor Chebrikov to General Secretary Yuri Andropov, "Report of the Work of the KGB in 1982," March 15, 1983, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 426, ed. Nate Jones, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/> [accessed 01/15/14].

being made for a nuclear missile attack.”⁷⁵⁸ The KGB created 300 new positions for Operation RYAN and sent hundreds of special agents to the United States and other NATO countries to do a wide variety of intelligence tasks, including monitoring evacuation centers and shelters that might be used during a nuclear war, appraising the level of blood held in blood banks, monitoring afterhours vehicle traffic in and out of government building, conducting surveillance on key nuclear decision makers, and even spying on heads of churches and banks.⁷⁵⁹ All of this information, much of it entirely meaningless, was sent back to Moscow where it was plugged into a computer program that attempted to “calculate and monitor the correlation of forces, including mili[tary], economy, [and] psychological factors, to assign numbers and relative weights.”⁷⁶⁰ This torrent of data convinced Soviet leaders that a nuclear first strike from the Reagan administration was a real possibility. Gordievsky writes, “Moscow did not have any doubts. It had concluded that Washington sought to shift the balance of forces in its favor so as to perform a surprise nuclear attack first and

⁷⁵⁸ Cable, KGB Center to Com[rade] Yermakov, “Permanent Operational Assignment to Uncover NATO Preparations for a Nuclear Missile Attack on the USSR,” February 17, 1983. Published in Benjamin B. Fischer, “A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare,” Central Intelligence Agency Publications, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#rft48> [accessed 12/15/13].

⁷⁵⁹ “Deputy Minister Markus Wolf, Stasi Note on Meeting with KGB Experts on the RYAN Problem, 14 to 18 August 1984” August 24, 1984, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU), MfS, ZAIG 5384, 1-16. Translated from German for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115721> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁷⁶⁰ This quote comes from an interview that Don Oberdorfer conducted with a former Soviet official. The name of the official is redacted in the transcript of the interview. See, Transcript, “Interview with former [redacted] hand, at Madison [Hotel], May 22, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

to reduce the responsive strike from the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership was serious about preparing for such inevitable war.”⁷⁶¹

Reagan, of course, had no plans to launch a war against the Soviets. His view of himself was radically different than the Soviet view. In keeping with his peace through strength strategy, he saw himself as a man of peace with a destiny to improve US-Soviet relations and reduce the threat of nuclear war. This belief was strengthened by a dramatic experience on March 30, 1981. On this day Reagan was walking out of the Washington Hilton Hotel when a man in the crowd pulled out a Rohm RG-14 revolver and began firing at the president. The first shot hit Reagan’s Press Secretary in the head; the second shot struck a local police officer. As the gunman continued firing, Reagan’s secret service agents sprang into action, shielding the president with their own bodies and tackling him into the presidential limousine.⁷⁶² In the mêlée, one of the gunman’s shots ricocheted off the limousine, slipped through a crack in the open door, and struck Reagan under the arm. The bullet grazed his rib and tumbled through his body, stopping within inches of his heart. Reagan would survive the assassination attempt, but the experience left an indelible impression on him. He believed that God had spared his life so that he could halt the nuclear arms race. In his memoirs, Reagan writes, “...coming so close to death made me feel I should do whatever I could in the years God had given me to reduce the threat of nuclear war; perhaps there was a reason I had been spared.”⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹ Gordievsky, *Turning Points*, 70.

⁷⁶² Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 257.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, 269.

Based on this feeling, he decided to make what he believed was a major peace initiative.

Twelve days after Reagan returned to the White House from the hospital after being shot, he sent two letters to Brezhnev—a highly-personalized, handwritten letter and a more formal typed letter. In the handwritten letter, he discussed the common hopes of the peoples of the world, assured Brezhnev that the US had no intention of imposing its will on others by force, and informed the Soviet leader of his decision to lift the American grain embargo on the Soviet Union. Reagan hoped that this gesture, made “in the spirit of helping the people of both...nations,” would lead to “meaningful and constructive dialogue” and help the two leaders to fulfill their “first obligation to find peace.”⁷⁶⁴

Despite Reagan’s attractive *words* about peace, Brezhnev’s two letters in reply to Reagan focused on Reagan’s *deeds* in pursuit of strength. In a letter on May 25, Brezhnev said that he shared Reagan’s aspirations for peace but could not overlook America’s efforts to increase and expand the American military presence around the world, including adding new overseas bases thousands of kilometers away from the United States and aiming new missiles at the Soviet Union. These steps did not correspond with a desire for peace. Two days later, Brezhnev sent Reagan a second letter. In it he took issue with Reagan’s claims that the US had to deploy new weapons in order to catch up with the Soviets. “Your predecessors,” Brezhnev argued, “recognized that there was a parity in the military areas between the USSR and USA.” Why was Reagan now revising this view? “Does it mean that all

⁷⁶⁴ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Leonid Brezhnev, April 24, 1981, The Reagan Files, <http://jasonebin.com/thereaganfiles/id9.html> [accessed 01/15/14].

depends on who does the counting?” Brezhnev asked. Brezhnev also questioned Reagan’s calls for peace when they were made in the face of “huge military budgets,” “new weapons systems,” and “demands...to rescind agreements reached earlier on arms limitations.” How could the Soviets take Reagan’s calls for peace, when “a definite status is being given to doctrines envisioning the possibility of delivering the first strike and waging ‘limited’ wars with the use of nuclear weapons”? “Try, Mr. President,” Brezhnev wrote, “to see what is going on through our eyes.”⁷⁶⁵

At this stage in Reagan’s presidency, he had no interest in seeing things through Soviet eyes. He described Brezhnev’s letters as an “icy reply” and placed the blame for the failure of his “first attempt at personal diplomacy” squarely on Brezhnev’s shoulders.⁷⁶⁶ Shortly after Reagan sent his personal appeal to Brezhnev, he publicly attacked the Soviet Union again.

A few months later, Reagan made another initiative that he hoped would significantly reduce the threat posed by nuclear weapons and help reduce tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. On November 18, Reagan gave a speech in which he introduced his “zero option” proposal—the United States would forego deploying its intermediate-range missiles in Europe if the Soviet Union would remove its comparable Soviet systems already deployed against Western

⁷⁶⁵ Letter, Leonid Brezhnev to Ronald Reagan, “Unofficial translation,” May 25, 1981, The Reagan Files, http://jasonebin.com/thereaganfiles/03_25_1981.html [accessed February 8, 2014]. Letter, Leonid Brezhnev to Ronald Reagan, May 27, 1981, The Reagan Files, http://jasonebin.com/thereaganfiles/5_27_1981.html [accessed February 8, 2014].

⁷⁶⁶ Reagan, *An American Life*, 273.

Europe, including its SS-20 missiles.⁷⁶⁷ Reagan hoped the Soviets would view the proposal as “a sincere effort to begin the process of arms reduction.”⁷⁶⁸ The Soviets, however, absolutely did not view Reagan’s proposal in this way. Just a few weeks before Reagan gave this speech, he had given his final approval for a multibillion dollar modernization of America’s strategic nuclear forces, including authorization to build 100 new B-1 nuclear bombers, 100 new intercontinental MX nuclear missiles, a new “stealth” bomber that would be able to penetrate defenses, and new Trident nuclear submarines with new nuclear missiles. Against the backdrop of these massive increases in America’s strategic nuclear potential, Soviet leaders concluded that the zero option was a “mere propaganda ploy.”⁷⁶⁹ Dusko Doder, the Moscow correspondent for the *Washington Post*, made numerous attempts to discuss the zero option with Soviet leaders, but did not find even one person willing to discuss it seriously. “They saw it,” Doder writes, “as an easily understood formula tailored for the Western man in the street and an ingenious device to put the Russians on the propaganda defensive.” The Russians were convinced that “the Americans were determined to deploy these missiles and had no interest in the ongoing talks in Geneva.”⁷⁷⁰

During this time, Reagan continued to add fuel to the fire of Soviet fears with inflammatory anti-Soviet rhetoric. During a commencement speech at Notre Dame,

⁷⁶⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, this proposal originated in Europe and the timing of Reagan’s announcement was clearly influenced by Thatcher and other European leaders. The idea itself, however, seems to have fit very well with Reagan’s own aspirations to reduce nuclear weapons.

⁷⁶⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, 293.

⁷⁶⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 348.

⁷⁷⁰ Dusko Doder, *Shadows and Whispers*, 179-180.

he said that the West would transcend communism and “dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written.”⁷⁷¹ On June 8, he told members of the British Parliament that the United States was launching a “crusade for freedom” against the Soviet Union and assured them that the “forces of good” would “triumph over evil” and that Marxism-Leninism would be left on “the ash heap of history.”⁷⁷² The Soviet news agency TASS responded to Reagan’s speech in England with one a sharp personal attack on the President. It warned that Reagan’s “anticommunist crusade” “may end only in a global catastrophe.” TASS argued that it was fine for the two sides to disagree on ideas but that it was inappropriate for heads of state to engage in such strident public attacks. “Crude anti-Sovietism has long been characteristic of Reagan and his immediate entourage. But there is a limit to everything, especially when a person is vested with the powers of a head of state.” The news agency went on to argue that the “threat of global war” that was “looming over the world” was caused by “the unbridled arms race” that the Reagan administration had unleashed “based on the policy of strength in international affairs.”⁷⁷³

On November 10, 1982, Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet General Secretary who had pursued détente with the United States during the Nixon and Ford presidencies,

⁷⁷¹ Ronald Reagan, “Address at Commencement Exercises at the University of Notre Dame,” May 17, 1981, The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/51781a.htm> [accessed 02/18/14].

⁷⁷² Ronald Reagan, “Address to Members of the British Parliament,” June 8, 1982, The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.htm> [accessed 02/05/14].

⁷⁷³ *The Washington Post*, “Soviets Sharply Assail Reagan over ‘Crusade,’” June 9, 1982, A26.

died. The Soviet Politburo chose Yuri Andropov to replace him. As Soviet Ambassador to Hungary, Andropov had played a key role in crushing the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. As Chairman of the KGB, he had been the main proponent of “extreme measures” against the Prague Spring in 1968, the most dominant supporter of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the architect of a massive intelligence operation against the United States (Operation RYAN), and one of the harshest critics of Reagan’s policies in pursuit of American strength. Andropov’s selection as General Secretary shows that the Soviet Union had no intention of moderating its foreign policy or backing down to the United States one year into Reagan’s peace through strength program.

In early 1983 Reagan told Secretary of State George Shultz that he wanted a chance to engage personally with a Soviet leader.⁷⁷⁴ On February 12, Shultz offered to arrange a private meeting between Reagan and Dobrynin. Reagan eagerly agreed. Three days later, Shultz secretly brought Dobrynin to the family quarters on the second floor of the White House, where Reagan was waiting. During the meeting, which lasted for almost two hours, Reagan expressed “his readiness to see important problems...with the Soviet Union addresses and resolved.”⁷⁷⁵ He hoped that Dobrynin would convey to the Soviet leadership his desire for a “positive turn”

⁷⁷⁴ Don Oberdorfer claims that Reagan began to look for ways to improve US-Soviet relations in a more intensive way early 1983. He argues that Reagan expressed his concerns about the direction of US-Soviet relations and desire for a breakthrough over dinner with George Shultz on February 12, 1983. See Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 15-48.

⁷⁷⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ronald Reagan, George Schultz, and Anatoly Dobrynin, February 15, 1983, The End of the Cold War Collection, Box 1, National Security Archive.

in US-Soviet relations.⁷⁷⁶ After the meeting, Dobrynin was “impressed with the fact of the meeting” and with “the reasonableness of the President,”⁷⁷⁷ but he did not know what to make of the encounter in the context of all of Reagan’s hardline policies and pronouncements. “What seemed difficult for us to fathom,” Dobrynin writes in his memoirs, “were Reagan’s vehement public attacks on the Soviet Union while he was secretly sending—orally and through his private letters—quite different signals seeking more normal relations.”⁷⁷⁸

On March 8, just three weeks after his meeting with Dobrynin, Reagan launched another one of these “vehement public attacks” against the Soviet Union. During a speech before the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, he called the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and the “focus of evil in the modern world.”⁷⁷⁹ Dobrynin was completely baffled. Reagan had done it again. In his memoirs, Dobrynin writes:

The entire episode demonstrated a certain paradox about Ronald Reagan: contradiction between words and deeds that greatly angered Moscow, the more so because Reagan himself never seemed to see it. In his mind such incompatibilities could coexist in perfect harmony, but Moscow regarded such behavior at that time as a sign of deliberate duplicity and hostility.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 518.

⁷⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ronald Reagan, George Schultz, and Anatoly Dobrynin, February 15, 1983, The End of the Cold War Collection, Box 1, National Security Archive.

⁷⁷⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 526.

⁷⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, March 8, 1983,” The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁷⁸⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 927.

Gordievsky echoes this conclusion. "Moscow was racking its brains," he writes, "over why Reagan was making such provocative pronouncements" after inviting Dobrynin to meet with him and "proposing to establish good working relationships with Moscow." "How could one take that proposal seriously when simultaneously Reagan called the Soviet Union the evil empire?"⁷⁸¹ The day after Reagan's speech, TASS expressed the Politburo's frustration with the President, asserting that Reagan's inflammatory language proved again that his administration was characterized by "extreme militarism" and was able to "think only in terms of confrontation and bellicose, lunatic anti-Communism."⁷⁸²

Two weeks later, on March 23, Reagan gave another speech that upset Soviet officials even more. Speaking from the Oval Office to a live nationwide television audience, Reagan announced his plans to begin research on a space-based defensive shield that would protect the United States against a Soviet nuclear attack. Reagan's plan called for a complex system that would "intercept and destroy ballistic missiles" before they reached American soil.⁷⁸³ He called his plan the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Critics in the media quickly nicknamed it "Star Wars" after the popular 1980s science fiction movie. Reagan believed that his proposal was a peace initiative that would open the way for serious reductions in nuclear

⁷⁸¹ Gordievsky, *Turning Points*, 71.

⁷⁸² *New York Times*, "Soviet Says Reagan Has 'Pathological Hatred,'" March 10, 1983.

⁷⁸³ In Reagan's memoirs, he credits Edward Teller with the idea for the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan writes on September 14, 1982, "Dr. Teller came in. He's pushing an exciting idea that nuclear weapons can be used in connection with Lasers to be non destructive except as used to destroy enemy missiles far above the earth. Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 100.

weapons.⁷⁸⁴ If the United States could develop a shield against nuclear weapons, Reagan asserted, then this would make nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” In his speech, he called “upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace.”⁷⁸⁵

Although Reagan claimed that SDI was a defensive shield that would contribute to “the cause of mankind and world peace,” the Soviets concluded that it was an offensive weapon that could lead the world to war. Reagan’s plan heightened Soviet fears that the United States might be planning a nuclear attack against the Soviet Union. They believed that the real reason that Reagan wanted to create a shield around the United States was so that the US could attack the Soviet Union without fear of a counter strike. According to Soviet General Dmitry Volkogonov, SDI showed “the USA’s desire to ensure better offensive, aggressive plans....Believing itself to be safe, it would think it was possible to launch at any moment a nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union.”⁷⁸⁶ Some Soviet leaders also worried that the United States might use Reagan’s plan for a defensive shield as a cover for putting nuclear weapons in space in order to gain a decisive strategic advantage over the Soviet Union. Sergei Sokolov, Marshall of the Soviet Union, argued, “The White

⁷⁸⁴ On February 11, 1982, Reagan wrote in his diary, “Out of [lunch with the JCS] came a super idea. So far the only policy worldwide on nuclear weapons is to have a deterrent. What if we tell the world we want to protect our people, not avenge them; that we’re going to embark on a program of research to come up with a defensive weapon that could make nuclear weapons obsolete?” Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 130.

⁷⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” March 23, 1983, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/32383d.htm> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁷⁸⁶ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, August 4, 1983.

House is seeking ways of achieving military superiority...by developing a fundamentally new type of weapon, space strike weapons."⁷⁸⁷

Over the next several months, Soviet anxieties grew. During a meeting between Dobrynin and Shultz in May, Dobrynin told Shultz that "the Soviet Union...was deeply convinced that Reagan was the most anti-Soviet American president for twenty years and his views bordered on fanaticism."⁷⁸⁸ Two weeks later, Andropov, who had replaced Brezhnev as General Secretary on November 12, 1982, told Averill Harriman that he feared that "the current Administration...may be moving toward the dangerous 'red line'" of war. In addition, Andropov seemed genuinely concerned that in an environment in which "mistrust and enmity have heated up" and "there is a sharpening of the arms race," a nuclear war could be started "through miscalculation." Andropov repeated four times during the conversation that some type of miscalculation could cause a nuclear war.⁷⁸⁹

On September 1 Andropov's prediction almost came true, as a serious miscalculation pushed the two superpowers closer to the brink. On August 31 Korean Airlines flight 007 departed New York City for Seoul, South Korea. The plane stopped in Anchorage, Alaska to refuel, and then departed for the final leg of the

⁷⁸⁷ *Pravda*, "Preserving What Has Been Achieved in the Sphere of Strategic Arms Limitation," November 6, 1985, 4. For a thorough analysis of the Soviet military's public statements on SDI, see Mary C. Fitzgerald, "The Soviet Military on SDI," Professional Paper 461 /August 1987, Center for Naval Analysis. <http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/5500046100.pdf> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁷⁸⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 535.

⁷⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting with CPSU General Secretary Andropov," June 2, 1983, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Box 655. Published in Nate Jones, ed. "The 1983 War Scare: "The Last Paroxysm" of the Cold War Part I," May 16, 2013, The National Security Archive. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/> [accessed 02/01/14].

flight early in the morning on September 1. Shortly after take off, the captain switched the plane into auto pilot mode and the captain and co-pilot began discussing their autumn vacation plans. At 3 A.M. Seoul time, the flight crew announced that the flight would land in three hours and that breakfast and beverages would be served shortly. No one on board realized that the plane had been drifting off course. Four hours into the flight, the plane was 185 miles outside its planned flight path and deep into Soviet airspace. The captain and his crew were also entirely ignorant of the fact that the plane was being tailed by two Soviet Sukhoi Su-15 fighter jets that had been scrambled to intercept the plane after it entered Soviet air space. One of the Soviet pilots, Colonel Gennadi Osipovitch, wondered whether the plane was a military or civilian aircraft. "I could see two rows of windows," Osipovitch recalls. "I wondered if it was a civilian aircraft. Military cargo planes don't have such windows." Osipovitch signaled the Korean jetliner in international code and fired warning shots with brightly lit tracers, but the plane did not respond. "I wondered what kind of plane it was, but I had no time to think. I had a job to do." Osipovitch claims that his orders were "to destroy the intruder" if it did not identify itself.⁷⁹⁰ When the plane failed to respond to Osipovitch's signals, he fired his missiles into the aircraft, and the plane began a rapid descent. Inside the Korean airliner, chaos ensued. An explosion sounded, the autopilot switched off, and the plane plunged downward. Turbulence racked the plane, and the passengers heard a terse announcement—"Attention. Emergency decent." As the captain

⁷⁹⁰ Osipovitch is quoted in Thom Patterson, "The downing of Flight 007: 30 years later, a Cold War tragedy still seems surreal," August 31, 2013, CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/31/us/kal-fight-007-anniversary/> [accessed 02/01/14].

struggled to regain control of the plane, the flight crew gave a second announcement: “Put out your cigarette. This is an emergency descent. Put the mask over your nose and mouth and adjust the headband.” The crew repeated this announcement four times, with increasing urgency each time. The last thing the cockpit voice recorder picked up was, “Put the mask over your nose and mouth and adjust...”⁷⁹¹ At that moment, the plane plunged into the Sea of Japan near Sakhalin Island, killing all 269 people on board, including 61 Americans and citizens of Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. Among the Americans killed were Alice Ephraimson-Abt, “a brilliant, 23-year-old blue-eyed blonde” from New Jersey who was on her way to Beijing to teach English and Congressman Larry McDonald, a Democrat representing Georgia in the US House of Representatives.⁷⁹²

Shortly after the plane crashed into the Sea of Japan, the Soviet Union issued a cryptic statement that acknowledged that a plane had entered Soviet airspace and then fell into the sea but said nothing about a Soviet fighter shooting it out of the sky. The implication of the Soviet statements was that the cause of the plane crash was unknown. Soviet leaders held to this story for more than a week, even after Japan announced that it had incontrovertible proof that the Soviet Union was responsible—Japanese intelligence services had recordings of the communication

⁷⁹¹ For details of the flight path and the transcript of the cockpit recording, see “CVR transcript Korean Air Flight 007 - 31 AUG 1983,” Aviation Safety Network, Flight Safety Foundation. http://aviation-safety.net/investigation/cvr/transcripts/cvr_ke007.php [accessed 02/01/14].

⁷⁹² Thom Patterson, “The downing of Flight 007: 30 years later, a Cold War tragedy still seems surreal,” August 31, 2013, CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/31/us/kal-fight-007-anniversary/> [accessed 02/01/14]. Benjamin B. Fischer, “A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare,” Central Intelligence Agency Publications, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#rft48> [accessed 02/01/14].

between the Soviet fighters and their military commanders on the ground.⁷⁹³ On September 5, Reagan gave an impassioned speech in which he denounced the shooting down of the plane as an “an act of barbarism, born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations.” “There was absolutely no justification, either legal or moral, for what the Soviets did,” Reagan declared. He even went so far as to play an audio recording of the Soviet pilot telling his superiors, “The target has been destroyed.” Reagan called the event, “The Korean Airline Massacre,” and the name stuck.⁷⁹⁴

Soviet sources, including minutes of Politburo meetings and communication between the Soviet and East German governments, reveal that the Soviet government genuinely suspected, both at the time of the shooting and afterwards, that the Korean plane was somehow involved in espionage against the Soviet Union.⁷⁹⁵ Some Soviet officials even believed that the United States might have even orchestrated the whole event to make the Soviet Union look bad. During a Politburo meeting on September 2, one Politburo member argued that the United States had

⁷⁹³ Transcript, “KAL Incident: Press Briefing,” September 1, 1983, National Security Archive. The audio recording was obtained from the Japanese government.

⁷⁹⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on the Soviet Attack on a Korean Civilian Airliner,” September 5, 1983, The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/90583a.htm> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁷⁹⁵ See, for example, “Stasi Note on Meeting Between Minister Mielke and KGB Deputy Chairman Kryuchkov” September 19, 1983, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU), MfS, ZAIG 5306, 1-19. Translated from German for CWIHP by Bernd Schaefer.

<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115718> [accessed 02/01/14].

sent the plane into Soviet territory as a “premeditated provocative act.”⁷⁹⁶ A report sent to the Politburo by the KGB and Ministry of Defense echoed this view. The report concluded:

We are dealing with a major, dual-purpose political provocation carefully organized by the US special services. The first purpose was to use the incursion of the intruder aircraft into Soviet airspace to create a favorable situation for the gathering of defense data on our air defense system in the Far East....Second, they envisaged, if this flight were terminated by us, [the US would use] that fact to mount a global anti-Soviet campaign to discredit the Soviet Union.⁷⁹⁷

Soviet officials initially denied shooting down the plane, but when it became undeniable that this was what happened, they argued that the jetliner was a spy plane. Both Soviet positions were entirely unconvincing to almost everyone outside the Soviet Union. Outrage against the Soviet Union grew in the countries who lost people in the tragedy and mourners in Korea and Japan burned Soviet flags. American officials called for a full inquiry and condemned the Soviet Union for obstructing search and rescue operations.⁷⁹⁸ On the whole, the KAL 007 massacre increased Soviet paranoia that the United States was fomenting war and reinforced Reagan’s belief that the Soviet system was inhuman and immoral.

⁷⁹⁶ Meeting Transcript, “Meeting of the Politburo of the CC CPSU under the chairmanship of K. U. Chernenko on the violation of the air space of the USSR by a South Korean airplane on August 31, 1983,” September 2, 1983. Box 9, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, Volkogonov Collection, National Security Archive.

⁷⁹⁷ The report is cited in Benjamin B. Fischer, “A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare,” Central Intelligence Agency Publications, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#rft48> [accessed 02/01/14]. Fischer found the report in Christopher Andrew, “KGB Foreign Intelligence from Brezhnev to the Coup,” *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 8, no. 3, July 1993, 60.

⁷⁹⁸ *Congressional Record*, September 20, 1983, S12462-S12464.

In late September, Soviet leaders lashed out at the United States in an official statement published in both *Pravda* and *Izvestia*. Andropov asserted that an "outrageous military psychosis" had overtaken the US and claimed that "the Reagan administration, in its imperial ambitions, goes so far that one begins to doubt whether Washington has any brakes at all preventing it from crossing the point at which any sober-minded person must stop."⁷⁹⁹ Two weeks later, Sergei Vishnevsky, a senior *Pravda* columnist, privately confided to Jack Matlock, a member of Reagan's NSC staff, that US-Soviet relations had deteriorated to such a dangerous point that many in the Soviet public were asking if war was imminent.⁸⁰⁰

In early November, Soviet anxieties increased even more when NATO conducted an international war games exercise that simulated a crisis in Europe that eventually escalated to a nuclear conflict. Senior officials from the United States and several European countries and 16,000 troops participated in the exercise, labeled "Able Archer." Coded messages flashed back and forth across the Atlantic as these officials went through a script that envisioned a gradual transition from conventional war to nuclear confrontation. The decisive moment in the drill came on November 9 when war gamers at Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe

⁷⁹⁹ "Declaration by Yu. V. Andropov, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet," *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*, 29 September 1983, 1. Cited in Benjamin B. Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare," Central Intelligence Agency Publications, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm#rft48> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁸⁰⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting between Sergei Vishnevsky and Jack Matlock," October 11, 1983, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/docs/18.US-Soviet%20Relations-October%2011,%201983.pdf> [accessed 02/01/14].

requested “initial limited use of nuclear weapons against pre-selected fixed targets.”⁸⁰¹

As NATO conducted its simulation, raw data from Soviet spies poured into Moscow and was plugged into the Operation RYAN database. On the night of either November 8 or 9—the sources are uncertain—the KGB decided that the NATO drill might be the cover for a surprise attack against the Soviet Union. KGB Center then sent a flash cable to its agents in West Europe, informing them that US forces in Europe had gone on alert and that Soviet troops were being mobilized in response.

Gordievsky recalls:

In the tense atmosphere generated by the crises and rhetoric of the past few months, the KGB concluded that American forces had been placed on alert--and might even have begun the countdown to war... The world did not quite reach the edge of the nuclear abyss during Operation RYAN. But during ABLE ARCHER 83 it had, without realizing it, come frighteningly close--certainly closer than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.⁸⁰²

A month after the Able Archer exercise, the United States began deploying intermediate-range missiles in Britain, West Germany, and Italy. When American Pershing II missiles arrived in the FRG, Soviet officials walked out of the INF negotiations in Geneva. Within the next three weeks, they also broke off negotiations on strategic weapons (START) and on conventional weapons (MBFR). For the first time in 14 years, the two sides had no arms control talks of any kind in

⁸⁰¹ Nate Jones, “The Able Archer 83 Sourcebook,” November 7, 1983, The National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ablearcher/> [accessed 02/01/14]. For a summary of the Able Archer exercise, see Report, Seventh Air Division Strategic Command, “SACEUR Exercise Able Archer 83: After Action Report,” December 1, 1983, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ablearcher/> [accessed 02/01/14].

⁸⁰² Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *Instructions from the Centre: Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations, 1975-85* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1993), 87-88.

progress. In Dobrynin's estimation, "the Soviet government's decision to suspend for the first time the nuclear arms limitation talks was, if anything, the lowest point in our relations with the Reagan administration."⁸⁰³

At the end of 1983 Reagan received several reports from multiple sources, all with the same message—Soviet leaders are genuinely afraid of you and believe that you might launch a surprise nuclear attack against them.⁸⁰⁴ This information troubled him. He did not at all like the idea that others viewed him as an aggressor, someone who might launch a war.⁸⁰⁵ Looking back on this period, Robert McFarlane, Reagan's National Security Advisor from 1983 through 1985, said that one of the reasons why such reporting of Soviet anxiety bothered Reagan was the President's conviction that the biblical prophecies of Armageddon could come true in his lifetime.⁸⁰⁶ McFarlane recalls, "For him to see that, with this deep-seated worry about Armageddon and to see that the Russians might even think that we would set it off, I'm sure generated very serious thought on his part about how he

⁸⁰³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 543.

⁸⁰⁴ One of these reports came from Oleg Gordievsky, a KGB agent in London who was also a double agent for MI6 and was spying on the Soviet Union for the British. Gordievsky told his MI6 handlers about the Soviet war scare during the NATO Able Archer exercise, and the British passed this information to the CIA. Numerous other reports from both Eastern and Western Europe added to the narrative that the Soviets were afraid of Reagan and worried about an impending nuclear war. See, Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 76-78.

⁸⁰⁵ Previously, Reagan had dismissed reports about Soviet anxiety as propaganda, but now he was faced with the unpleasant reality that the Soviets really viewed him in this way. Reagan's dismissal of earlier reports as propaganda and his own view of himself and the United States can be seen in his diary entry from October 16, 1981. On this day, he wrote, "[Soviet] 'propaganda is painting us as a militaristic people when the truth is we are the most moral & generous people on earth'" (Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 44).

⁸⁰⁶ Reagan frequently expressed this belief in his diaries. On May 15, 1981, he wrote, "Sometimes, I wonder if we are destined to witness Armageddon." Again on June 7, 1981, he wrote, "I swear I believe Armageddon is near." See, Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, entries for May 15 and June 7, 1981.

could relieve this concern.”⁸⁰⁷ As a result, starting in early 1984 Reagan frequently endeavored, in both his public speeches and in his private correspondence, to convince the Soviets that they should not fear him. The result of this effort was a significant adjustment in Reagan’s rhetoric—the harsh attacks on the Soviet Union were now replaced by more frequent statements about his desire for cooperation and peaceful relations with the Soviet Union. Behind the scenes, Reagan also began looking for an opportunity to hold a summit with the Soviet General Secretary. He believed that if he could get a Soviet leader alone in a room that he could convince him that he was not a threat and that the United States would never start a nuclear war.⁸⁰⁸

Some historians have described late 1983 and early 1984 as a major turning point in Reagan’s approach to the Soviet Union.⁸⁰⁹ However, neither Reagan nor the Soviet leadership viewed this period in this way. From Reagan’s perspective his intensified efforts to increase dialogue with the Soviet Union in 1984 were entirely consistent with the strategy of peace through strength that he had pursued from 1981-1983. In Reagan’s view, he had always wanted peace, and he had been reaching out to Soviet leaders and making proposals to reduce the threat of nuclear war since 1981. Seeking to convince the Soviet leadership that he desired peace in 1984 was not, therefore, in Reagan’s mind, a departure from his previous policies. He also did not believe that these efforts conflicted with or required any major

⁸⁰⁷ As quoted in Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 123.

⁸⁰⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, 588-589.

⁸⁰⁹ See, for example, Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal*; and Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*.

modification in his policies in pursuit of American strength. Reagan was troubled that Soviet leaders viewed him as a possible aggressor, but there is no evidence that he ever attributed these Soviet views to his own policies. Reagan never seemed to consider the possibility that his aggressive policies in pursuit of American strength might be the reason that the Soviets viewed him this way, and he never seemed to entertain the idea that his desire for strength might be leading to war rather than to peace. Consequently, although Reagan did begin to moderate his public rhetoric in 1984, he did not change his actual policies toward the Soviet Union or abandon the strategy of peace through strength. He did not, for example, call off the production of MX missiles, cancel the deployment of B-1 bombers, halt the CIA's psychological operations against the Soviet Union, veto American funding of anti-communist groups around the world, or stop the flow of American cruise and Pershing II missiles into Europe. Thus, although Reagan appeared more interested at this time in finding ways to improve US-Soviet relations, the paradox at the heart of his Soviet strategy remained—calls for peace coupled with policies that seemed to be pushing the two sides closer to war.

The Soviet leadership in 1984 also did not believe that Reagan's attitude toward the Soviet Union had undergone any significant change. Although Reagan's rhetoric sounded very appealing, Soviet leaders did not believe that it was real as long as Reagan's anti-Soviet policies remained unchanged. As a result, despite numerous efforts by Reagan to convince the Soviet Union that America wanted peace, US-Soviet relations remained poor throughout 1984.

On January 16 Reagan gave a major speech on US-Soviet relations. During the speech, Reagan declared that the United States wanted “genuine cooperation” and “progress for peace” with the Soviet Union. In the most memorable part of the speech, he also asked his audience to imagine what might have happened if two couples—one Russian (Ivan and Anya) and one American (Jim and Sally) found themselves in the same waiting room or sharing a shelter from the rain. Reagan argued that the two couples would discover that they shared a great deal in common, they would like each other, and they might even agree to meet again. They would prove that “people don’t make wars.” “If the Soviet Union wants peace,” Reagan concluded, “then there will be peace. Together we can strengthen peace [and] reduce the level of arms.”⁸¹⁰

Reagan’s goal for the speech, as expressed in a letter to Thatcher the same day, was to demonstrate America’s willingness “to pursue a constructive and realistic dialogue with the Soviet Union aimed at building a more positive and stable long-term relationship.”⁸¹¹ The words were compelling, the tone was conciliatory, and Reagan genuinely believed what he was saying, but the Soviets were not convinced. “At any other time,” Dobrynin writes, “such a speech by an American president would have been regarded as a tangible step toward improving relations with the Soviet Union. But with all the negative factors, to say nothing of the

⁸¹⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation and Other Countries on United States-Soviet Relations,” January 16, 1984, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/11684a.htm> [accessed 05/02/14].

⁸¹¹ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Margaret Thatcher, January 15, 1984, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/109282> [accessed 12/12/13].

imminent presidential election, it was hard to believe in Reagan's sincerity."⁸¹² Two days after Reagan's speech, Gromyko and Shultz met in Stockholm. Ignoring Reagan's sweet words, Gromyko's characterized Reagan's policies as being "permeated by a spirit of militarism and aggression."⁸¹³ When Shultz tried to convince Gromyko of the President's "personal seriousness on arms control," Gromyko pointed to the ongoing deployment of American cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe, which he said "made it impossible to move ahead on arms control."⁸¹⁴ Ten days later, Andropov sent Reagan a letter that further explained Soviet thinking at this time. Despite Reagan's efforts to convince the Soviets that he wanted better relations, Andropov said that America's "practical actions" led to only one conclusion—that the American goal was to "challenge the security" of the Soviet Union and its allies. "There has been nothing so far," Andropov wrote, "that convinces us otherwise."⁸¹⁵

Less than a month later, on February 9, Andropov died. He had been General Secretary for only fifteen months. The Politburo once again faced the task of choosing a new General Secretary during the Reagan era. By this point, Reagan had been pursuing peace through strength for three full years. He had announced his

⁸¹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 545.

⁸¹³ *Ibid*, 544-545.

⁸¹⁴ Cable, US Delegation Secretary in Oslo to Secretary of State Washington, "Briefing with Allies on Secretary's Bilateral with Gromyko," January 19, 1984, Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive. Cable, American Embassy Stockholm to Secretary of State Washington, "CDE Opening Speeches, January 18, 1984," January 19, 1984, Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive. Cable, Us Delegation Secretary in Stockholm to White House Washington, DC, "Memorandum for the President: My Meeting with Gromyko in Stockholm, January 18, 1984," January 19, 1984, Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

⁸¹⁵ Letter, Yuri Andropov to Ronald Reagan, January 28, 1984, Jack Matlock Series V, Head of State Collection [January 1984], Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Strategic Defense Initiative eleven months earlier. If the Soviet leadership felt compelled by increased American strength and the strains of an escalating arms race to pursue a new path for Soviet foreign policy, this moment would have been the time to do so. Instead, they decided to stay the course by selecting Konstantin Chernenko as Andropov's replacement. This decision guaranteed that the Soviet Union's intransigent, Gromyko-dominated foreign policy would continue without interruption.

Throughout the early months of 1984, Reagan continued his efforts to engage the Soviet Union. When Andropov died on February 9 and was replaced by Chernenko, Reagan hoped that he might be able to disabuse the new Soviet leader of the notion that the United States was preparing to attack the Soviet Union. He immediately sent Chernenko a letter in which he stated that he had "no higher goal than the establishment of a relationship between our two great nations characterized by constructive cooperation."⁸¹⁶ Less than a month later, he wrote to Chernenko again and said, "[T]he United States had no desire to threaten the security of the Soviet Union and its allies."⁸¹⁷ While he was sending Chernenko letters, Reagan also wrote privately in his diary about his desire to meet with the new Soviet leader. "I have a gut feeling," he wrote, "I'd like to talk to him about our problems man to man...I have a team considering an invitation to him to be my

⁸¹⁶ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Constantin Chernenko, February 11, 1984, Jack Matlock Files, Head of State Correspondence (US-USSR) [February 1984] Box 25, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁸¹⁷ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Constantin Chernenko, March 6, 1984, Jack Matlock Files, Head of State Correspondence (US-USSR) [February 1984] Box 25, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

guest at the opening of the Olympics [in] July in L.A.”⁸¹⁸ Two weeks later, Reagan expressed this desire again in his diary, writing, “I’m convinced the time has come for me to meet with Chernenko along about July 1.”

But a meeting between Reagan and Chernenko did not happen. The Soviets remained “fixated on US INF” and refused to resume any form of negotiations without some expression of US “willingness to return to the situation that existed before deployment.”⁸¹⁹ “The mood in Moscow,” Shultz informed Reagan on February 22, “is hostile.”⁸²⁰ Throughout the remaining months of 1984, Reagan and Chernenko exchanged numerous letters, but for the most part, they were speaking past each other. In June Reagan announced that he was willing to hold a summit with Chernenko without any prior assurances that their talks would produce concrete results, but by this time, Chernenko was profoundly ill. Despite several more Reagan statements that seemed to augur well for improved US-Soviet relations, the Soviets remained unsure about his intentions through the remainder of the year. When Gromyko met with Reagan in September, he asked Nancy Reagan, “Is your husband for peace or war?”⁸²¹ Even the unflappable Gromyko still did not know what to make of the president who spoke about peace but pursued policies that seemed to be leading ineluctably toward war.

⁸¹⁸ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 220.

⁸¹⁹ Briefing Paper, “Checklist of US-Soviet Issues: Status and Prospects,” February 18, 1984, Jack Matlock Files [US-USSR 1984-1985], Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁸²⁰ State Department Analysis, “US-Soviet Relations: A Framework for the Future,” [undated, most likely early 1984], Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

⁸²¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 556.

On November 6 Reagan won a landslide victory over Walter Mondale in the presidential election of 1984. He won 49 out of 50 states and 525 of the 538 available Electoral College votes. In his campaign Reagan declared that it was “morning again in America,” pointing to a dramatic economic recovery and the widely-held perception that he had helped restore American confidence at home and prestige abroad. During his first four years as president, Reagan had accomplished much of what he hoped to achieve in 1981, but one thing remained elusive—improved relations with the Soviet Union. Reagan had set out in 1981 to achieve peace through strength. He had argued that increased American power would convince the Soviets that they could never win the Cold War. This, in turn, would produce a positive change in Soviet foreign policy and open the way for a more normal relationship between the two countries. But this did not happen. Reagan pursued American strength with gusto, and he also frequently made peace initiatives, but the Soviet leadership refused to believe that Reagan wanted peace when he seemed to be preparing for war. Even when Reagan moderated his public rhetoric and intensified his efforts to engage the Soviet leadership, Andropov and then Chernenko continued to deeply distrust him. By the end of Reagan’s first term in office, US-Soviet relations were in much worse shape than when he entered the White House in 1981.

CHAPTER NINE

**GORBACHEV'S NEW THINKING
AND THE INF TREATY,
1985-1988**

By the end of Reagan's first term, Soviet leaders had already had two chances to select a new General Secretary during his presidency. Their first choice was Andropov, a KGB Chairman who believed that Reagan was preparing for nuclear war; their second choice was Chernenko, the preference of the aging conservatives in the Politburo. If either man had lived just a couple years longer, Soviet policy toward the United States would not have changed, and Reagan would have finished his second term as president without any progress in US-Soviet relations. If this had happened, Reagan's "peace through strength" strategy would have been deemed a failure.

Events, of course, took a very different direction. In 1985 Chernenko died and was replaced by Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev would change the direction of Soviet foreign policy and take radical steps to end the nuclear arms race. Gorbachev gradually came to believe that the quest for nuclear equality was a trap—it led to an arms race that led to ever-growing quantities of nuclear armaments that led to an extremely dangerous situation for all involved. Gorbachev eventually concluded that the Soviet Union should not try to ensure its security by amassing more weapons; instead it should keep the minimum amount to meet its defensive needs, and it should get rid of all of its nuclear weapons. These new ideas about nuclear weapons led him to make numerous concessions in the nuclear arms negotiations with the United States, and these concessions made the INF Treaty possible.

Gorbachev's new thinking in foreign policy evolved in a symbiotic way with personal relationships with Western leaders, including Margaret Thatcher, Francois Mitterrand, and Ronald Reagan. Through direct encounters with the world leaders,

he became convinced that none of their countries had plans to launch a nuclear war against the Soviet Union. This growing understanding gave him the confidence to explore more and more radical ways to remove the Soviet Union from the arms race with the West.

The Thatcher Initiative

While US-Soviet relations deteriorated in 1983 and then languished in 1984, Margaret Thatcher decided to take action. "There was a new chill in East West relations," Thatcher recalls. "We had entered a dangerous phase." Thatcher did not believe that the West should abandon its strategy of peace through strength, but she concluded that Western leaders should take steps to reduce the escalating tensions. She writes, "We knew that...we had to win the Cold War without running unnecessary risks in the meantime."⁸²² This conclusion led Thatcher to organize a seminar on the Soviet Union from September 8-9, 1983. She invited a group of experts on the USSR to the Prime Minister's private country retreat at Chequers to present papers on the state of East-West affairs and make recommendations for ways to improve the relationship. Days before the seminar commenced, Geoffrey Howe, Thatcher's Foreign Secretary, sent Thatcher his views on UK-Soviet relations and his hopes for the seminar. Howe argued that the UK had to find ways to "increase the level of frequency of contact with the Soviet Union." He realized that some at the seminar might argue that "the shooting down of the Korean airliner makes dialogue with the Russians impossible," but he believed "the exact opposite, namely, that this incident proves how dangerous is the state of affairs where the two

⁸²² Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 450-453.

superpowers talk to each other more across the floor of the United Nations than they do on the Hot Line.”⁸²³ For the most part, the experts at the Chequers seminar shared Howe’s assessment. Although they believed that “the capacity of the West to exercise influence on the Soviet Union was not great,” they concluded that the best chance for improved UK-USSR relations would be for the UK government to “build up contacts [with Soviet leaders] slowly over the next few years.”⁸²⁴

Not long after the Chequers seminar, Andropov died and was replaced by Chernenko. The US government sent Vice President Bush to Andropov’s funeral, but the British government, wanting to send a signal to Moscow of their desire for a turn in UK-USSR relations, sent Thatcher herself. During their meeting, Chernenko did not make a strong impression. A British doctor who accompanied Thatcher predicted that the new General Secretary would not live much longer than a year.⁸²⁵ Chernenko had trouble speaking and, when he did express himself, had little original to say, repeating the same Soviet arguments that dated back to the SALT era—i.e., that “the question of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe, and the problem of nuclear weapons in general should be resolved...in strict accordance with the principle of equality and equal security.” The Soviet Union would not be able to participate in negotiations, Chernenko asserted, as long as NATO continued its “ongoing armaments drive in a hope to achieve military superiority.” But Thatcher was not deterred. Her goal was to make a positive impression with a view

⁸²³ Minute, Geoffrey Howe to Margaret Thatcher, “Strategy Meetings on Foreign Affairs and Defence,” September 5, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive.

⁸²⁴ Meeting Minute, Chequers Seminar, “Policy on East/West Relations,” September 12, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/111075> [accessed 01/15/14].

⁸²⁵ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 155.

to the future. She told Chernenko that she believed that in any future negotiations “each nation should retain a sense of dignity and pride,” and she did her best to charm the new General Secretary and his entourage. Surprisingly, it seemed to work. At the very end of the conversation, Chernenko seemed to wake up. With unexpected enthusiasm, he told Thatcher, “Let’s be friends in all regards. We have plenty of reserves, contacts, [and] opportunities for real friendship between our peoples and between the governments. It is necessary now to make a new and fresh contribution to the improvement of relations between our countries.”⁸²⁶

This hope for friendship, however, never materialized. Despite Chernenko’s aspiration, Gromyko was firmly in control of the formation of American foreign policy, and he was unwilling to abandon the arguments that he had been repeating in US-Soviet negotiations for decades. When Howe visited Moscow in July, he met with Gromyko for six hours in “two hard-slogging sessions” and seventy minutes with Chernenko and Gromyko. Howe’s primary message for the Soviet leaders was that the Soviet Union should return to the negotiating table with the United States. The Soviets, Howe recalls, were completely unreceptive. He writes, “Fallacious and almost willfully perverse in all their arguments, Gromyko and Chernenko disclosed not so much as a hairline crack in their armour of self-righteousness.”⁸²⁷ At times, Chernenko seemed almost incompetent. Describing the General Secretary, Howe

⁸²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, “Record of Conversation between K. U. Chernenko and British Prime Minister M. Thatcher,” February 14, 1983, Box 9, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, Volkogonov Collection, National Security Archive.

⁸²⁷ Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 356.

writes, "A high speed gabble, interrupted by stumblings (in order to breathe), indicated his lack of conviction, and even, at times, a total lack of comprehension."⁸²⁸

With Gromyko controlling foreign policy and Chernenko's health fading fast, prospects for any improvement in East-West relations seemed dim, despite the British overtures. At the Chequers seminar in 1983, however, the British scholars had proposed a way to increase UK-Soviet contacts apart from meetings with the General Secretary and Foreign Minister. "It might be useful," they suggested, "to arrange at the appropriate time for other senior members of the Politburo, particularly potential successors to Andropov, to visit London."⁸²⁹ Based on this recommendation, the UK government extended invitations to visit London to "several senior Soviet figures."⁸³⁰ In a stroke of good fortune, the figure who accepted the invitation was Mikhail Gorbachev.

On December 16 Gorbachev visited Thatcher in London. Gorbachev's visit to the UK initiated a relationship between Thatcher and Gorbachev that would be of great significance in the arms negotiations leading up to the INF Treaty. In only a slight exaggeration, Geoffrey Howe calls the meeting between Thatcher and Gorbachev "four hours of conversation that changed the shape of the world."⁸³¹

The meeting took place in a great hall with a grand fireplace at the Chequers country estate. The moment Gorbachev walked in the room, the British note taker Charles Powell observed, "you could see he was alive, not dead on his feet like

⁸²⁸ Ibid, 357.

⁸²⁹ Meeting Minute, Chequers Seminar, "Policy on East/West Relations," September 12, 1983, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://margaretthatcher.org/document/111075> [accessed 02/15/14].

⁸³⁰ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 459.

⁸³¹ Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 358.

Brezhnev or stony-faced Gromyko, but lively, with conversation and banter.” Gorbachev “exuded power.” “Never still, his eyes darted round the room.” Powell claims that Thatcher was “immediately entranced, recognizing someone powerful and disputatious.”⁸³² Initially, the conversation “took a rather polemical tone,” but this did not bother the General Secretary.⁸³³ In fact, Thatcher’s hard-hitting, unrelenting personality won Gorbachev’s respect. Looking the Prime Minister straight in the eye, he said,

I know you are a person of staunch beliefs, someone who adheres to certain principles and values. This commands respect. But please consider that next to you is a person of your own ilk. And I can assure you that I am not under instructions from the Politburo to persuade you to join the Communist Party.”⁸³⁴

After making this statement, Gorbachev recalls, Thatcher “burst into a hearty laugh, and the stiff, polite and somewhat acerbic conversation flowed naturally into more interesting talk.”⁸³⁵

Only a few weeks before Gorbachev went to London, the Soviet government announced that they would return to the nuclear arms negotiations with the United States in Geneva. Negotiations had been on hold since the Soviets walked out of the talks after American intermediate-range missiles began arriving in Europe at the end of 1983. The approaching resumption of these negotiations was clearly on Gorbachev’s mind when he met with Thatcher. One of Gorbachev’s chief objectives, as one American newspaper correctly surmised, was “to glean from the British all

⁸³² Powell’s account is presented in Pryce-Jones, *The Strange Death of the Soviet Union* 123.

⁸³³ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 161.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*

they know and will tell him about what is going on in Washington. "The Russians," the paper continued,

more or less correctly, assume that Mrs. Thatcher is the foreign head of state closest to President Reagan. She undoubtedly has a better slant on Reagan's thinking about...negotiations than anyone else at her level within the Western community. For the Russians, it is essential to go to Geneva with the best information they can get on the great continuing mystery in Washington.⁸³⁶

Thatcher realized that this was Gorbachev's objective, stating, "I knew that to some degree I was being used as a stalking horse for President Reagan."⁸³⁷ And she was willing to play her part. Her message to Gorbachev was twofold. She repeatedly emphasized that Reagan was "an honorable man who sincerely wants to improve relations with the Soviet Union," and she made it clear to Gorbachev that there was no question of the Soviet Union's being able to divide the United Kingdom from the United States." "Wedge-driving" Thatcher told Gorbachev, "is just not on."⁸³⁸ Thatcher's loyalty to Washington gained her points in the eyes of her Russian guest.

Looking back on his relationship with Thatcher, Gorbachev stated, "What I heard from her, I knew also reflected the position of Washington, and I knew that what I was telling her was getting known in Washington immediately. I think she was very trusted by President Reagan."⁸³⁹ According to Gorbachev, his first conversation with Thatcher "was a turning point towards a major political dialogue

⁸³⁶ *Christian Science Monitor*, December 27, 1984.

⁸³⁷ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 462.

⁸³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, December 22, 1984, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records (File Folder: Thatcher Visit - Dec 1984 [1] Box 90902), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁸³⁹ Excerpts of Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev from September of 1997, Episode 22, CNN Cold War documentary.

between our countries.”⁸⁴⁰ “The first meeting,” he continued, “might have been the reason why the Soviet-British dialogue made such a good start on my taking the helm of the Soviet Union in 1985.”⁸⁴¹

Gorbachev’s visit to London was significant not only because Gorbachev began to respect and trust Thatcher—an important prerequisite to his being willing to make substantial concessions to the West in the future—but also because Thatcher was impressed by Gorbachev and began to recommend him eagerly to President Reagan and the world. After five hours of private talks with Gorbachev, Thatcher told the British Broadcasting Company, “I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together.” This statement, repeated by almost every major media outlet, “reverberated around the world.”⁸⁴² And the place where it reverberated most was in the White House. Coming from any other Western leader, the statement might have been dismissed as wishful thinking. But this was Margaret Thatcher speaking. Known for her hard-headed realism, when she spoke fondly of a Soviet leader, people in Washington took notice. George Shultz wondered out loud to Dobrynin, “What on earth did he do to fascinate the Iron Lady?”⁸⁴³

Less than a week later, Thatcher had the opportunity to answer Shultz’s question in person. On December 23, Thatcher flew to the United States to meet with Reagan, Shultz, and Reagan’s top advisors at Camp David. Thatcher gave her American counterparts a highly positive analysis of Gorbachev. She described him as “an unusual Russian” who was “less constrained [and] more charming” than other

⁸⁴⁰ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 161.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁸⁴² Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 146.

⁸⁴³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 560.

Soviet officials.⁸⁴⁴ She recounted her conversation with Gorbachev in great detail, including her glowing recommendation of Reagan. Reagan was stirred by Thatcher's account, observing that her remarks to Gorbachev were so similar to his own statement to Gromyko.⁸⁴⁵

Thatcher's briefing made a big impression on the American officials at Camp David. "She exuded intellectual energy throughout her time with us," Shultz recalls. "The president had immense confidence in her, and her views carried great weight."⁸⁴⁶ Consequently, even before Gorbachev became the new General Secretary three months later, Reagan and Shultz were already considering inviting him to Washington. "Our appetite," George Schultz remembers, "was whetted by Gorbachev's performance" in London.⁸⁴⁷

Not everyone in the Reagan administration, however, was so eager. Some doubted how well Reagan would be able to handle himself in negotiations with such a young, energetic, and sharp-witted Soviet leader. According to one diplomat who participated in setting up the meeting that did eventually take place, "only a handful of people at State were pushing for it...Nancy Reagan and Mike Deaver were very helpful. But [William] Casey, [Edwin] Meese, and [Caspar] Weinberger were Mau-Mauing the enterprise."⁸⁴⁸ Aware of the debate within the administration over a face-to-face meeting with Gorbachev, Thatcher sought to reassure the President. "I

⁸⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, December 22, 1984, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records (File Folder: Thatcher Visit - Dec 1984 [1] Box 90902), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁶ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 509.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 507.

⁸⁴⁸ Shimko, *Images and Arms Control*, 203.

was saying to Ron Reagan,” Thatcher recollects, ““This is a man I can do business with and, because I believe the same things as you do, this is a man you can do business with without compromising any of your beliefs.””⁸⁴⁹ Thatcher’s position intensified Reagan’s own desire for a meeting with Gorbachev and made it easier for him to defy the opposition of the hardliners within his own staff. Max Kampelman, the chief U.S. negotiator at Geneva from 1985 to 1988, argues that Thatcher’s recommendation “made [Reagan’s] acceptance of Gorbachev a great deal simpler.” The fact that she indicated she could do business with him,” Kampelman writes, “I think strengthened the President’s resolve that this was an appropriate and proper course for him to follow.”⁸⁵⁰

On March 10, 1985, Chernenko died, and Gorbachev became the General Secretary of the Soviet Union. Reagan wasted no time in reaching out to the new Soviet leader. He sent Bush and Shultz to Chernenko’s funeral with a letter for Gorbachev. In the letter Reagan told the new Soviet leader that he was personally committed to work with Gorbachev to maintain and strengthen peace, and he invited him to visit Washington at his “earliest convenient opportunity.”⁸⁵¹

Gorbachev was eager to get a read on Reagan’s real intentions, so when he met with Bush and Shultz at the Kremlin, he asked bluntly, “Is the United States really interested in achieving results at the talks or does it need them to implement

⁸⁴⁹ Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 173.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸⁵¹ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachev, Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 8590272-8590419], Box 39, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

its rearmament programs?"⁸⁵² Bush answered, "We know that some of the things we do and say sound threatening or hostile to you...[but] I can tell you that neither the American Government nor the American people has hostile intentions toward you."⁸⁵³ Gorbachev then told Bush and Shultz that he was "ready to return US-Soviet relations to a normal channel." Toward this end, he agreed that it was "necessary to know each other, to find time for meetings to discuss outstanding problems, and to seek ways to bring the two countries together."⁸⁵⁴

Throughout Chernenko's funeral and the meetings that surrounded it, Thatcher's prior assessment of Gorbachev was on everyone's lips. According to Schultz, "Gorbachev impressed everyone, and the result was a certain Gorbachev euphoria in the air. People cited Margaret Thatcher's statement: 'I like Gorbachev. We can do business together.'"⁸⁵⁵ Shultz was very impressed with the General Secretary, and he remarked to Dobrynin, "Gorbachev is radically different from any Soviet leader I have ever met."⁸⁵⁶

Gorbachev, by contrast, was not very impressed with the Bush-Shultz team. During a meeting of the Politburo a few days later, Gorbachev said, "The general impression that the American delegation left is, I tell you honestly, quite mediocre.

⁸⁵² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 568.

⁸⁵³ NSC Talking Points for Vice President George Bush, "Your Meeting with the New General Secretary: Suggested Talking Points," March 11, 1985, Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 8590272-8590419], Box 39, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁸⁵⁴ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 532.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 532. Thatcher also attended Chernenko's funeral, and her presence was noted and appreciated by Gorbachev. "It is revealing," he wrote, "that Margaret Thatcher took the initiative in visiting the Soviet Union after my election as General Secretary." This was significant because, as Gorbachev noted, "She was a frequent guest in Washington" (Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 433).

⁸⁵⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 568.

This is not a very serious team.” Gorbachev was disappointed that Bush seemed unable to speak about topics that went beyond his prepared text. “The only issue the Americans kept pushing,” he told his Politburo colleagues, “was that President Reagan wishes to meet with the Soviet leadership, wishes to conduct negotiations.” The problem, Gorbachev noted, was that Reagan’s message to him was “quite amorphous and general.”⁸⁵⁷

Thatcher also attended Chernenko’s funeral, and Soviet leaders were far more impressed with her. Gorbachev spoke positively about Thatcher’s arguments in favor of increasing bilateral UK-USSR relations and “energizing the dialog aimed at establishing better trust between member-states of the Warsaw treaty and members of NATO.”⁸⁵⁸ Several people who observed the two leaders together noted that there seemed to be an electric chemistry between them. Sukhodrev who served as the interpreter for the Thatcher-Gorbachev meeting told Chernyaev that Thatcher “fawned, charmed, engaged [Gorbachev], and he answered with the same.”⁸⁵⁹

Gorbachev valued his developing relationship with Thatcher because he believed that the Soviet Union needed to improve its relations with Europe and move beyond viewing so much of Soviet foreign policy in bilateral, Soviet-American

⁸⁵⁷ Meeting Record, “Conference of the Secretaries of the CC CPSU, Held in the Office of the CC CPSU General Secretary Comrade M. S. Gorbachev,” March 15, 1985, The Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Volkogonov Collection, Reel 17, Container 25. [Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, The National Security Archive]. Available in the Digital National Security Archive.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ Chernyaev, *Diary*, March 14, 1985. In the same diary entry Chernyaev recorded his belief that Thatcher tried to use her feminine wiles (“she likes to play in the feminine way”) with Gorbachev in order to use her influence with the General Secretary to elevate her own status in the world. “It seems that this is how she ‘does politics,’ Chernyaev wrote, “and with the help of M[ikhail] S[ergeyevich] she wants to surpass all kinds of Kohls and Mitterrands in world affairs, and maybe even the Reagans.”

terms, but he also realized that his relationship with Thatcher could be valuable because of her connections to Washington. "It is revealing," he wrote, "that Margaret Thatcher took the initiative in visiting the Soviet Union after my election as General Secretary." This was strategic for the Soviet Union because, Gorbachev concluded, because she "was a frequent guest in Washington."⁸⁶⁰

Old Thinking and the Resumption of the INF Negotiations

Three months before Gorbachev came to power, Shultz and Gromyko met in Geneva and announced that the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to resume negotiations on nuclear weapons. The negotiations would take place in three separate but parallel fora: strategic arms reduction talks (START), intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), and nuclear and space talks (NST). The negotiations in Geneva resumed on March 12, one day after Gorbachev came to power.

When the negotiations reconvened, Gorbachev did not immediately start tabling radical arms reduction proposals. In fact, the initial Soviet arms control proposals under his leadership were strikingly similar to previous Soviet positions. American proposals also remained unchanged at the resumption of the INF talks, and, consequently, the negotiations quickly reverted to the familiar situation of stalemate over differing perceptions of how to define the balance of nuclear forces in Europe.

When the INF negotiations resumed on March 12, the US continued to argue in favor of zero INF for both sides while expressing a willingness to agree to an

⁸⁶⁰ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 433.

interim solution that included deep cuts for both sides. Soviet negotiators again rejected the zero option. Despite the fact that the zero option seemed, at face value, like a radical proposal in favor of significant reductions for both sides, Soviet negotiators continued to view it as completely one-sided. They argued that if both sides eliminated their INF, the Soviet Union would be left with no weapons to counter British and French nuclear weapons or American forward-based systems. This would leave the Soviet Union in an even worse security situation than it had been in during all the years of the SALT negotiations—when it had argued that the balance of nuclear forces in Europe favored the United States.

In response to the American proposals, Soviet negotiators called for an immediate bilateral moratorium on INF deployments with subsequent reductions that would eliminate all American intermediate-range missiles and most Soviet INF. The Soviet Union would be allowed to retain INF levels equivalent to British and French nuclear forces. This proposal mirrored earlier Soviet formulations and was in keeping with the Soviet principle of equal security. The only change in the Soviet position came when Gorbachev announced a unilateral Soviet moratorium on new INF missile deployments. This proposal made in the hopes of influencing Belgium, who had delayed deployment of cruise missiles until this time but were set to make a final decision on deployment within the next few days.

American negotiators summarily dismissed the Soviet proposals. They argued that the only reason that Soviet leaders were willing unilaterally halt new Soviet SS-20 deployments was because current INF levels favored the Soviet Union. The Belgian government also rejected Gorbachev's initiative and announced on

March 15 that they would begin deploying American cruise missiles within the month.

Gorbachev was unhappy with this swift rejection of his first effort at arms control. In April he told a group of American congressmen who were visiting Moscow that the US administration “displayed absolutely incomprehensible haste” in rejecting the Soviet proposal. “How can one, under these conditions, not feel doubt about the sincerity of the USA at the Geneva talks?” Gorbachev asked.⁸⁶¹ In June he expressed his unhappiness in a letter to Reagan. His letter repeated all the old Soviet arguments and sounded like it could have been written by Gromyko ten years earlier. He accused the US of “taking advantage of geographic factors” by deploying new weapons in Western Europe that were “designed to perform strategic missions.” These weapons, he claimed, would give the United States “a monopoly on the use of weapons in a situation for which [the Soviet Union] had no analogue.” It was “incomprehensible” why the United States would not agree to a “balance of medium-range missiles” whereby the Soviet Union would not have more missiles in Europe “than are currently in the possession of England and France.” The American “departure from the principle of equality and equal security...is the reason for the lack of progress in limiting and reducing nuclear arms over the past 4-5 years,” he concluded.⁸⁶² With both sides recycling old arguments based on incompatible principles of equality and different definitions of strategic weapons, the negotiations seemed destined to repeat the previous history of deadlock.

⁸⁶¹ *Bulletin Journal*, “Tip O’Neil Meets with Soviet Leader,” April 11, 1985, A5.

⁸⁶² Letter, Mikhail Gorbachev to Ronald Reagan, June 22, 1985, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 8590683-8590713] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Gorbachev quickly grew impatient with the lack of progress in the Geneva arms control negotiations and realized that he needed to do something to break the deadlock. Gorbachev “had the feeling,” says Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, one of Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisors, “that our foreign policy had become too cast iron, too inflexible, too concentrated upon a number of positions that seemed to be impossible to replace, to change.”⁸⁶³ Gorbachev wanted to explore new ways of thinking in foreign policy, but he realized that some of the people in the Soviet foreign ministry had been espousing the old, “cast iron” positions for so long that it would be very difficult for them to imagine and embrace alternate ideas. Gorbachev later wrote that he realized that despite the power of his position as General Secretary, he “could not make foreign policy alone.”⁸⁶⁴ This realization motivated him to begin replacing key foreign policy officials. He started at the top, with the man known in the West as “Mr. Nyet,” Andrei Gromyko himself. During a session of the Politburo on June 29, Gorbachev announced that he was appointing Gromyko to a new position, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet—a prestigious but largely honorific position.⁸⁶⁵ He then mentioned several possible candidates to replace Gromyko as Foreign Minister. All the people that he mentioned were highly experienced in diplomacy, but then he informed his colleagues that his thoughts had

⁸⁶³ Transcript, “Interview of Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov,” January 15, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁶⁴ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 517-518.

⁸⁶⁵ Explaining why Gorbachev gave Gromyko this position, Dmitri Volkogonov writes, “He saw that positive results were not going to come in the foreign policy as long as Andrei Gromyko was Foreign Minister....However, Gorbachev was indebted to him for nominating him as General Secretary. It would be difficult to put him out to grass on a pension, but nor could he be kept on at the Foreign Ministry” (Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy for an Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 490-491).

“traveled in a different direction.”⁸⁶⁶ His choice was Eduard Shevardnadze, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Shevardnadze had no formal experience in foreign policy, but Gorbachev viewed this as a strength. He did not want to fill the position with another bureaucrat; he wanted a quick thinking politician—someone who “would have the necessary feel for politics and the responsiveness of a politician in his dealings with Western leaders and foreign ministers.”⁸⁶⁷ Gorbachev was drawn to Shevardnadze’s flexible and creative mind.⁸⁶⁸ In addition, he believed that Shevardnadze was “characterized by a sense of the new,” and he admired the “courage and originality of his approaches.”⁸⁶⁹ Valentin Falin, a Soviet diplomat, argues that Gorbachev chose Shevardnadze because he “had absolutely no burden of old stereotypes on his shoulders.”⁸⁷⁰

Cultivating the Human Dimension—Shevardnadze and Shultz

Gorbachev’s replacement of Gromyko with Shevardnadze was an important moment in the transformation of Soviet foreign policy. Shevardnadze not only was unburdened by old stereotypes, he actively rejected old methods of diplomacy and labored to develop the “human dimension” in Soviet foreign relations. This meant that he wanted to be viewed by the person on the other side of the negotiating table

⁸⁶⁶ Minutes, “Session of the Politburo of the CC CPSU,” June 29, 1985, Digital National Security Archive.

⁸⁶⁷ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 213.

⁸⁶⁸ Transcript, “Interview of Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov,” January 15, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁶⁹ Chernyaev, *Diary*, July 1, 1985.

⁸⁷⁰ Transcript, “Interview of Valentin Falin,” January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

as a fellow human being—not as “the personification of a hostile idea”—and he tried to view others in the same way. In his memoirs, Shevardnadze says that he made a deliberate effort to “remove from my own eyes the ideological lenses that would make any representative of the West look like a crafty enemy.” “I wanted my partners to trust me,” Shevardnadze writes, “and I wanted to trust them.”⁸⁷¹

In many ways, Shevardnadze’s approach to diplomacy corresponded with that of George Shultz, the American Secretary of State. The Secretary of State who came before Shultz—Alexander Haig—had viewed international relations as a zero sum game and had a strong antipathy toward the Soviet Union. In 1979 Haig had been the target of an assassination attempt in Belgium, and although the authorities attributed the attack to a terrorist group, Haig believed that the Soviets had tried to kill him.⁸⁷² This belief colored his approach to the Soviet Union. Shultz, by contrast, had no such personal or ideological baggage. Before entering government service, Shultz had been an economics professor at MIT and the University of Chicago. When he became Reagan’s Secretary of State in 1982, he was one of the strongest proponents in the Reagan administration of reaching out to the Soviets and of looking for ways to reduce tensions. Soviet leaders appreciated Shultz’s calm demeanor and businesslike approach to US-Soviet diplomacy. Alexander Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev’s closest advisors, praised Shultz’s diplomatic disposition. Shultz “was always in the mood for business,” Yakovlev said in an interview in 1990. “He lacked any kind of groundless stubbornness. He was always to the point, and I think

⁸⁷¹ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 61.

⁸⁷² *New York Times*, November 25, 1993.

he rescued the situation a few times.”⁸⁷³ Shultz also believed in the value of cultivating the human dimension in international affairs and when Shevardnadze became Foreign Minister, Shultz was “determined to build a personal relationship with the proud, sociable Georgian.”⁸⁷⁴

Less than a month after Shevardnadze’s appointment, Shultz and Shevardnadze met in Finland when foreign ministers from Europe and North America gathered in Helsinki to mark the tenth anniversary of the accord signed by participants in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The meeting would be an important step in building trust and establishing a human connection between the United States and the Soviet Union. Prior to the first scheduled Shultz-Shevardnadze meeting, all the foreign ministers from the various countries gathered in Finlandia Hall. The seating in the hall was according to the French alphabet, which meant that the United States was seated in the front and the Soviet Union was seated way in the back. At a certain point, Shultz saw Shevardnadze at the back of the hall and decided to introduce himself to the new Soviet Foreign Minister. This required walking along the front row and then climbing a long flight of stairs. “Everybody could begin to see him moving in that direction and up these steps,” Roz Ridgway, US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, recalls. “It was really quite a moment because it just got quieter and quieter as everybody saw what was happening.” The Soviet delegation alerted Shevardnadze that Shultz was making his way over to him, and Shevardnadze moved to the aisle to meet him. “When the two

⁸⁷³ Transcript, “Oberdorfer Interview with [Alexandr] Yakovlev,” undated [1990], Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 25; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁷⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*, 264.

men met in that aisle,” Ridgway remembers, “there was just this explosion of flashbulbs.” Ridgway believes that the moment was significant—it symbolized Shultz’s willingness to reach out to Shevardnadze, to engage him as a human being, and Shevardnadze’s eagerness to respond.⁸⁷⁵

The next day, the two men held their first official meeting at the residence of the US Ambassador to Finland. Shevardnadze admits that he was quite nervous, since prior to becoming Foreign Minister he was “not fairly much...in the know as far as major disarmament problems were concerned.” Prior to coming to Finland, he had spent hours pouring over the relevant documents and consulting with other Soviet officials, but attempting to absorb the material so quickly was like trying to learn “higher mathematics.”⁸⁷⁶ Both men developed a strategy for dealing with Shevardnadze’s predicament, and both strategies say a lot about the two men. Shultz decided to be gracious and to avoid embarrassing Shevardnadze. “When Shevardnadze was till learning his brief,” Ridgway recalls, “Shultz did not try to press his advantage or make him look bad.” Shevardnadze, for his part, decided not to pretend that he knew exactly what he was doing but to use his inexperience as a way to break the ice with Shultz. Upon entering the room where Shultz and the American delegation were waiting, Shevardnadze said to his aides with a chuckle, “I am new at this. Be sure to correct me if I goof.” The American officials who heard this were pleasantly surprised. They immediately recognized and appreciated the marked contrast between Shevardnadze’s unpretentious, down-to-earth style and

⁸⁷⁵ Transcript, “Interview of Roz Ridgway,” November 25, 1988, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 2, Folder 30; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁷⁶ Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 121.

that of the intransigent, stony-faced Gromyko. Jack Matlock, an American official who attended the meeting, writes:

There were no histrionics, no long lectures, no recriminations...Instead of indulging in oratory as if he were addressing an audience of thousands, as Gromyko had, Shevardnadze spoke in a voice so soft that one had to strain to keep from missing a word of phrase.⁸⁷⁷

During the discussions that followed, Shevardnadze presented many of the same arguments that Gromyko would have made. He asserted that American medium-range missiles “upset the regional balance” and that British and French systems along with “U.S. carrier-based aircraft” should be included in any agreement on INF.⁸⁷⁸ Yet Shultz and the other U.S. officials present were impressed by Shevardnadze, nonetheless. “The substance of Soviet policy had not yet changed,” Matlock writes, “but the mode of presentation was totally different.”⁸⁷⁹ As the meeting drew to a close, Shevardnadze surprised everyone again by turning to his staff and asking, “Okay, fellows, how did I do? How many bloopers did you count?”⁸⁸⁰ After Shevardnadze had departed the room, one of Matlock’s colleagues expressed what everyone was thinking—“Don’t tell me that’s a Soviet foreign minister,” he exclaimed.⁸⁸¹

⁸⁷⁷ Matlock, *Autopsy on An Empire*, 74.

⁸⁷⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Secretary of State George Shultz and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and aides, July 31, 1985, End of Cold War Collection, Box 1, National Security Archive.

⁸⁷⁹ Matlock, *Autopsy on An Empire*, 74.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸⁸¹ Ibid. In Shultz’s report to Reagan on his meeting with Shevardnadze, he was less effusive but impressed, nonetheless. He noted “a greater willingness to move from polemics to practical work” (Cable, US Delegation Secretary in Helsinki to White House, “Memorandum for the President from George P. Shultz: Meeting with New Soviet Foreign Minister,” End of Cold War Collection, Box 1, National Security Archive).

In September Shultz and Shevardnadze met two more times—once in New York and once at Shultz’s home—and the connection between them grew. Shevardnadze recalls that at an important moment during the meeting in New York, he told Shultz:

Much in the world depends on the state of Soviet-American relations. And they in turn depend on the relations that you and I have. I intend to do business as your honest and reliable partner, and if you wish, to be your friend.

Evidently moved by Shevardnadze’s offer, Shultz stood up from the table and extended his hand. “Here is my hand,” he said. “Give me yours.” The same month Shultz invited Shevardnadze and his wife to visit the Shultz home. The two couples had dinner together, accompanied by only an interpreter. Shultz sat cross-legged in front of his fireplace where he grilled steak directly on the coals for the Shevardnadzes. Shultz’s wife O’Bie served pie that she had made herself. According to Shevardnadze, these early human encounters helped build trust and understanding, which in turn made it easier for Gorbachev and Shevardnadze to make such drastic changes in the Soviet posture toward the West.⁸⁸²

But these changes were still a ways away. By the summer of 1985, US-Soviet relations were still quite cold, and the arms control negotiations in Geneva were going nowhere. In As Gorbachev and Shevardnadze considered ways to reduce East-West relations, they began to look more and more to Europe. Shevardnadze writes, “As a kind of end run, we came up with the idea of focusing more on Europe and

⁸⁸² Transcript, “Interview of Roz Ridgway,” November 25, 1988, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 2, Folder 30; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 264. Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 70-71.

intensifying our contacts with other countries.”⁸⁸³ As part of this strategy, on September 23 Shevardnadze met with the British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe in New York and told him that “the Russians did not look at everything through a US-Soviet prism; Russia’s relations with the UK were important in themselves, especially those between Gorbachev and Mrs. Thatcher.”⁸⁸⁴ Ten days later, Gorbachev visited Paris where he met with French President François Mitterrand.

Gorbachev used his time in France to announce several new proposals related to intermediate-nuclear forces in Europe. First, he hinted that the Soviet Union might be willing to conclude an INF agreement “outside of direct connection with the problem of space and strategic arms.” Prior to this time, Soviet leaders had always tied an agreement on INF to progress in these other two fora and, particularly, to the American abandonment of SDI. Second, Gorbachev stated that British and French nuclear weapons could not be excluded from negotiations on nuclear weapons in Europe. Since Britain and France did not want any limits placed on their nuclear weapons in the US-Soviet negotiations in Geneva—negotiations in which they had no direct say—Gorbachev declared that the Soviet Union was ready to enter into direct, bilateral negotiations with Britain and France on nuclear weapons. Third, he announced that the Soviet Union had withdrawn from the “European zone” all the SS-20 missiles that it had deployed in Europe after June 1984. This proposal was directed at the Dutch, who had announced on June 1, 1984 that they would put off deploying American cruise missile until November of 1985 and would cancel deployment at that time if the Soviet Union still had the same

⁸⁸³ Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, 80.

⁸⁸⁴ Howe, *Conflict of Loyalty*, 438.

number of SS-20 missiles as it had on June 1, 1984. Finally, Gorbachev proposed an interim INF agreement in which the United States would be allowed to keep some of its deployed cruise missiles and the Soviet Union would be permitted the same number of SS-20 warheads as on all American, British, and French INF combined. This was a significant Soviet concession, as it was the first Soviet proposal on INF that would allow the United States to retain any of its newly-deployed intermediate-range missiles. Gorbachev concluded that Europe was now “entitled to expect a reply step by the United States—the termination by it of the further deployment of its medium-range missiles on the European continent.”⁸⁸⁵

Gorbachev’s proposal set off a flurry of transatlantic cables between the United States and its allies in Britain, France, and the Netherlands. British officials viewed Gorbachev’s proposals as “a public relations problem” and the French agreed that his ideas would “sell rather well in Europe” and reinforce the “image of Soviet flexibility and reasonableness,” but neither country was eager to enter negotiations with the Soviet Union that matched their entire nuclear arsenals against a single Soviet system.⁸⁸⁶ Dutch officials rejected the Soviet claim that they had no more SS-20 deployed at the time of Gorbachev’s proposal than on June 1, 1984. The Soviet numbers, Dutch officials pointed out, included only SS-20s in the

⁸⁸⁵ All quotes in this paragraph come from, Memorandum, American Embassy Paris to US Secretary of State, “Gorbachev INF Proposal,” October 3, 1985, Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

⁸⁸⁶ The British reaction can be found in Memorandum, American Embassy London to US Secretary of State, “British Reaction to Soviet NST Counterproposals and Gorbachev’s INF Proposals,” October 5, 1985, Box 2, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive. The French reaction is in Memorandum, American Embassy Paris to US Secretary of State, “Gorbachev Visit: French Reaction to Soviet Arms Control Position,” Box 1, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

“European zone,” but the SS-20 was a mobile system. If the Soviets retained hundreds of SS-20s in Asia, these systems could be shifted back to Europe in the event of a war. The Dutch, therefore, decided to move forward with deployment of American cruise missiles. With this decision, all of the five countries slated for deployment as part of the 1979 dual-track decision had accepted American intermediate-range missiles.⁸⁸⁷

Despite the fact that French officials rejected Gorbachev’s overture to engage in bilateral negotiations on nuclear weapons, the meeting between Gorbachev and Mitterrand still served a valuable purpose. Gorbachev discovered that Mitterrand also opposed Reagan’s SDI, and the two men found that they agreed on a number of issues. Alexandrov-Agentov, one of Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisors, claims that they two men “seemed to very soon find a common language.”⁸⁸⁸

The Geneva Summit

On the first day that Gorbachev took office as General Secretary, Reagan had invited him to meet with him in Washington. Less than a month later, Gorbachev announced his willingness to meet with Reagan, and on May 14 Shultz and Gromyko agreed to a summit between Reagan and Gorbachev (after six-hours of otherwise fruitless conversation).⁸⁸⁹ Eventually, the two leaders agreed to meet in Geneva from November 19-20, 1985.

⁸⁸⁷ Cable, American Embassy Hague to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Dutch Reaction to Gorbachev’s Paris Statement on SS-20s,”

⁸⁸⁸ Transcript, “Interview of Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov,” January 15, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁸⁹ For an account of this meeting, see, Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 564; and Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 115-118.

Gorbachev desperately wanted to make a deep impression on Reagan. He wanted to break through diplomatic niceties and established Cold War patterns and engage Reagan man-to-man. He wanted to demonstrate emphatically that he was a new kind of Soviet leader, different from previous General Secretaries. But he was worried that he would not have a chance to do this. The Soviet leadership at the time was still deeply suspicious of Reagan. Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's closest advisors, says that the Soviet government went into the Geneva summit with "the most profound mistrust of the Americans."⁸⁹⁰ Dobrynin recalls that Gorbachev and his Politburo colleagues approached the meetings with Reagan "with high anxiety, uncertain what it would produce because it was the first one in the five years of a presidency characterized by virulent anti-Sovietism."⁸⁹¹ Gorbachev's anxiety was multiplied by the fact that his aides told him that he would have only five minutes alone with Reagan before they were joined by their teams. Wanting to make the most of this limited time, Gorbachev rehearsed in advance exactly what he would say during those critical moments. One thing that he decided to do was to acknowledge that Reagan was the older man and to give him the appropriate consideration and respect.⁸⁹²

Gorbachev did not realize that Reagan also wanted to spend as much time as possible with him one-on-one during the summit. Reagan was eager to finally get

⁸⁹⁰ Transcript, "Oberdorfer Interview with [Alexandr] Yakovlev," undated [1990], Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 25; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁹¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 585.

⁸⁹² Transcript of Conversation, "Dinner with Andrei Grachev," May 27, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 8; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

the chance to engage a Soviet leader. Since learning that the Soviet Union viewed him as an aggressor who might launch a nuclear war, he had been trying to convince the Soviet leadership that he actually wanted peace and nuclear disarmament. The Geneva summit would be his chance to do this. Prior to the summit, Gorbachev's advance team informed him that the summit would be held in a beautiful manor house on a lake. About 150 yards from the house, there was a beach cottage with a fireplace. Reagan had a plan for this cottage, so he instructed his aides to build a large fire in the cottage's fireplace and to keep it burning.⁸⁹³

On November 19, as anxiety mingled with hope, Reagan, Gorbachev, and 3,000 members of the media arrived in Geneva. The summit, by all accounts, exceeded expectations. The two leaders spent more time in one-on-one dialogue than anyone would have imagined in advance, and this time helped tear down pre-existing prejudices. Their first meeting, scheduled for 15 minutes, lasted an hour, as both men vied to outdo the other in their professions of goodwill toward the other and in making lengthy expositions about their desire for peace. After a morning meeting and lunch, the two leaders and their aides sat down for another session, but as the meeting got underway, Reagan sprung his plan, inviting Gorbachev to take a walk and then guiding him down to the beach cottage. In front of the fire, the conversation was candid, emotional, and at times combative. The main point of contention was star wars. Again and again, Gorbachev warned that SDI would bring the arms race into outer space and called upon Reagan sign an agreeing banning

⁸⁹³ Transcript, "Interview of Ronald Reagan," March 27, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box and Folder Number; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

space weapons. Reagan countered with conviction that SDI was a peaceful initiative, but the neither man could convince the other.⁸⁹⁴

The Geneva Summit, quickly dubbed the “fireside summit,” failed to produce an arms control breakthrough, but the two leaders ended up having six private conversations during the two-day summit. In the end, they also issued a joint statement that nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.

Reagan and his advisors were impressed with Gorbachev. Reagan told Paul Nitze in the limousine as they were departing, “You could almost get to like the guy.”⁸⁹⁵ Later he said that there was a definite chemistry between he and Gorbachev.⁸⁹⁶ Robert McFarlane, Reagan’s National Security Advisor, was impressed that Gorbachev really seemed to listen to what US officials were saying. “For the first time,” McFarlane observed, “this was a Soviet leader who might be open to changing his mind.”⁸⁹⁷

After the summit, Soviet officials also began to revise their view of Reagan. Gorbachev said publicly after the summit that his meetings with Reagan helped

⁸⁹⁴ All of the meeting transcripts of the Geneva Summit have been declassified. The best place to find them all together and online is, “To the Geneva Summit: Perestroika and the Transformation of U.S.-Soviet Relations,” National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 172, National Security Archive, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/> [accessed March 1, 2014].

⁸⁹⁵ Paul Nitze, “Summit Notes 11/20/85,” Papers of Paul H. Nitze, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸⁹⁶ Transcript, “Interview of Ronald Reagan,” March 27, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box and Folder Number; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁸⁹⁷ Transcript, “Interview with Bud McFarlane,” October 9 and 18, 1989, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 2, Folder 22; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

“clear away” some “accumulated prejudices and prejudiced evaluations.”⁸⁹⁸ Privately, he told his aides that he became convinced that Reagan was “not deprived of common sense” and that his “political lexicon” in private discussions was richer than his public statements.⁸⁹⁹ Shortly after the summit, Gorbachev told Reagan that he believed that the summit enabled the two leaders to overcome “serious psychological barriers” to dialogue.⁹⁰⁰

Soviet leaders also attached significance to the summit’s joint statement. Valentin Falin, one of Gorbachev’s senior advisors, said that the Geneva summit was a “kind of breakthrough” not only because of the “personal contact established” between Reagan and Gorbachev, but also because if “such a conservative personality” as Reagan was willing to admit “certain very important principles” then this was evidence that the United States was changing and that “even with Reagan it is possible to do useful things.”⁹⁰¹ Shortly after the summit, Chernyaev wrote in his diary that “something cardinal” had occurred at Geneva and that a turning point was noticeable in international relations mainly because the two sides “came close to the recognition that nobody will start a war.”⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁸ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Analysis Report, “Moscow on the Geneva Summit,” December 2, 1985, Box 2, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive

⁸⁹⁹ Transcript, “Interview of Valentin Falin,” January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹⁰⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 592. Memorandum, Nicholas Platt to Admiral John M. Pointdexter, “Gorbachev’s Letter of December 24,” Office of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Head of State Files [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 8591293] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁹⁰¹ Transcript, “Interview of Valentin Falin,” January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹⁰² Chernyaev, *Diary*, November 24, 1985.

Looking back, Gorbachev and Reagan noted the role that Margaret Thatcher had played in helping to bring them together. In his memoirs, Gorbachev offers his interpretation of why Reagan chose to meet with him. “The Americans,” he writes, “wanted to see for themselves whether Mrs. Thatcher was right in praising me as a man ‘you can do business with’. I think this was the main thing that interested them—a perfectly understandable objective for a first meeting.”⁹⁰³ Reagan also admits that he had Thatcher’s words in mind at his first meeting with the General Secretary. “As we shook hands for the first time,” Reagan writes, “I had to admit—as Margaret Thatcher...predicted I would—that there was something likable about Gorbachev.”⁹⁰⁴

The Evolution of New Thinking

Gorbachev’s meetings in 1985 with Thatcher, Mitterrand, and Reagan and Shevardnadze’s meeting with Shultz were critical for the development of Gorbachev’s thinking on foreign policy. Valentin Falin argues that these meetings were “were the first cornerstones placed of how to come out of the deadlock.” They strengthened Gorbachev’s conviction that “the policy of the edge against the edge, sharp knife against sharp knife, is not a policy.”⁹⁰⁵ Through these personal interactions with the leaders of the rival nuclear powers, Gorbachev became convinced that a fist strike nuclear attack from any of these countries was highly

⁹⁰³ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 403-403.

⁹⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 635.

⁹⁰⁵ Transcript, “Interview of Valentin Falin,” January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

unlikely, and this realization gave him the confidence to explore more radical solutions to end the nuclear arms race.

On New Year's Eve Gorbachev called all of the Soviet arms negotiators to Moscow. In lengthy private meetings with each one of them, he asked them to come up with fresh approaches to arms control.⁹⁰⁶ "Nobody is listening, so tell it to me as you see it," Gorbachev told Oleg Grinevsky, a senior Soviet negotiator. "What are the problems?" he asked. "What do we have to do to have these negotiations succeed?"⁹⁰⁷ After years of narrow negotiating instructions that failed to produce any results, many of these officials jumped at the opportunity to share their thoughts with Gorbachev. He then asked some of them to repeat their ideas to the Politburo.⁹⁰⁸

In early January of 1986, Gorbachev put together an ambitious arms reductions package and made plans to present it at the upcoming 27th Party Congress in February. But then he changed his mind. Instead of presenting it at the Congress, he decided to send Reagan a letter and then announce it in a public statement. Falin claims that Gorbachev decided not to announce the proposal at the Party Congress because he did not want the world to view it as a "Party political move." Rather, he wanted the plan to be an initiative of "the Soviet Union as a

⁹⁰⁶ Vladislav M. Zubok, "Gorbachev's Nuclear Learning: How the Soviet leader became a nuclear abolitionist," *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

⁹⁰⁷ Transcript, "Interview with Oleg Grinevsky," February 7, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹⁰⁸ Zubok, "Gorbachev's Nuclear Learning," *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

country, as a nation.”⁹⁰⁹ This was an effort to distinguish Gorbachev’s dramatic plan from the empty Party platitudes of the past.

On January 12 Gorbachev sent his proposal to Reagan, and three days later, he announced it to the world. It was a radical vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Gorbachev’s set forth a detailed, stage-by-stage plan for the global elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2000. In the first stage, which would last five to eight years, the US and USSR would eliminate half of their strategic nuclear weapons and destroy all their medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles in the European zone. In the second stage, which would begin by 1990, all nuclear powers would be called upon to destroy all their nuclear weapons with a range over 1000 km. In the third stage, which would commence no later than 1995, all remaining nuclear weapons on earth would be scrapped. “By the end of 1999,” Gorbachev declared, “there will be no more nuclear weapons on earth.”⁹¹⁰

At the Party Congress in February, Gorbachev explained the thinking behind his radical proposal. He argued that deterrence, containment, and “the policy of strength” had fostered an arms race that no one could ever win and that soon might go out of control. The quest for nuclear parity had led to a situation in which each side had amassed a stockpile of weapons that far exceeded their legitimate defense needs and had actually made their safety less secure. The only thing that the current situation guaranteed was “equal danger” for all parties. In the future, Gorbachev

⁹⁰⁹ Transcript, “Interview of Valentin Falin,” January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹¹⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Statement by Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee,” January 15, 1986, published in Mikhail Gorbachev, *Selected Speeches and Articles*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987.

announced, the Soviet Union would no longer pursue equal security based on amassing greater and greater numbers of nuclear weapons. "In our age," Gorbachev said, "genuine equal security" is guaranteed not by the highest possible levels of armaments but by "the lowest possible levels." and "nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction must be totally excluded." Henceforth, the Soviet Union's security needs would be met not by trying to match the West weapon for weapon but by a "lowering of the levels of military capabilities...to limits of reasonable adequacy."⁹¹¹

Gorbachev's new idea of "reasonable adequacy," also translated "reasonable sufficiency" (*razumnaya dostatochnost*) rejected both the American view of parity and the Soviet principle of equal security. Andrei Kortunov, a senior researcher at the Soviet Union's USA and Canada Institute called the idea of reasonable sufficiency the "ultimate substitute for the idea of parity."⁹¹² In fact, it overthrew the whole paradigm of seeking to define and acquire nuclear equality. One of the architects of this new way of defining Soviet security was Alexander Yakovlev, Gorbachev's most important advisor from 1985-1988 and the intellectual force behind many of his reforms. As Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Yakovlev oversaw a research study on the aggregate military potential of the United States. He recalls the impact of this study on their thinking about nuclear weapons and the arms race: "The deeper and more profoundly we studied these

⁹¹¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, "Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," February 25, 1986, published in Gorbachev, *Selected Speeches and Articles*, 341-462.

⁹¹² Transcript, "Interview of USA Staff Member Andrei Kortunov," February 8, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 13; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

questions, the more confident we were in thinking we were all crazy.” Yakovlev and others at IMEMO began to ask themselves:

How is it possible...to think about nuclear war? How can we accumulate nuclear arms? And how can we think about using these weapons? Although we have all the data indicating that humanity will perish, how can two states in the world think of destroying each other for the sake of some group’s interests, for prestige, or political or economic interests? How can a rational man think like this?”⁹¹³

They concluded that remaining in the arms race was madness, and they began to consider how many weapons the Soviet Union really needed to assure its security. They concluded that due to the destructive power of even a small number of nuclear weapons, there was no longer any need to try to match the United States nuclear warhead for nuclear warhead. “[I]t was known,” Yakovlev told an American reporter in 1990, “that however much you’d increase your weapons, for example if you had ten thousand warheads, [or even] one million warheads, we still knew that, in order to destroy you...five would be enough. So why be frightened?”⁹¹⁴

The American Response

Gorbachev’s arms control proposal met with mixed reviews from the United States. Reagan embraced, in principle, Gorbachev’s call for a nuclear free world, but some of the details of his plan created problems for the United States and NATO countries in Europe. Prior to responding to Gorbachev’s proposal, Reagan sent Paul Nitze to Europe to consult with the allies. In a top-secret memorandum on February 14, Nitze told Reagan that he discovered considerable “skepticism about the realism

⁹¹³ Transcript, “Oberdorfer Interview with [Alexandr] Yakovlev,” undated [1990], Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 25; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

or even desirability of a nuclear-free world.” Some European leaders even voiced opposition to the elimination of INF in Europe, which had been Reagan’s own position since 1981. They argued that now that “the trauma of deploying U.S. LRINF in Europe” was finally over, “the idea of withdrawing these missiles so soon is not warranted.” Britain and France also remained adamant that their nuclear forces not be the subject of negotiations until after the Soviet Union had made large scale reductions in both its nuclear and conventional forces.

Based on these consultations, Reagan decided to respond to Gorbachev’s proposal with a more moderate, graduated plan of his own. He proposed reducing American and Soviet strategic nuclear warheads down to 6,000 and decreasing INF missiles in Europe to 140 launchers by 1987 with concurrent reductions of INF in Asia, reducing these systems another 50% by 1988, and then eliminating all weapons in this category by 1989.⁹¹⁵

The American and Soviet proposals, both of which called for sweeping reductions in nuclear weapons and far exceeded anything imagined by either side in all of the US-Soviet negotiations since 1969, had many similarities, but the differences were significant. The American proposal on INF included systems in both Europe and Asia, whereas the Soviet proposal included only systems in Europe. Soviet leaders argued that their SS-20s in Asia were intended as a deterrent against China and were incapable of reaching Europe. American and European leaders argued that no SS-20s could be excluded from limits “merely because of their

⁹¹⁵ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Mikhail Gorbachev, February 22, 1986, National Security Council Executive Secretariat, Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 890146-8690267] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

deployment location, since those systems are capable of moving or being transported in a matter of days between different geographic areas.”⁹¹⁶ The greatest point of contention in Gorbachev’s proposal was that the entire package was tied to the American abandonment of SDI, which Reagan absolutely refused to do.

Gorbachev’s plan and Reagan counter proposal were both sent to the negotiations in Geneva, where they languished for months with no progress. Both sides expressed disquiet at the lack of progress after the promising beginning at the Geneva summit and the similarities in the proposals of both leaders. On April 2, Gorbachev sent a letter to Reagan, asking, “Where is the real turn for the better?”⁹¹⁷ On April 11 Reagan wrote back and also expressed concern over the “relative lack of progress since our meeting in Geneva in moving overall relations in a positive direction.”⁹¹⁸ George Shultz describes the mood at the time, “As the winter months had passed into spring, a certain sense of stalemate and sourness had set in.”⁹¹⁹

The Star Wars Dilemma

Disagreements over Reagan’s SDI were the most difficult to overcome. This was due in part to the different ways in which American and Soviet officials interpreted Soviet opposition to SDI. Reagan saw SDI as a way to rid the world of nuclear weapons. He believed in the project and even talked about sharing it with the Soviets some day. Many Reagan officials, however, supported SDI because they

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ Letter, Mikhail Gorbachev to Ronald Reagan, April 2, 1986, National Security Council Executive Secretariat, Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 890146-8690267] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁹¹⁸ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Mikahil Gorbachev, April 11, 1986, National Security Council Executive Secretariat, Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 890146-8690267] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁹¹⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 712.

believed that the Soviets were afraid of it and that this fear would eventually lead to concessions in the nuclear arms negotiations.⁹²⁰ Based on this interpretation, they urged Reagan not to give it up. Some Soviet officials were, in fact, afraid of SDI. They feared that America might actually possess some secret technology that would enable them to build the elaborate system in outer space, and, by doing so, to gain a huge advantage over the Soviet Union.⁹²¹ But this is not how Gorbachev viewed SDI. Gorbachev believed that the Soviets could spend 10% of the cost of building SDI in order to find a way to destroy it.⁹²² Therefore, his opposition to it was not based on fear, but based on something else. During a Politburo meeting on March 24, Gorbachev tried to explain his view of SDI to his comrades. In the middle of the meeting, he declared with passion, “Maybe we should just stop being afraid of SDI!” Some in the Reagan administration, he explained, were “betting precisely on the fact that the USSR is afraid of SDI. That is why they are putting pressure on us—to exhaust us.” But Gorbachev wanted his comrades to understand that this was not why he opposed SDI and not why they should oppose SDI. “[W]e are against the SDI,” he declared, “because we are in favor of abolishing nuclear weapons. The SDI would make the world even more unstable. But for us this is not a problem of fear,

⁹²⁰ For example, George Shultz wrote after the Reykjavik summit, “The Soviets, I thought, had agreed to our long-standing proposals. They had done so, I believed, because of SDI. They wanted SDI to wither and die. If President Reagan had agreed—by this compromise—to let SDI die, we would have no leverage to propel the Soviets to continue moving our way. I admired the president for hanging in there.” (Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 773).

⁹²¹ Transcript, “Interview of Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov,” January 15, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹²² Meeting Notes, “Anatoly Chernyaev’s Notes from the Politburo Sessions,” March 24, 1986, Opus 2, File 2, Gorbachev Foundation Archive. Available in Box 15, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya].

but of responsibility, because the consequences would be unpredictable.”⁹²³ Gorbachev comments illustrate why SDI became such a barrier to progress in the negotiations—Reagan, American officials, Soviet officials, and Gorbachev himself all interpreted it in different ways. Gorbachev seems to have been genuinely torn over SDI—he really wanted to achieve his arms reduction package, but he also strongly opposed SDI, and his opposition to SDI was the main barrier to getting his arms control package.

The Chernobyl Disaster

In April a catastrophe in the Ukraine intensified Gorbachev’s nuclear abolitionist instincts. On April 26 the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant malfunctioned, causing a massive explosion in one of the reactors. The resulting fire sent a plume of highly radioactive nuclear fallout into the atmosphere and over the skies in large parts of the Soviet Union and Western Europe. The effort to stop the fires and then contain the leaking radiation involved over 500,000 workers at a cost of 18 billion rubles. Thirty-one people died from the immediate accident, all of whom were reactor staff and emergency workers who reached the scene first, and thousands of others suffered serious health consequences. The crisis had a profound effect on Gorbachev. According to Shevardnadze, the tragedy “tore the blindfold from our eyes” and “convinced us that morality and politics could not diverge.”⁹²⁴ Gorbachev became even more convinced that the arms race only increased the danger for both sides and that the principle of reasonable sufficiency was correct. Not long after the

⁹²³ Ibid.

⁹²⁴ Quoted in Zubok, “Gorbachev’s Nuclear Learning,” *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

disaster, Richard Nixon visited Gorbachev in Moscow. Gorbachev shared with him some of the lessons that he had drawn from Chernobyl. "Even if one country would constantly be arming itself, and the other would do nothing," Gorbachev told the former president, "then this first country still would gain nothing. For the weak side may simply detonate all its nuclear devices, even on its own territory, and it would mean suicide for it and a slow killing for the adversary."⁹²⁵

In the aftermath of Chernobyl, Gorbachev became even more motivated to eliminate barriers to an arms reduction agreement, even if this meant making significant concessions. During a Politburo meeting two weeks later, Gorbachev urged his colleagues to abandon old ways of thinking. He said, "If we take the position of the imperialist: toughness and toughness again, to insist on our position we will not achieve anything. And everything will be as it used to be. And that means that it would be worse."⁹²⁶ "At that time," says Viktor Karpov, a member of the Soviet negotiating team in Geneva, "we spoke about the necessity to just think anew the whole situation."⁹²⁷

A striking manifestation of this effort to think about nuclear weapons in new ways can be found in a new START proposal that Soviet negotiations tabled at the negotiations in Geneva on June 11. In the proposal, the Soviet Union dropped its insistence that American forward-based systems be included in American strategic

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Notes, "Anatoly Meeting's Notes from the Politburo Session," May 5, 1986 Gorbachev Foundation Archive. Available in Box 15, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya].

⁹²⁷ Transcript, "Interview of Viktor Karpov." January 11, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 10; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

weapons totals. This unilateral concession signaled a major change in the way that the Soviet Union defined strategic weapons and reversed a Soviet negotiating position that dated back to 1969.⁹²⁸

France and Britain

Right at the time that Gorbachev was groping for new ideas in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, Gorbachev visited Mitterrand in Paris (July 7) and Shevardnadze met with Thatcher in London (July 13-16). During Gorbachev's meeting with the French President, Gorbachev complained about American intransigence and the persistent talk in the United States about applying pressure on the Soviet Union in order to extract concessions from them. Mitterrand played the role of middleman and repeatedly expressed understanding for Gorbachev's positions but also encouraged him not to view Reagan too harshly or to view the situation in the US as "something frozen."⁹²⁹ During Shevardnadze's time in London, "the atmosphere at all the talks was good," according to the Pavel Palazhchenko, the Soviet interpreter. The British officials "made a real effort to make the Soviet minister feel at home" and to listen to Soviet positions "in a new and more flexible way."⁹³⁰

⁹²⁸ Background Book, "President Reagan's Trip to Reykjavik," October 1, 1986, Box 2, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

⁹²⁹ Meeting Transcript, "Transcript of Conversation between Mikhail S. Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand," July 7, 1986, Box 15: 1986-1988, Russian and Eastern European Archive Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya]. See also Zubok, "Gorbachev's Nuclear Learning," *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

⁹³⁰ Pavel Palazhchenko, *My Years With Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 50.

Both meetings, in Paris and London, contributed to the growing understanding between the Soviet Union and these two European nuclear powers. Less than a month later, Gorbachev announced that he would no longer try to include British and French nuclear weapons in the negotiations with the Americans for a treaty on intermediate-nuclear weapons in Europe. This was another huge concession. Since the first day of the SALT negotiations back in 1969, the Soviet Union had been fighting to include British and French systems in the negotiations. Now Gorbachev agreed to exclude them from the equation, and he did so unilaterally without any equivalent American concession. According to Vladislav Zubok, Gorbachev took this step without consulting the military, who strongly opposed it.⁹³¹ Members of the military were profoundly unhappy about this. Chernyaev records in his diary around this time that Gorbachev began receiving anonymous letters “from military people, with threats to deal with him like with Khrushchev if he goes on being in favor of disarmament.”⁹³² Chernyaev, however, was convinced that Gorbachev had made the right move. In a private conversation not long after Gorbachev’s decision, Chernyaev told him, “it is completely impossible to imagine the circumstances under which any French or English government, no matter how close their relations with the United States, would press the button to launch a nuclear attack against us.”⁹³³ Gorbachev realized that this decision involved

⁹³¹ Zubok, “Gorbachev’s Nuclear Learning,” *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

⁹³² Chernyaev, *Diary*, February 2, 1986.

⁹³³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 82

some risk, but, as he explained to Reagan a couple months later, “a compromise needed to be found, and therefore risks needed to be taken.”⁹³⁴

The Reykjavik Summit

This latest concession, however, still did not yield an INF agreement. Major disagreements remained over how to treat Soviet INF missiles in Asia, whether to also place limits on a category of missiles called shorter-range, intermediate-range missiles (SRINF), and how to verify that both sides were complying with a future treaty.⁹³⁵ In addition, SDI remained a barrier to an arms control treaty on intermediate-range missiles as well as on strategic weapons. In the hopes of overcoming these obstacles, Gorbachev wrote to Reagan on September 15 and urged the President to join him for an emergency summit “to engage in a strictly confidential, private and frank discussion (possibly with only our foreign ministers present).”⁹³⁶ Gorbachev and his closest advisors believed that only Gorbachev and Reagan themselves could break the logjam in the negotiations. In the negotiations in Geneva, recalls Shevardnadze, “there seemed to be no movement at all—endless discussion and debate, mutual recriminations and accusations without actually [any] progress.” Therefore, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze decided, “What is needed

⁹³⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Meeting between Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, et al., October 11, 1986. Jack Matlock Files, Series III US-USSR Summits 92137, 92140, Box 7 [Reykjavik Meeting—Geneva Materials (3) 10/12-13/86], Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

⁹³⁵ Background Book, “President Reagan’s Trip to Reykjavik,” October 1, 1986, Box 2, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive. Shorter-range, intermediate-range missiles (SRINF) were missiles with ranges between 150 km and 1,000 km. Once the two sides began discussing SRINF, they started referring to longer-range, intermediate-range forces (LRINF), which were now defined as those systems with a range of 1,000-5,500 km.

⁹³⁶ Letter, Mikhail Gorbachev to Ronald Reagan, August 9, 1986, National Security Council Executive Secretariat, Head of State File [USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev 8690616-8690659] Box 40, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

is a political decision—highest level political decision...That’s why [there was] the need for [a] meeting at the highest level.”⁹³⁷

Reagan accepted the invitation, and the two leaders scheduled a summit for one month later in Reykjavik, Iceland. In the days before the summit, Gorbachev continued to push for new solutions. During a Politburo session on September 22, he told the other Soviet leaders that they should encourage journalists “to have a vent” and “say what they think” regarding arms control. Scientists and academics should be encouraged to “come up with their own opinions regarding nuclear weapons and the arms race” and should “publish their wishes for the Soviet government.” “Don’t we have some brains?” he asked.⁹³⁸

Gorbachev wanted to come up with a bold proposal that would engage and excite Reagan and draw him personally into the negotiations. When a deputy foreign minister suggested a conservative strategy, Gorbachev said that he wanted something “more dramatic” and that the Soviet Union should stop making “offers to the Americans that we know beforehand that they will not accept.”⁹³⁹ During a Politburo meeting on October 4, he said that he wanted to find a way to “move Reagan,” to “push him until a breakthrough occurs.” Chernyaev summarized this strategy during discussions with Gorbachev right before the summit. Chernyaev said to Gorbachev, “The main goal of Reykjavik, if I understood you correctly...is to

⁹³⁷ Transcript, “Interview of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze,” January 17, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 21; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

⁹³⁸ Meeting Notes, “Notes of a Politburo Session: Conference with Members of the Politburo and Assistants in the Secretariat Room,” September 22, 1986, Gorbachev Foundation Archive. Available in Box 15, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya].

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*

sweep Reagan off his feet by our bold, even 'risky' approach...To get all we can out of an international situation that is currently favorable to us for a major step toward disarmament."⁹⁴⁰

Not everyone in the Politburo, however, felt comfortable with this radical approach to the summit. To them Gorbachev answered, "What are you doing, still preparing to fight a nuclear war? Well I'm not, and this is what determines everything else. If we're still trying to conquer the entire world, then let's discuss how to defeat the Americans in the arms race. But then we can forget about all that we've said about our new policies."⁹⁴¹

On October 11, 1986 Reagan and Gorbachev came together in Reykjavik, Iceland, for their second superpower summit. Their meetings took place at Hofdi House, originally the residence of a 19th century French consul. The summit was a momentous event that almost resulted in an agreement to completely eliminate strategic nuclear weapons in ten years. During the first session between Gorbachev, Reagan, Shevardnadze, and Shultz, Gorbachev said that the Soviet Union favored "radical reductions of strategic offensive arms by 50 percent and no less."⁹⁴² Gorbachev pointed out that this proposal covered only the weapons that the United States defined as strategic weapons and did not include medium-range missiles or forward-based systems—weapons previously defined by the Soviet Union as strategic weapons. "This takes into account the US viewpoint and is a concession,"

⁹⁴⁰ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 81.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 83.

⁹⁴² Memorandum of Conversation, 1st Session of Summit Meeting between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, October 11, 1986, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109177> [accessed 02/26/14].

Gorbachev noted. To Gorbachev's surprise, Reagan accepted his proposal to cut all offensive strategic weapons by fifty percent. This was a moment of great import. The two leaders seemed to understand each other and to share the same aspiration to make significant cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

In the negotiations related to INF, Gorbachev also made a major concession. He started these negotiations by proposing the complete elimination of all INF missiles in Europe. Reagan, however, informed Gorbachev that he now favored retaining 100 missiles in Europe for both countries. Reagan also argued that "he could not and would not accept a situation in which sizeable reductions in Europe, even to zero, were not matched by proportional reductions in Asia." Gorbachev answered that the Soviet Union had already made a major concession by dropping their insistence on including British and French systems. In response to this concession, "the US should take back its demands regarding nuclear forces in Asia." But Reagan refused to do this, and Gorbachev relented on this point as well. In exchange for Reagan's acceptance of zero INF missiles for both sides in Europe (which Reagan had wanted all along), Gorbachev agreed to limit INF missiles outside of Europe to 100 for both sides.⁹⁴³ As the negotiations progressed, Gorbachev also agreed in principle to the need for verification measures to ensure compliance and to include limits on short-range INF in an INF Treaty—two things that the Soviet Union had refused to do in the past. "Excitement was in the air,"

⁹⁴³ The key documents related to the negotiations on INF are: Memorandum of Conversation, Reykjavik Summit, 3:30 PM – 5:40 PM Session, October 11, 1986, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109178> [accessed 02/26/14]. Memorandum of Conversation, Reykjavik Summit, 10:00 AM – 1:35 PM Session, October 12, 1986, Box 91240, Collection: Series III, US-USSR Summits, Jack Matlock MSS, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

George Shultz recalls. Gorbachev “was laying gifts at our feet—or, more accurately, on the table—concession after concession.”⁹⁴⁴

By the final day of the summit, Reagan and Gorbachev, supported by Shevardnadze and Shultz, were considering eliminating not just 50% of all strategic nuclear weapons, but *all* nuclear weapons. During the penultimate session, Gorbachev tabled a two-stage plan that would eliminate 50% of all strategic offensive weapons in five years and then all remaining strategic offensive weapons during a second five-year period. At a certain point in the discussion, however, Reagan asked whether Gorbachev wanted to eliminate just strategic weapons in the second five-year period or all nuclear weapons. “It would be fine with me,” Reagan said, “if we eliminated all nuclear weapons.” “We can do that,” Gorbachev answered. “We can eliminate them.” “Let’s do it,” Shultz added excitedly.⁹⁴⁵ Reagan described these moments in the negotiations as “breathtaking.” “George and I,” he writes, “couldn’t believe what was happening. We were getting amazing agreements...I felt something momentous was occurring.”⁹⁴⁶

At the Reykjavik summit, Gorbachev and Reagan came to the brink of an understanding that called for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, but, at the last minute, they backed away. Gorbachev’s two-stage, ten-year proposal included an important condition—SDI would have to be confined to laboratory research for ten years. Gorbachev believed that even this condition represented a Soviet concession.

⁹⁴⁴ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 760.

⁹⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Reykjavik Summit, 3:25 PM – 4:30 PM and 5:30 PM – 6:50 PM Sessions, October 12, 1986, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110621> [accessed 02/26/14].

⁹⁴⁶ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life*, 675, 677.

He was no longer asking Reagan to abandon SDI completely; he was simply requesting that Reagan keep it in the lab for ten years. Reagan was willing to agree not to deploy SDI for 10 years, but, during the ten-year waiting period, he wanted the freedom to do all kinds of research, development, and testing for SDI—both inside the laboratory and outside of it. In the end, the two days of breathtaking negotiations that envisioned total nuclear abolition were overturned by this disagreement over SDI—should SDI research be limited solely to research *inside* a laboratory, or would research *outside* of a laboratory also be permitted? “It’s a question of a one word,” Reagan protested. “This should not be turned down over a word.” “It is not just a question of a word,” Gorbachev replied, “but a question of principle.”⁹⁴⁷ Gorbachev had made concession after concession, but now he had reached his limit. He would not budge anymore.

At midnight, after ten hours of heated negotiations, the Reykjavik summit ended without agreement. As the two tired men left the conference building together, Dobrynin overheard their parting words. Gorbachev, “his voice ringing with bitterness he could hardly hide,” said to Reagan, “Mr. President, you have missed the unique chance of going down in history as a great president who paved the way for nuclear disarmament.” Reagan replied with evident disappointment, “That applies to both of us.”⁹⁴⁸

Although Reykjavik ended in bitter disappointment, it was another milestone on the road to a nuclear disarmament agreement. The very fact that the two men

⁹⁴⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Reykjavik Summit, 3:25 PM – 4:30 PM and 5:30 PM – 6:50 PM Sessions, October 12, 1986, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110621> [accessed 02/26/14].

⁹⁴⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 621.

looked each other in the eye and declared their mutual desire to rid the world of nuclear weapons seemed to build a bond between them. Chernyaev believes that a “spark of understanding was born between them, as if they had winked to each other about the future.”⁹⁴⁹ “For the first time,” Zubok writes, “the remarkable antinuclear synergy between Gorbachev and Reagan revealed itself.”⁹⁵⁰

The negotiations at Reykjavik changed the way Gorbachev and his advisors viewed Reagan—the man whom the Soviet leadership had so deeply distrusted for so long. According to Dobrynin, after Reykjavik, Gorbachev decided “he could and would work with Reagan.” When Gorbachev returned to Moscow, he told Dobrynin that “he saw in [Reagan] a person capable of taking great decisions.”⁹⁵¹ Yakovlev also began to see Reagan in a new light. What changed his perspective was witnessing Reagan’s human struggle over SDI. Yakovlev recalls:

I saw his internal hesitation, his batting back and forth in his mind what to do. On the one hand, as it seemed to me, he was interested in the idea of universal nuclear disarmament, on the other hand, his sticking to the idea of such a funny toy as SDI. And I saw this contradiction on his face—this toy, and the prospect of becoming a man, of taking a historic step...It was not an act. He was sincerely torn by this internal contradiction.

Watching Reagan wrestle with this momentous decision helped him to see the President “from a different angle, as a human being and as a politician.”⁹⁵² After the Reykjavik summits, Chernyaev claims, “Gorbachev retained a certain sense of trust

⁹⁴⁹ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 85.

⁹⁵⁰ Zubok, “Gorbachev’s Nuclear Learning,” *Boston Review*, April/May 2000, <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.2/zubok.html#13> [accessed 12/15/06].

⁹⁵¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 610.

⁹⁵² Transcript, “Oberdorfer Interview with [Alexandr] Yakovlev,” undated [1990], Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 25; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

in this person. After Reykjavik, he never again spoke about Reagan in his inner circle as he had before.”⁹⁵³

Iran Contra—Reagan Under Fire

Less than a month after the Reykjavik summit ended, the Republican party lost control of the Senate in the congressional elections held in the United States on November 4, 1986. On the very same day, the Lebanese magazine *Al-Shiraa* published an article that revealed that the Reagan administration had been trading arms for hostages in clandestine deals with Iran. This initial exposé led to revelations that the White House had shipped more than 1,500 missiles to Iran and that members of Reagan’s National Security Council had diverted some of the profits from these sales to the Contras, anti-communist rebels in Nicaragua. The sale of arms to Tehran violated a U.S. government embargo on selling weapons to Iran and broke a Reagan campaign promise not to negotiate with terrorists; the diversion of money to the Contras directly contradicted a series of laws passed by Congress that made funding the Contras illegal. In the wake of the revelations, Reagan’s National Security Advisor, Admiral Pointdexter, resigned and was replaced by Frank Carlucci. This was significant because Carlucci “did not share Reagan’s interest in radical shifts in nuclear weaponry.”⁹⁵⁴ For the next year, the Reagan administration was hobbled by intensive investigations and lengthy hearings into what became known as the Iran-Contra affair.

As members of the media and the Democrat-controlled Senate increasingly questioned Reagan’s decision-making related to the Iran-Contra crisis, many in the

⁹⁵³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 85.

⁹⁵⁴ Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 259.

US also began to question Reagan's radical arms control proposals at the Reykjavik summit. Against this backdrop, the Reagan administration quietly withdrew its support for the idea of completely eliminating all nuclear weapons. As a result, the momentum surrounding the START negotiations faded, valuable time was lost, and the Reagan presidency would end two years later without a START treaty.

The two sides were, however, able to achieve a treaty on INF. Reagan's diminished stature during the Iran-Contra affair increased Thatcher's importance during the critical period of negotiations that produced the INF Treaty. With Thatcher's help, the two superpowers were able to work together during the eleven months after the Reykjavik summit to finalize an INF treaty.

Untying INF from SDI

The Reykjavik summit sent shock waves throughout the international community. The *New York Times* likened the proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons to the apple that Eve offered to Adam—"a tempting offer but one fraught with catastrophic consequences." Such a proposal, the paper concluded, was "unrealistic," "unverifiable" and "undesirable."⁹⁵⁵ According to the *Washington Post*, the idea of eliminating all nuclear weapons in Europe "traumatized the European governments."⁹⁵⁶ British, French, and West German leaders all feared that eliminating all, or even most, American nuclear missiles inside and outside of Europe would accentuate disparities between NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional forces. After the Reykjavik summit, Thatcher, Mitterrand, and Kohl decided that they

⁹⁵⁵ *New York Times*, December 22, 1986. The paper incorrectly attributed this proposal to Gorbachev. The transcript of the summit, as indicated above, shows that it was Reagan who made this offer.

⁹⁵⁶ *Washington Post*, November 21, 1986.

needed to “cooperate very closely” and to develop “a common western position” on arms control policy. Through consultations in late October, they developed a joint position. They would support the elimination of all longer-range INF (missiles with a range of 1,000-5,500 km) as long as reductions in American strategic nuclear weapons did not exceed fifty percent. They also would oppose any agreement on shorter-range INF (missiles with a range of 150-1,000 km) that failed to eliminate the Soviet advantage in these systems. Over the next few months, all three leaders would reach out to the Americans and the Soviets. To the US government, they would argue that strategic reductions should not exceed fifty percent; to the Soviet government, they would argue that the Soviet Union should abandon its link between limits on SDI and an INF agreement.⁹⁵⁷

As the European leader with the closest ties to both Reagan and Gorbachev, Thatcher played a central role in the implementation of this shared strategy. On November 15, just one month after the Reykjavik summit, Thatcher flew to the United States to meet with Reagan at Camp David. Her goal for the meeting was to “get the Americans back onto the firm ground of a credible policy of nuclear deterrence,” including a pledge from Reagan to continue with the plan to sell Britain American-made Trident II submarine-launched ballistic missiles, despite Reagan’s

⁹⁵⁷ Cable, American Embassy London to Secretary of State Washington DC, “Trilateral FRG-UK-French Coordination on Arms Control,” November 5, 1986, NSC European & Soviet Directorate, Box 90902, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Available in the Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive: <http://margarethatcher.org/document/110559> [accessed 05/05/14]. *Wall Street Journal*, “Three European Nations to Coordinate Arms Control in an Unprecedented Move,” November 5, 1986, *Washington Post*, “Summit Roller Coaster; Europeans Weigh Results of Reykjavik,” November 2, 1986, A1. *The Times (London)*, “Thatcher Has Key Role in Arms Talks,” October 20, 1986, Issue 62593. *The Sunday Times (London)*, “Nuclear Pullout - Europe warns Reagan,” October 19, 1986, Issue 8463. *New York Times*, “Western Allies Grumble About Reykjavik Plans,” October 22, 1986, A12.

proposals at Reykjavik to eliminate all ballistic missiles within ten years.⁹⁵⁸ When Thatcher arrived at Camp David, she immediately got into a golf cart with the President, and the two drove off together. The two were alone for close to an hour. In their respective memoirs, Thatcher and Reagan are both silent as to what transpired on the ride in the golf cart, so we cannot be certain as to what Thatcher said and the way Reagan responded. What we do know is that when Thatcher and Reagan returned, Thatcher and Reagan issued a statement that fully conformed with Thatcher's prepared arguments. Standing next to Reagan, Thatcher said, "The President and I...confirmed that NATO's strategy of forward defence and flexible response would continue to require effective nuclear deterrents based upon a mix of systems." In addition, Thatcher continued, "The President...confirmed his full support for the arrangements made to modernise Britain's independent nuclear deterrent with Trident."⁹⁵⁹

Thatcher's success at Camp David greatly impressed Gorbachev. Although Thatcher's arguments at Camp David went against some of his own Reykjavik proposals, Gorbachev had to acknowledge the Prime Minister's power and influence. Immediately after leaving Camp David, Thatcher sent a letter to the General Secretary, informing him of the understanding that she had reached with Reagan. When the British Ambassador, Sir Bryan Cartledge, delivered the letter to Gorbachev, Gorbachev told him that he considered Thatcher to be the strongest

⁹⁵⁸ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 471-472.

⁹⁵⁹ Transcript, "Press Conference of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan," November 15, 1986, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106514> [accessed 01/10/14].

leader in the West after Reagan.⁹⁶⁰ Looking back at her evolving relationship with Gorbachev at this time, Thatcher rightly concludes that her performance at Camp David “demonstrated that, whether they liked it or not, I was able to have some influence on President Reagan on fundamental issues of alliance policy. Mr. Gorbachev, therefore, had as much reason to do business with me as I with him.”⁹⁶¹

Thatcher then turned her attention to convincing Gorbachev to stop linking an INF agreement to American acceptance of Soviet demands related to SDI. On December 15, she wrote to Gorbachev and asked him directly to push forward with an INF agreement. She argued that an agreement on INF was achievable in the very near future and that it was inconsistent to link INF with SDI, an anti-missile system designed to intercept *strategic* missiles, not *intermediate-range* ones. Thatcher’s personal appeal to Gorbachev was supported by similar overtures by Mitterrand and Kohl.⁹⁶²

During two Politburo meetings at the end February, Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership discussed these European appeals and debated how they should respond. In an unusual twist, Gromyko argued in favor of removing the Soviet position on INF from the larger Soviet disarmament package. “Of course, it is a step back,” Gromyko admitted, “but the circumstances are new, and we would achieve a partial agreement.” Marshall Sokolov, the Soviet Defense Minister, however, argued against this suggestion, reminding the other Politburo members that the Soviet Union needed its SS-20 missiles in order to counter British and French missiles. In

⁹⁶⁰ Paul Sharp, *Thatcher’s Diplomacy: The Revival of British Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), 195.

⁹⁶¹ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 474.

⁹⁶² *The Times* (London) Issue 62705.

response, Gorbachev countered, "You are losing the political elements here. There will be no war with Britain and France. It is impossible. And our medium-range missiles, if we remove them, it does not change anything here." As the meeting progressed, Gorbachev seemed to grow convinced that de-linking INF missiles from the broader Soviet package was the right thing to do for two reasons: adopting this position would "make an impact on the outside world, on public opinion," and it would strengthen the Soviet Union's relations with Europe. "We should respond to all the signals of the desire to deal with us," Gorbachev concluded. "And such hints are coming, explicitly or implicitly from Thatcher, Kohl, and from Mitterrand."⁹⁶³

Less than a week later, Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union was willing to de-link the INF negotiations from resolution of SDI issues. Gorbachev's announcement made clear that this initiative was taken with a European audience in view. He said that he realized that the people of Europe were waiting for an agreement on medium-range missiles and he spoke of Europe as a shared home for both the Soviet citizens and Western Europeans. There is "a real opportunity," Gorbachev said, "to free our common European home from a large portion of the nuclear burden in a short time."⁹⁶⁴

From the American perspective, this announcement came, in Shultz's words, "Almost as though out of the blue."⁹⁶⁵ At the time that it was made, Reagan was reeling from the Iran-Contra affair, and nothing in the US-Soviet bilateral

⁹⁶³ Meeting Notes, "Anatoly Chernyaev's Notes from Politburo Sessions on February 23 and 26, 1987," Box 15: 1986-1988, Russian and Eastern European Archive Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya].

⁹⁶⁴ *The Times (London)*, March 2, 1987, Issue 62705.

⁹⁶⁵ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 876.

negotiations had indicated that the Soviets were about to make this concession. European leaders, however, were less surprised. Based on their intensive efforts with Gorbachev, they believed that their voices had been heard.⁹⁶⁶

The Problem of Shorter-Range INF

Gorbachev's concession on untying INF from SDI opened the way for an agreement on the missiles that the two sides were now calling "longer-range, intermediate-range nuclear forces" (LRINF), but disagreement remained on what to do about shorter-range, intermediate-range nuclear forces (SRINF). When the United States had started deploying Pershing II ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles in Europe at the end of 1983, the Soviet Union responded by deploying two shorter-range missile systems—the SS-12 and the SS-23—in the Soviet Union, and East Germany, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. The United States did not own any missiles in this category, but American-owned warheads were on West German Pershing IA missiles. By early 1987, the Soviet Union had nine times as many SRINF warheads as the warheads on the West German Pershing IA missiles. With a view to rectifying this disparity, the United States and its NATO allies called for "global and equal restrictions" on SRINF so that both sides would end up with the same number. The Soviet Union, however, opposed reductions on SRINF and favored simply freezing deployments at their current levels. Soviet leaders argued that Soviet SRINF were needed to counterbalance American forward-based systems, which far exceeded Soviet SRINF levels but would not be subject to any limitations in any of the current arms control proposals. The United States, however, did not see

⁹⁶⁶ *The Times* (London), March 2, 1987. Issue 62705.

things this way. If the two sides could not reach an agreement on SRINF, American officials threatened, the United States would convert longer-range Pershing II missiles into shorter-range Pershing IA missiles.⁹⁶⁷

As the debate over SRINF raged between the United States and the Soviet Union, Thatcher visited Moscow. She arrived on March 26 and stayed in the Soviet Union for five days. During this visit, Thatcher met with Gorbachev five times, including an entire day of one-on-one talks with only interpreters.⁹⁶⁸ In addition Gorbachev greeter Thatcher on her arrival, entertained her for dinner in the Kremlin, and took her to a special performance of *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theater. He allowed Thatcher unprecedented access to the Soviet public, including a meeting with leading Soviet dissidents and uncensored time on Soviet television, where she absolutely skewered a group of unwitting Soviet journalists. She visited a public market where “she found herself greeted with an enthusiasm and warmth that took both Soviet leaders and British political observers by complete surprise.”⁹⁶⁹

Throughout the visit, Thatcher’s meetings with Gorbachev were frequently allowed to run long, disrupting the formal schedule. Charles Powell, one of Thatcher’s senior foreign policy advisors, was struck by the mysterious chemistry that existed between the two leaders. “[T]here was this strange phenomenon of attraction and repulsion which kept them together for thirteen hours,” Powell

⁹⁶⁷ Memorandum, US Mission Geneva to RUEHC/US INFO Washington, “Media Reaction: ‘Arms Accord by Spring 1988?’” Box 3, End of Cold War Collection, National Security Archive.

⁹⁶⁸ *The Times (London)*, March 26, 1987, Issue 62726.

⁹⁶⁹ *The Times (London)* March 30, 1987, Issue 62729.

observes.⁹⁷⁰ Gorbachev describes their heated discussions as “constructive polemics” and concludes that these intense interactions “seemed to strengthen our mutual sympathy.”⁹⁷¹ One of the main arguments that Thatcher made during her visit in Moscow was that the West would not allow the Soviet Union to retain a 9-1 advantage in SRINF. If an agreement on these systems could not be reached, then NATO would deploy new SRINF in Europe to catch up.⁹⁷²

Thatcher’s visit to Moscow was an overwhelming success. After Thatcher left, Gorbachev told the Politburo that it was in the Soviet Union’s interest to “raise the role of Britain in international affairs.” “Great Britain is like a side horse of the United States,” Gorbachev said, “but Thatcher sees that Reagan is getting decrepit.”⁹⁷³ Chernyaev credits Thatcher’s visit with “Gorbachev’s sharp turn toward Western Europe.” Shortly after Thatcher’s departure, Gorbachev told his inner circle that they needed to study Europe more. “It’s obvious,” he argued, “that not a single issue can be decided without Europe...We don’t have to be afraid. We must lower military confrontation as much as possible...Western Europe is our basic partner.”⁹⁷⁴

A month after Thatcher’s visit, Shultz went to Moscow to reap the harvest of the seeds that Thatcher had sown. During an intense four and a half hour session on

⁹⁷⁰ Pryce-Jones, *Strange Death of the Soviet Union*, 124.

⁹⁷¹ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 435.

⁹⁷² House of Commons Statement, [Margaret Thatcher Statement to the House of Commons Regarding Trip to Moscow], April 2, 1987, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106787> [accessed 05/05/14]. *The Times* (London) April 1, 1987, Issue 6237.

⁹⁷³ Meeting Notes, “Anatoly Chernyaev’s Notes from the Politburo Session,” April 2, 1987, Gorbachev Foundation Archive. Available in Box 15, Russian and East European Archives Document Database, National Security Archive [translated by Svetlana Savranskaya].

⁹⁷⁴ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 105.

April 13, Shultz argued for equal reductions in SRINF based upon the long-established American definition of nuclear parity—equal numbers for both sides. Gorbachev, however, informed Shultz that he no longer subscribed to the notion of parity—from his perspective nuclear parity was “a casuistry.” Therefore, he could not accept Shultz’s arguments based on this principle. Instead, he would make his own, more progressive proposal, not based on parity but upon his new way of thinking. To Shultz’s surprise, Gorbachev then proposed the complete elimination of all SRINF missiles. According to Dobrynin, Gorbachev made this decision without consulting other Soviet leaders and against the direct recommendation of Sergei Akhromeyev, Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces. Dobrynin writes, “Gorbachev increasingly improvised and without consulting our experts would agree to sudden compromises which were often regarded by our military as one-sided concessions to the Americans.”⁹⁷⁵

Verification

Despite the fact that Gorbachev kept making concessions, and the negotiations seemed to be moving steadily toward an agreement on INF, some began to doubt whether Reagan would be able to see an agreement through to completion. By the summer of 1987, Reagan’s standing in the world and in the United States had been severely weakened by the Iran-Contra scandal, which continued to consume his presidency. Reagan’s diminished stature led the *Toronto*

⁹⁷⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 623.

Star to conclude that “after the arms-to-Iran affair, only a new U.S. president will be able to negotiate a major arms deal and sell it to his people and his allies.”⁹⁷⁶

It was against this dismal background that Thatcher flew to Washington on July 16 for another meeting with Reagan. Thatcher still believed that Reagan was the right man for the job and that a major disarmament agreement could be accomplished during his presidency. Consequently, Thatcher spent much of her time in Washington promoting the American president to the American people. She also devoted herself to “bolstering the confidence of President Reagan and encouraging him to look beyond his present worries.”⁹⁷⁷ Several contemporary observers noted how Thatcher’s strength and Reagan’s weakness had transformed the nature of the Thatcher-Reagan relationship. The *London Times* pointed out that when Thatcher reported on her time with Reagan, she spoke like “a senior partner in the firm.”⁹⁷⁸ The *Dallas Times Herald* wrote that “to Americans, frightened by the lassitude of Ronald Reagan, Mrs. Thatcher looks like the foremost defender of the free world. Indeed, she may be the most important leader on the planet, aside from Mikhail Gorbachev.”⁹⁷⁹ And the British Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Whitelaw, concluded: “She needed him very much earlier on. Now I think, he needs her.”⁹⁸⁰

One of the areas in which the president needed his British ally was in overcoming another major obstacle to an INF treaty—the question of verification. On March 12 the United States had submitted a proposal at the Geneva negotiations

⁹⁷⁶ *The Toronto Star*, December 10, 1986.

⁹⁷⁷ *London Times*, July 20, 1987.

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁹ Robert M. Hathaway, *Great Britain and the United States: Special Relations since World War II* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 129.

⁹⁸⁰ *Financial Times*, July 20, 1987

of a comprehensive approach to verification of any agreement on INF. The approach included detailed procedures for both scheduled and “challenge” on-site inspections of the destruction and dismantlement of INF systems. At Reykjavik Gorbachev had agreed in principle that verification measures would be necessary, but it had been difficult for the Soviet leadership to agree to the intrusive measures envisioned in the American plan. During Thatcher’s visit with Reagan, she decided to send Gorbachev a personal letter to encourage him to overcome this final barrier to an INF treaty. “I think that a message should be sent to Mr. Gorbachev,” Thatcher announced, “so that negotiations, if he wants an agreement—and I believe he does—can perhaps get down to the details and be completed by the end of the year.”⁹⁸¹

Given the Soviet Union’s history of extreme secrecy, gaining acceptance of the idea of intrusive inspections of Soviet military installations was one of Gorbachev’s most difficult challenges. Yegeny Primakov, Director of the Soviet Institute of World Economy and International Relations, remembers how difficult it was for him “from a psychological point of view” when Gorbachev asked him, “What do you think about this idea to open our laboratories?”⁹⁸² Gorbachev’s view was that given the concessions that he had made in order to obtain an INF agreement, the Soviet Union actually needed verification more than the United States. He argued that if the Soviet Union had truly decided to base its security on the “political side”

⁹⁸¹ Ibid. House of Commons PQs, [Prime Minister Thatcher Answer Questions in the House of Commons], July 21, 1987, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106922> [accessed 05/05/14].

⁹⁸² Transcript, “Interview of Politburo Member Yevgeny Primakov,” Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 19; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

and on “political relationships,” rather than on military considerations, it was critical to be able to calculate the forces on the other side and to see what they are doing. This “assurance and info[rmation] was even more important” to the Soviet Union.⁹⁸³ Based on these considerations, Gorbachev decided to accept the American verification regime. He announced his decision just days after receiving Thatcher’s letter.

Pershing IA Missiles and Global Double Zero

At the same time that Gorbachev announced his acceptance of an intrusive verification regime, he also made another surprise initiative. In the weeks following Gorbachev’s proposal to eliminate all SRINF, a controversy had emerged over the elimination of all SRINF would include West Germany’s 72 Pershing IA missiles. The warheads on these missiles belonged to the United States, but the missiles themselves belonged to Germany. The United States informed the Soviet Union that any agreement between the United States and Soviet Union would not cover these Pershing IA missiles because the United States could not force the FRG to destroy their missiles. When debate over the status of the West German missiles was not immediately resolved, Gorbachev decided to make another offer to sweeten the deal. At Reykjavik and in the negotiations that followed it, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to each retain 100 LRINF missiles outside of Europe. This would allow the Soviet Union to keep 100 LRINF missiles in Asia. In July, however, Gorbachev offered to eliminate these 100 missiles as well. Once he made this offer,

⁹⁸³ Transcript, “Interview with Oleg Grinevsky,” February 7, 1990, Don Oberdorfer Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Germany agreed to dismantle its Pershing IA missiles. The emerging INF treaty now included a global double zero agreement—zero LRINF and zero SRINF.

Shultz and Shevardnadze Finalize the Treaty

Finalizing the remaining pieces of the INF Treaty was left to Shultz and Shevardnadze. During an eight month period in 1987, the two men met together five times. Through two final meetings, in September in Washington and in October in Moscow, they worked out the last details of the treaty. During these meetings Shultz and Shevardnadze set a high standard for how negotiations should be conducted between rivals. Chernyaev describes the two foreign ministers as “highly professional people who knew and trusted each other, not only on matters of policy but personally.” Chernyaev calls their relationship a “harbinger of new relations between the USSR and the United States” and concludes, “A friendly, personal understanding was forged among Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and Shultz—a real statesmen who really stood out among many U.S. officials.”⁹⁸⁴

A Clock with Three Faces

With the main features of a major disarmament treaty in place, Reagan and Gorbachev announced that they would meet for another summit in December in Washington where they planned to sign an INF Treaty. On his way to this historic summit, Gorbachev’s plane touched down outside of London, and Thatcher and Gorbachev met briefly at Brize Norton, a Royal Air Force Base. According to

⁹⁸⁴ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 142.

Thatcher, their brief conversation was “vigorous, enjoyable and even rather jolly.”⁹⁸⁵ Since it was the Christmas season, Thatcher presented Gorbachev with a gift—a clock with three faces. The clock showed Washington time on one face, Moscow time on the other, and London time on the third. *The Washington Post* commented on the gift’s significance:

In ways that go far beyond geography, the gift was a metaphor for Thatcher's view of Britain's place in the world. She frequently cautions that there are only two superpowers, modestly noting that Britain is not one of them. But increasingly these days, neither Gorbachev nor Ronald Reagan takes a step toward the other without first checking the time, and the temperature, with Maggie.⁹⁸⁶

When asked before the trip why Gorbachev planned to stop in Britain on his way to Washington, Gennadi Gerasimov, the chief spokesman for the Soviet foreign ministry, expressed a similar sentiment: “Mr. Gorbachev values Mrs. Thatcher's opinion,” he answered. “This shows that the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States—important as they are—are not the end of the story.”⁹⁸⁷ TASS marked the occasion of Gorbachev’s visit with Thatcher by declaring that “Soviet-British relations were better than they had been since the end of the Second World War” and by highlighting the positive role played by the British government in the lead up to the INF agreement.⁹⁸⁸ Before Gorbachev left Britain, he and Thatcher took turns commemorating the treaty-signing that would take place in Washington. “We are living in historic times,” Thatcher declared, “and the treaty Mr. Gorbachev is going to sign is a historic treaty.” Gorbachev responded, “We have covered this road

⁹⁸⁵ Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, 773.

⁹⁸⁶ *Washington Post*, January 3, 1988.

⁹⁸⁷ *Associated Press*, December 3, 1987.

⁹⁸⁸ *Times (London)*, December 28, 1987.

together—the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, our allies and your partners.”⁹⁸⁹ Gorbachev even went so far as to call Britain the “third force” in the achievement of the INF treaty. Later, Chernyaev would observe that the negotiations that produced the INF agreement followed “the Thatcher route.”⁹⁹⁰ Gorbachev’s visit to London, his comments, and the comments of the American and Soviet press highlight the central role played by the British Prime Minister in the international diplomacy that produced the INF Treaty.

At the Washington summit on December 8, Gorbachev and Reagan signed the INF Treaty.⁹⁹¹ It was the first agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce the existing arsenals of the two sides, eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons, and utilize comprehensive on-site inspections for verification. At the treaty’s signing, Gorbachev declared, “May December 8, 1987 become a date that will be inscribed in the history books, a date that will mark the watershed separating the era of mounting risk of nuclear war from the era of a demilitarization of human life.”⁹⁹²

New Thinking and the Human Factor

At a Politburo meeting shortly after the Washington summit, Gorbachev spoke to the importance of “the human factor in international politics.” In the past, Soviet leaders had treated meetings with foreign leaders as “simply meetings of representatives of opposed and irreconcilable systems.” It was a revelation to him, Gorbachev confessed, “that politicians...represent purely human concerns, interests,

⁹⁸⁹ *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, December 13, 1987.

⁹⁹⁰ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 103.

⁹⁹¹ On May 27, 1988 the US Senate ratified the treaty.

⁹⁹² Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1010.

and the hopes of ordinary people.” Even the politicians of places like the United States and Great Britain, were “guided by the most natural human motives and feelings” and these considerations “had the biggest impact on political decisions.” Now the Soviet Union, Gorbachev affirmed, has “embraced the purely human factor in international politics. It is also a major component of new thinking.”⁹⁹³

In the end, Reagan and his advisors believed that Reagan’s strategy of “peace through strength” had prevailed. Overwhelming American strength, they concluded, had forced Gorbachev to make the concessions that led to the INF Treaty. The irony of these arguments is that Gorbachev’s biggest concessions—de-linking SDI from INF, sacrificing his 9-1 advantage in SRINF, agreeing to intensive verifications, and giving up his SS-20s in Asia—all happened not when Reagan was at his strongest, but when he was at his weakest—during the most intense period of the Iran-Contra affair. In the end, “peace through strength” did not produce the INF Treaty. The treaty was made possible when a new Soviet leader decided to reject the entire paradigm related to “nuclear equality,” and, bolstered by his personal contacts with Western leaders, to make numerous unilateral concessions in order to eliminate an entire category of nuclear weapons.

⁹⁹³ Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 142-143.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation presents the most comprehensive analysis of the INF Treaty to date. Drawing upon a large body of recently-available American, Soviet, and European primary sources, it sheds new light on the Soviet understanding of nuclear equality from 1969-1986, the secret Kissinger-Dobrynin back channel negotiations from 1969-1974, the logic behind the Soviet decision to begin deploying its SS-20 missiles in 1976, the reasons why NATO had such difficulty formulating a unified response to these new Soviet missiles at the start of Jimmy Carter's presidency in 1977, Carter's bungling of the neutron bomb affair in 1978, the fragility of the NATO dual-track decision in 1979, Margaret Thatcher's role in the deployment of American missiles in Europe in 1983, the paradox at the heart of Ronald Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union, the Soviet reaction to Reagan from 1981-1984, and the importance of new ideas and personal relationships in Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to abandon the pursuit of nuclear equality and make numerous concessions to the United States in order to achieve the INF Treaty in 1987. These new insights provide the basis for a compelling narrative of the nuclear arms race in Europe and the history of the INF Treaty from 1969-1988.

American negotiators entered the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in 1969 with the expectation that the talks would focus on intercontinental nuclear weapons. This expectation was based on a traditional definition of "strategic" nuclear arms—weapons located in the USA and able to reach the USSR or located in the USSR and able to reach the USA. Based on this traditional definition, US negotiators argued that the goal of the *Strategic Arms Limitation Talks* should be to produce a treaty that gave both sides an equal number of *strategic* (i.e.

intercontinental) weapons. They used the word *parity* to describe a situation in which both sides would possess an equal number of intercontinental systems and asserted that the primary aim of the talks should be to produce parity. Soviet negotiators, however, entered the talks with a novel definition of strategic weapons and argued that a different principle should govern the talks—the principle of “equal security.” They asserted that all nuclear weapons that were able to strike the homeland of either the US or USSR should be defined as strategic weapons, regardless of where these weapons were located or how the country who owned these weapons labeled them. Based on this view, they argued that American “forward-based systems”—short-range nuclear weapons carried by American aircraft that were stationed at bases in Europe or on aircraft carriers in the Atlantic Ocean—should be viewed as strategic weapons. Because of their geographic location, the Soviets argued, these forward-based weapons were able to reach the USSR. Consequently, they should be defined as strategic weapons. Moreover, the Soviets also claimed that similar weapons owned by America’s allies, namely Britain and France, should also be counted as part of America’s strategic nuclear arsenal and included in the talks between the US and USSR. Only by considering all nuclear weapons capable of reaching the US or USSR, Soviet negotiators argued, could the two sides reach a treaty that assured “equal security” for both sides.

From the Soviet perspective, a treaty that produced “parity” would result in a situation in which the United States had a strategic advantage over the Soviets, because the idea of parity did not take into consideration American and Allied weapons located in Europe that could reach the USSR. On these grounds, they

rejected the principle of parity and called for a treaty based on equal security. From the American perspective, however, a treaty based on “equal security” would give the Soviet Union a strategic advantage because the Soviets sought to label non-strategic weapons as strategic and to count weapons owned by third parties (Britain and France) as part of the American arsenal. On these grounds, the US rejected the principle of equal security with its expansive definition of strategic weapons and called for a treaty based on the principle of parity.

American and Soviet negotiators quickly discovered that it would be impossible to negotiate a treaty that would be acceptable to both sides unless one of the two countries abandoned their understanding of nuclear equality. Neither side was willing to do this, so the talks became completely deadlocked.

While the official SALT negotiations in Helsinki and Vienna were stalemated, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s National Security Advisor, began secret negotiations with the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin. The US Secretary of State and the entire American SALT delegation had no idea that this was happening. They also did not know that while Nixon gave them very narrow instructions that gave them no leeway in the official negotiations, he gave Kissinger the freedom to do whatever he saw fit in order to make a deal. Nixon desperately wanted a high profile summit with the Soviet leadership and an arms control treaty that would score him political points. He also wanted to be absolutely certain that he would receive all the credit for this agreement. With Nixon’s blessing and the freedom to do whatever was necessary to secure an agreement, Kissinger made numerous concessions to the Soviets in his secret negotiations with Dobrynin. Most

importantly, from the Soviet perspective, he seemed to agree to the Soviet principle of equal security. He told Brezhnev directly that the United States would compensate the Soviet Union for American geographic advantage by giving them more intercontinental ballistic missiles than the United States.

The Soviets were elated by the 1971 Interim Agreement that they had negotiated with Kissinger through the confidential Kissinger-Dobrynin channel. They had developed a strategy to take advantage of Nixon's desire for a quick political victory, and they fully believed that their strategy had worked and that Nixon and Kissinger had accepted their definition of nuclear equality. As a result, they were quite surprised and disappointed when the US Senate, led by Senator Scoop Jackson, attacked the treaty. Jackson could not understand why the United States would agree to a treaty that failed to achieve parity between the US and USSR. He willing to accept the SALT I interim agreement as a temporary arrangement, but he led the Senate to attach an amendment to it that stated that all future agreements with the Soviet Union must be based on parity—equal numbers of intercontinental nuclear systems for both sides. To everyone's amazement, especially to Soviet officials, Nixon then supported the Jackson amendment and criticized the very agreement that they themselves had negotiated. Nixon and Kissinger never really liked the agreement that they had negotiated with the Soviet Union, but they knew that it would score them some political points and that it would be only temporary. Thus, after negotiating a temporary agreement that conformed with the Soviet view of nuclear equality, he set out to negotiate a new permanent treaty based on the American notion of parity. His strategy for achieving this was to use Jackson's

staunch opposition to the Interim Agreement to educate Brezhnev about the limiting realities of American domestic politics. This message was reinforced when even Nixon himself fell victim to American politics, and, to the disbelief of the Soviet leadership, was forced out of office. When Gerald Ford became president in 1974, he was able to finalize the terms of a possible arms control agreement with Brezhnev at a mini-summit in Vladivostok that would give both the United States and the Soviet Union equal numbers of intercontinental nuclear weapons. This was an extremely difficult step for Brezhnev to take, and he had to spill political blood in the Politburo to secure consensus among the Soviet leadership for it.

After taking the difficult step at Vladivostok to accept an agreement based on equal numbers, the Soviet leadership was shocked when the Vladivostok was also attacked in the United States, and the main critic was, once again, Senator Jackson. Jackson argued that the Vladivostok agreement failed to include a new Soviet jet called the Backfire bomber. He argued that this was a strategic weapon that could drop nuclear bombs over the United States. Jackson also argued that a future SALT treaty should not include new American cruise missiles—low-flying missiles that could skim along tree tops, through valleys, and over mountains and then destroy targets with uncanny accuracy. Thus, Jackson and his supporters opposed the Vladivostok agreement because they said that it did not include enough Soviet weapons and included too many American weapons. Soviet leaders were aghast at these arguments. They passionately insisted that the Backfire bomber was designed for use in Europe and that the United States was exaggerating its potential range. It could not reach the United States, and was not, therefore, a strategic weapon. Soviet

officials also insisted that since cruise missiles were clearly capable of reaching the Soviet Union, they had to be counted as strategic weapons against American strategic totals. It would be insane to allow this new category of weapon to go entirely unconstrained in a treaty meant to cover all strategic weapons. As the negotiations dragged on, Soviet leaders started to become convinced that American domestic politics would never allow the United States and the Soviet Union to negotiate an equitable agreement. Even when they had agreed to a treaty that would leave out American forward-based systems—which they viewed as strategic weapons—the United States still would not accept it. In the meantime, Soviet medium-range missiles that were targeted at Europe were obsolescing, and the United States was upgrading its forward-bases system. Against this backdrop, the Soviet Union felt entirely justified in deploying new SS-20 missiles in 1976 and then targeting these missiles on Europe. They had been trying to find a way to achieve equal security through arms control negotiations with the United States for seven years. Having failed, they decided to achieve it through deploying new weapons. They argued that these new missiles would create nuclear equality in Europe between the Soviet Union and NATO.

The new Soviet SS-20 missiles were highly accurate, mobile, and each carried three independently-targeted nuclear warheads. The range of these missiles allowed them to cover targets across the entire European continent. Many in Europe reacted to this new threat with horror, accusing the Soviet Union of destroying détente and upsetting the nuclear balance between East and West. They called upon the United States to respond. They were shocked, however, when neither President

Ford nor President Carter seemed concerned about the new Soviet missiles. Both American presidents believed, in keeping with the American view of strategic parity, that the state of the nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union was determined by intercontinental nuclear systems, not by missiles in the European theater. In keeping with this view, Carter main objective related to nuclear weapons was to sign a treaty with the Soviet Union that made major cuts to both sides intercontinental nuclear systems. Theater nuclear forces, as Carter called nuclear weapons in Europe, were barely on Carter's radar at all.

Some Europeans began asking the United States to deploy cruise missiles in Europe as a response to the SS-20, but Carter had no interest in doing so. However, these requests did not go away, and when Carter found himself faced with a growing controversy over the neutron bomb, he decided to try to solve two problems—the SS-20 and the neutron bomb—with one solution: he would tell the Soviets that he would forgo deploying the neutron bomb if they removed their SS-20 missiles. For most European officials, the plan simply did not make sense. The SS-20 was an intermediate-range missile that could cover all of Europe, but the neutron bomb was a warhead that would be installed on battlefield artillery systems. Why would the Soviet Union want to trade the two? But Carter persisted with his plan, and eventually some European leaders concluded that they should support him, figuring that they should go along with the Americans when they showed an interest in European security. At the last minute, however, after Helmut Schmidt and others had gone on record as supporting Carter's scheme, Carter pulled the plug and announced that he would indefinitely delay making a decision on the neutron bomb.

In the aftermath of the neutron bomb fiasco, Carter's advisors warned him that the alliance had been shaken, and that NATO needed decisive American leadership in response to European perceptions. Carter still did not believe that the SS-20 posed a qualitatively new threat to Europe, but he decided to go ahead and support the deployment of American cruise missiles in Europe. He made this decision to a large extent because he believed that West German political realities demanded it. He found it particularly irksome, therefore, when Schmidt then introduced qualifications that would have to be met before the FRG would allow any cruise missiles to be deployed on German territory.

While Schmidt wavered over supporting cruise missile deployment, Margaret Thatcher offered Great Britain's unequivocal support. By showing a united front, the US and the UK were eventually able to win the FRG's support, and then the three countries rallied the smaller European NATO members in 1979 to support unanimously a dual-track strategy of diplomacy followed by deployment.

NATO's public show of unanimity masked deep tensions in the alliance. These tensions were then exacerbated by Carter's management of two new challenges at the end of 1979—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran hostage crisis. By the end of Carter's presidency, it seemed highly unlikely that he would have been able to hold the alliance together to see the dual-track decision through to fruition.

Of course, Carter never had the chance to prove that supposition incorrect. When Ronald Reagan overwhelmingly defeated Carter in the presidential election of 1980, it fell to Reagan to lead the alliance to carry out the dual-track decision. He

succeeded in doing this, but he did not do it alone. The exceptionally close relationship between Thatcher and Reagan played a critical role in the implementation of the NATO dual-track strategy, and, particularly, in the successful deployment of American missiles in Europe at the end of 1983. When Reagan officials divided over whether to pursue negotiations with the Soviets or whether deploying new American missiles in Europe was truly warranted, Thatcher visited Reagan in Washington and helped convince him to do both. In the face of a massive, international propaganda campaign against possible deployment of American missiles in Europe, Thatcher urged Reagan to seriously pursue arms control negotiations and to make a bold disarmament proposal. Later when some leaders in Europe seemed to be vacillating about deploying American missiles, she orchestrated a strong display of alliance security by convincing European leaders to issue a security statement in favor of deployment after an economic summit. In 1983 she became the first European leader to receive American missiles, having overcome a large protest movement in the UK.

When American missiles began arriving in Europe at the end of 1983, the Soviets walked out of the arms control talks in Geneva. This decision was the culmination of three of the worst years in US-Soviet relations. During Reagan's first three years in office, he pursued a variety of policies designed to increase America's military might and assert America's influence internationally. Reagan revived the B-1 bomber program, authorized production of a new MX missile, and put plans in motion to rebuild the Navy. He began sending aid to anti-communist movements around the world, and he authorized an elaborate program of CIA-directed

psychological operations against the Soviet Union. He also frequently gave speeches, attacking the Soviet Union, describing it as a source of evil, and predicting its demise.

The paradox of the Reagan presidency is that while he was implementing all these aggressive, militaristic policies, he was also calling for peace and looking for ways to eliminate nuclear weapons. Reagan seemed to truly want peace and to genuinely believe that peace could and would be achieved through strength. For Reagan, pursuing “peace through strength” took the form of a religious calling, and he believed that it was his destiny to eliminate the threat of nuclear war.

The problem with Reagan’s “peace through strength” strategy is that by the end of his first term in office it was not leading to peace but to conflict. This is due in large part to the fact that the Soviet leadership became convinced that Reagan was preparing for war and might actually launch a nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union. They worried about this so much that the KGB launched a gigantic intelligence operation in the United States and Europe to try to detect any preparations by the United States or NATO for a nuclear attack. In 1983 Reagan’s aggressive policies and Soviet paranoia came to a head when multiple events built upon each other to raise tensions to a new high.

At the end of 1983 Reagan learned through multiple intelligence sources about Soviet fears. The realization that Soviet leaders viewed him as a warmonger and aggressor deeply bothered the president, and he began to modify his public rhetoric and look for an opportunity to hold a one-on-one meeting with a Soviet leader. The problem was that Reagan did not modify any of his actual policies, and

Soviet leaders did not believe that the president who prepared so furiously for war could possibly want peace. By the end of Reagan's first term, his peace through strength strategy seemed to be leading the world closer and closer to war.

As tensions mounted, the Soviet military shot a Korean airliner filled with civilians out of the sky, claiming that it was on a spy mission over Soviet air space. This event convinced Margaret Thatcher that she needed to do something to reduce the escalating tensions between East and West. After a seminar of British experts on the Soviet Union, she decided to invite some of the senior members of the Politburo to London. The Soviet official who accepted her invitation was Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's visit to London and the relationship that he developed with Thatcher would be of great importance for the transformation in East-West relations that would happen just a few years later.

When Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985, he began to look for ways to eliminate tensions with the West and to reduce the threat of nuclear war so that he could rebuild Socialism in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was willing to think differently about the Cold War, but he did not enter office with a clearly defined plan. His ideas gradually evolved, and this evolution did transpire in a vacuum. Gorbachev's new ideas needed to be cultivated and strengthened. Gorbachev needed confidence that his unilateral concessions would not backfire on him and lead to a situation in which his country could be strengthened. The confidence that this would not happen, which in turn produced the confidence necessary to make unilateral concessions, came from Gorbachev's personal encounters with Western leaders, including Reagan, Thatcher, and Francois Mitterrand of France. Gorbachev's

relationship with Thatcher played a particularly important role in strengthening Gorbachev's willingness to make bold experiments in his relations with the West. Thatcher also was an excellent mediator between Reagan and Gorbachev, especially when Reagan became severely weakened politically during the Iran Contra affair.

One of Gorbachev's greatest experiments took place in the arena of nuclear arms negotiations. Since the start of nuclear arms negotiations between the United States and in the Soviet Union in 1969, both countries had fought for their own definition of nuclear equality. Gorbachev, however, eventually became convinced that the quest for nuclear equality—however that equality might be defined—was a trap. The nuclear arms race had led caused both sides to amass gigantic arsenals of nuclear weapons, and the staggering volume of these arsenals far exceeded the legitimate security needs of either side. In fact, he concluded, rather than making both sides equally safe, the oversized nuclear stockpiles of both sides had made both countries equally in danger. Based on this new way of thinking about nuclear weapons, which was strengthened after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, Gorbachev developed a new paradigm for Soviet security. Instead of seeking nuclear parity or equal security, Gorbachev decided that the Soviet Union would seek "reasonable sufficiency." This meant that instead of increasing its nuclear arsenal to match the West, it would reduce its armaments down to the lowest possible level. Instead of trying to have an equal number—matching the other side bomb for bomb—it would have the lowest possible number that would still provide a reasonably sufficient amount of security. This new way of thinking allowed Gorbachev to make concession after concession in the arms negotiations with the

Reagan administration, and these concessions eventually led to the signing of the INF Treaty in 1987.

The INF Treaty was truly an historic achievement. After an arms race that kept the world under the cloud of looming nuclear holocaust for almost four decades, the Cold War antagonists finally agreed to begin destroying some of their nuclear weapons. By June 1, 1991, the treaty's implementation deadline, the two countries had destroyed 2,692 intermediate-range missiles.⁹⁹⁴

⁹⁹⁴ Tom Collina, "The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance" (Washington: The Arms Control Association, 2008), <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty> (accessed March 2, 2014).

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