

MOSCOW ON THE POTOMAC: THE SOVIET EMBASSY AND DÉTENTE, 1969-1979

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ABSTRACT

MICHAEL V. PAULAUSKAS: *Moscow on the Potomac: The Soviet Embassy and Détente, 1969-1979*
(Under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

This dissertation examines the role of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., in conducting superpower diplomacy during détente, the period from 1969 to 1979 when the superpowers attempted to normalize the Cold War. This work revolves around four major themes. First, it explores the critical role played by Soviet diplomats on the ground in determining the nature of Soviet-American relations. Second, it analyzes the relationships of key diplomats, arguing that personal diplomacy bolstered détente in its initial years, but ultimately could not guarantee the long-term improvement of Soviet-American relations. Third, it complicates current understandings of Soviet foreign policy in this period, as it functioned not simply as an expression of the Kremlin's will, but as a complex bureaucratic process that frequently wreaked havoc on negotiations. In this sense, détente was not a monolithic policy undertaken by the Soviet government with a singular goal in mind, but rather a process negotiated by Soviet officials with different understandings of Soviet aims and strategies. Finally, by considering the expansion of cultural exchanges and trade negotiations during this period, it demonstrates the vital role played by economic and cultural interests in setting the parameters of détente.

The first part of this dissertation focuses on the role played by Anatoly Dobrynin, who served as Soviet ambassador to the US from 1962 to 1986. It begins with a brief biography of Dobrynin and a study of the methods of diplomacy that made him an effective

operator in Washington. In particular, it outlines the “Dobrynin school” of diplomacy, assessing the atmosphere promoted by Dobrynin at the embassy and his influence over a generation of young Soviet diplomats. Next, the dissertation explains the rise and fall of the backchannel, the site of secret negotiations for improved Soviet-American relations, and it describes the personal diplomacy established by Dobrynin and American National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. The second part of the dissertation serves as a case study of the embassy’s Cultural Department, showing how lower-level diplomats promoted the image of the USSR as a dependable great power with whom the US should develop friendlier ties.

For Linda

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INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 1913, *The New York Times* announced that the Russian government had purchased a large house on Sixteenth Street in Washington, D.C., after several years of trying. The mansion, described as “one of the finest in Washington,” was located in the “best resident district,” not on the outskirts of town, like the spots for the proposed French and German embassies. The widow of George M. Pullman, the sleeping car baron, had built the home two years earlier for entertaining, but had never occupied it, and the Russian government made an early bid to purchase the grand building for its embassy, offering \$350,000. When the Russian government refused to pay for the furnishings in the home, Mrs. Pullman demurred, instead selling it to her friend, Mrs. John Hays Hammond. As luck would have it, the Russian government finally won the prized mansion for its new embassy after Mrs. Hammond decided to leave Washington and sold her home to the Russian state for \$375,000.¹

Under the tenure of Russian Ambassador Georgii Bakhmetev, who occupied the embassy at the end of the year, the building quickly gained a reputation as one of the most opulent in the capital, throwing lavish parties for the top guests in the Washington social scene. One reviewer called it “the finest and largest” embassy in Washington, with “first-class” furnishings and a prime location on Washington’s broadest residential avenue, in a direct line to the White House. Upon arrival, a “Cossack footman in native dress” opens the front door, and any visitor “at once feels transported miles and years away from the newest

¹ "New Embassy for Russia," *New York Times*, November 5, 1913.

of all the great capitals, and entirely at home in this picturesque and hospitable palace.” A grand staircase in the back of the hall led to the second floor salon, where, during formal events, Madame Bakhmetev, a member of a prominent American family, stood under a “superb crystal chandelier” to greet the guests. The first drawing room, which stretched across the front of the building, featured old Italian furnishings and a grand piano decorated with autographed photographs of the Russian imperial family. A second drawing room, with antique Italian gold-framed furniture, held three portraits by famous artists, Madame Bakhmetev’s collections of crystals, jade and Tanagra figures, and books and magazines from around the globe. The dining room, which seated eighty guests, featured a silver plate, renowned in all of the capitals in which the Bakhmetevs served, as well as three separate collections of silver, “each worthy of a place in a museum,” and antique Russian, French, and Caucasian cups. A painting of Nicholas II on horseback, “one of the best portraits of his Majesty in existence,” provided the only decoration for the oak-paneled walls. A large living room, with a life-sized portrait of the tsar in Hussar uniform, also featured a series of paintings displaying different aspects of an ambassador’s reception at the court of Louis XV. The style here was entirely Russian, including the ambassador’s impressive arms and armor collection and the table where the ambassador’s uncle, the poet and essayist Count Aleksei Tolstoy, wrote most of his major works. All of the décor featured a personal touch, down to the hand-carved lifelike birds that adorned the white picture rail in Madame Bakhmetev’s sitting room, and it all received a rave review from the reporter touring the premises.²

² "Russian Women's Part in the War," *New York Times*, April 11, 1915. Madame Bakhmetev was one of the “Beale girls,” three socialite sisters who also included the wives of John R. McLean and Admiral George Dewey. "Soviet Envoy Host at Brilliant Fete," *New York Times*, April 11, 1934.

After the 1917 February Revolution, which resulted in the tsar's abdication and the rise of the Provisional Government, the Russian ambassador fled to France with many of the embassy's valuables, and he was replaced in June by Boris Bakhmetev, who had no relation to the previous ambassador. When the October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power a few months later, most of the embassy staff resigned, volunteering for service in the American army or government. Bakhmetev did not recognize the legitimacy of the Bolsheviks, and he remained at his post in Washington as an "ambassador without a country" until 1922, when he finally settled the embassy's debts with American citizens using the Russian government's liquidated assets in the US.³ Bakhmetev became an American citizen and a professor of civil engineering at Columbia University, and he left the property in the care of Serge Ughet, financial attaché at the embassy.⁴ By the early 1930s, the embassy had not been occupied for a decade, the majority of its records collecting dust in a New York City warehouse.⁵

After the American government recognized the USSR in 1933, work began to restore the embassy to its former glory. The American government officially broke ties with all remaining representatives of the tsarist and Provisional Governments, including Ughet, who removed his personal files from the 800 to 900 boxes of state documents that he eventually turned over to the Soviet government.⁶ New York University Professor of Interior

³ "Bakhmeteff stays; disowns Bolsheviks," *New York Times*, November 25, 1917; and "Bakhmeteff Gives Notice to Hughes of His Retirement," *New York Times*, June 5, 1922.

⁴ "Bakhmeteff Leaves with Many Honors," *New York Times*, June 20, 1922; and "Boris Bakhmeteff of Columbia Dead," *New York Times*, July 22, 1951.

⁵ "Russian Embassy Being Put In Order," *New York Times*, July 16, 1933; and "Litvinoff Views Embassy," *New York Times*, November 18, 1933.

⁶ "Russian Embassy Being Put In Order."; and "All Ties Broken with Old Russia," *New York Times*, November 18, 1933.

Architect Eugene Schoen was tapped to renovate and repair the building.⁷ Thankfully, Schoen found the building in “surprisingly good shape,” with the oak paneling in the dining room in “perfect condition” and the original decoration preserved. The Soviet government sent artwork, furniture, and rugs from Moscow museums, including several Bashir Bokhara antique rugs and a large bust of Lenin.⁸ Aleksandr Troianovskii, a veteran revolutionary who had previously served as ambassador to Japan and the vice-chairman of the State Planning Committee, assumed the ambassador’s post in November, and took control of the embassy in April.⁹

Once in place, Troianovskii resumed his predecessor’s tradition of lavish parties and courting of the Washington elite. Regarding the embassy’s first reception after Troianovskii’s arrival, *The New York Times* gushed that it was “as brilliant as any ever held there by the late George Bakhmeteff.” The reporter carefully detailed Mrs. Troiankovskii’s pale salmon pink gown and jewelry, and called the salon “the largest and most stately of all the state apartments.” The 500 guests, including top members of President Franklin Roosevelt’s cabinet, enjoyed a dinner service that came on china presented to the Russian government by Louis XV, and kitchen facilities featuring “the excellence and abundance of the offerings of the most elaborate kitchen in any official household in the capital.” The food, according to this report, even exceeded that available at the White House, and the décor placed the “richest art of old Russia” next to works by modern Russian artists. The only change noted came in the room where Bakhmetev kept his antique armories, which had been

⁷ "To Repair Soviet Embassy," *New York Times*, November 30, 1933.

⁸ "Embassy Occupied by Troyanovsky," *New York Times*, April 7, 1934; and "Red Flags in Washington," *New York Times*, January 12, 1934.

⁹ "Troyanovsky to be Envoy of Soviet; Skvirsky His Aide," *New York Times*, November 20, 1933.

replaced by Troianovskii's office.¹⁰ Future ambassadors and their spouses repeated these grand "housewarmings," including the Litvinovs, who in 1942 gave a party with sturgeon, duck, turkey, salads, frosted cakes, and a variety of expensive beverages.¹¹

From 1933 to 1962, a range of ambassadors served in Washington, with various levels of success. Konstantin Umanskii, previously the chargé d'affaires under Troianovskii, took the reigns at the embassy from 1939 to 1941, angering many American officials. In one highly criticized incident, Umanskii took a State Department official to a restaurant outside of Washington two weeks after the start of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, pressuring him to recognize the Soviet Union's annexation of the Baltic States. This blunder raised American suspicions about Soviet intentions in a period when a more delicate touch was needed to promote Soviet-American reconciliation.¹² In contrast, Maksim Litvinov, who had served as the people's commissar of foreign affairs before leading the embassy from 1941 to 1943, enjoyed a fair amount of popularity in the US. As a revolutionary before 1917, he traveled widely and married an English woman. He eventually lost his position as foreign commissar when General Secretary Joseph Stalin pursued a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany. Litvinov's Jewish identity and pursuit of closer ties to Great Britain, France, and the US stood at odds with the Stalinist regime's new foreign policy goals. When he was brought back into the fold to improve relations with the allies during World War II, his long

¹⁰ "Soviet Envoy Host at Brilliant Fete."

¹¹ "Sidelights of the Week," *The New York Times*, February 15 1942.

¹² Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 26.

history of favoring Soviet-American cooperation to counter Nazism provided him with the highest profile of any Soviet diplomat serving in the West.¹³

Litvinov's subsequent replacements hardly inspired American confidence in Soviet diplomacy. When future Foreign Minister Andrei Andreevich Gromyko took over the embassy from 1943 to 1946, an American analyst described him as "slow-witted and unimaginative" and unqualified to run the embassy.¹⁴ Georgii Zarubin, in Washington from 1952 to 1958, may have been a capable administrator, but he had a "strict and stern appearance of a typical representative of 'Stalin's school'" and his inability to speak English understandably frustrated American officials.¹⁵ Overall, most of the Soviet ambassadors to the US in this period had certain liabilities that prevented them from making a significant impact on Soviet-American relations, especially after the eruption of the Cold War placed the superpowers in a period of entrenched conflict.

This dissertation picks up the story of the embassy to examine the work of the most effective Soviet ambassador to the US, Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin, during détente, the period from 1969 to 1979, when diplomats on both sides of the Iron Curtain attempted to normalize the Cold War and lessen international tensions. Détente represented the most important era in the history of the embassy, as Dobrynin helped to mold it into the central hub for Soviet-American relations. Soviet embassy diplomats and American officials negotiated strategic arms settlements, trade deals, and expanded cultural ties, generating relationships with American diplomats and new ideas about international affairs that proved

¹³ Steven Merritt Miner, "Soviet Ambassadors from Maiskii to Dobrynin," in *The Diplomats: 1939-1979*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 618-19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 619.

¹⁵ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)* (New York: Time Books, 1995), 26-27.

critical to shaping General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's policies and the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ Détente fundamentally altered the nature of postwar international relations, signaling the first sustained period of successful superpower negotiations. Yet, until now, there has been no comprehensive study of the subject from the Soviet perspective, nor any detailed examination of the work performed by the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

Historiography on Détente and Soviet Foreign Policy

The majority of scholars of détente privilege the American viewpoint, examining Soviet efforts as a foil to American policy.¹⁷ Cold War-era scholars who studied Soviet policy—including Adam Ulam, Robin Edmonds, and Harry Gelman—claimed that international concerns, such as perceived vulnerabilities or opportunities for dominance in the Third World, led Soviet leaders to pursue a rapprochement with the US. They suggested that inconsistencies in American policies and/or Soviet aggression in Africa and the Middle East eventually brought about the demise of détente.¹⁸ All of these authors wrote without access to archival sources and with the aim of influencing American foreign policy by

¹⁶ This argument is most clearly articulated in 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).

¹⁷ Particularly influential works on détente from an American perspective include: William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007); Raymond L. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Rev. ed. (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1994); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Several recent biographies of Henry Kissinger also contribute to this discussion: Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009); and Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Robin Edmonds, *Soviet Foreign Policy: The Brezhnev Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Harry Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Adam Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

clarifying the attitudes of Soviet leaders. The few recent authors who have used Russian archival sources to explore détente, including Vladislav Zubok and Odd Arne Westad, have continued to focus on top Soviet leaders and their immediate advisors.¹⁹

Most post-1991 research on Cold War-era Soviet foreign policy has focused on the question of how ideology affected Soviet conceptions of international relations. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov provide the most thorough exploration of this subject with their model of a “revolutionary-imperial paradigm,” or the combination of traditional Russian messianic imperialism and Marxist ideology. They argue that ideological concerns influenced each Soviet leader to varying degrees, whether they actively sought to spread communist revolution around the globe or simply believed that socialism, backed by the progressive forces of history, would eventually triumph on the world stage. This focus on ideology, however, coexisted with a desire to defend Russian strategic interests and expand the Russian sphere of influence, themes that extended back well into the tsarist period.²⁰ The majority of Cold War historians have adopted this model in some form, although they disagree about whether ideology or strategic concerns played the dominant role. Like Zubok and Westad, these scholars concentrate on top Soviet leaders and their immediate advisors. As a result, relatively little research has been done on the Soviet foreign policy apparatus, particularly during détente.

¹⁹ Vladislav Zubok, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Odd Arne Westad, ed. *The Fall of Detente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997); I. S. Ivanov, ed. *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Rossii, t. 2, 1917-2002 gg.* (Moscow: Olma Press, 2002); and Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Zubok, *Failed Empire*.

In this dissertation, I contend that while this emphasis on top leaders and the interplay of ideology and strategic thinking has made important contributions to our understanding of Soviet foreign policy during the Brezhnev period, a broader discussion of workings of the Soviet foreign policy apparatus is necessary to fully account for Soviet behavior on the international scene. Western historians during the Cold War discussed the issue of factionalism in the Brezhnev-era Soviet bureaucracy, but generally broke it down to binary categories, such as “hawks” and “doves” or “traditionalists” and “realists.”²¹ To lend additional nuance to this picture, I outline six major rifts in the foreign policy structures that developed in this period. These include fissures between individual Politburo members, between different bureaucracies, between different groups within individual ministries, between the Kremlin leadership and the rest of the country, between Moscow and diplomats on the ground, and between embassy officials. This approach creates a more nuanced portrait of Soviet foreign policy during détente, as it functioned as a complex administrative process, with various entities pursuing different and sometimes contradictory objectives, rather than the more unified picture implied by studies that only consider General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and the Politburo.

The first rift in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus existed within the Politburo itself. Thanks to details emerging in memoir literature, recent historians, including Zubok, have given this issue appropriate attention. He describes how, in response to the North Vietnamese offensive in the spring of 1972, President Richard M. Nixon resumed the

²¹ For pertinent examples of this approach to the Soviet foreign policy bureaucracy during the Brezhnev period, see: Morton Schwartz, *Soviet Perceptions of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 164; and John Lenczowski, *Soviet Perceptions of US Foreign Policy: A Study of Ideology, Power, and Consensus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982). Determining which Politburo members had the most influence over foreign policy was also a common trend in the historiography of this period. Examples include: Edmonds, *Soviet Foreign Policy: The Brezhnev Years*; and Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente*.

bombing of North Vietnam in April, leading to the accidental destruction of four Soviet merchant ships. This ushered in an intense debate in the Politburo about whether or not the Soviet leadership should go forward with the Moscow Summit in May, where Nixon and Brezhnev eventually concluded the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty, or SALT I. Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Nikolai Podgorny, Ukrainian Party leader Petro Shelest, and Defense Minister Andrei Grechko all opposed inviting Nixon to Moscow, while Mikhail Suslov, the Party's chief ideological expert, remained silent on the issue. However, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Alexei Kosygin and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's support for the summit allowed Brezhnev to build a consensus among Party leaders to move forward with the meeting and détente more broadly.²² This account, drawn from memoirs and diaries, reflects a longstanding divide in the Party leadership over the issue of détente that can be corroborated through other sources. For example, transcripts of the May 1972 Party Plenum reveal Brezhnev's anxious desire to explain and gain support for détente from the broader Party apparatus at this event.²³

The second rift prevailed between the different bureaucracies in Moscow. Russian and American historians and former top policymakers highlighted this divide at the Brezhnev-Carter Project conferences in the mid-1990s, when they met to discuss the collapse of détente. Several prominent American "veterans," including former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, argued that détente entered a decline when the Soviet government pursued aggressive campaigns to spread communism in the Third World, particularly in Angola and Ethiopia. Brzezinski and others emphasized that, at the time, they

²² Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 217-22.

²³ The transcript of the Plenum can be found in Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI), f. 2, op. 3, d. 272.

felt that Soviet participation in these revolutionary conflicts undermined top-level talks to further improve superpower relations and to pursue a second SALT accord. In response, Dobrynin and other Soviet officials countered that improving relations with the US always took priority over these African campaigns. This argument failed to persuade Brzezinski, who asked why the Soviet government invested so much energy in their pursuit if it had such little importance.²⁴ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bessmertnykh, who served as an assistant to Gromyko and as an officer at the Soviet Embassy during this period, accounted for this apparent contradiction through divisions in the bureaucracy. When asked if Gromyko had been briefed on Soviet involvement in African conflicts, Bessmertnykh joked about the foreign minister's ignorance of the topic. One time, he noted, Gromyko and the deputy foreign minister for Africa were reading a cable that mentioned Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Neither Gromyko nor his own deputy knew where Lusaka was located, although the deputy suggested it might be in Africa. Bessmertnykh laughed that this anecdote demonstrated Gromyko's general lack of interest in African affairs.²⁵

In other words, whereas some branches of the foreign policy bureaucracy, such as the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, focused their efforts on supporting revolutionary movements in the Third World, officials in the Foreign Ministry mostly concerned themselves with great power diplomacy, specifically with the US, Western Europe, China, India, and Japan. Foreign Ministry officials never assigned as much significance to these African gambits as their colleagues in the International Department, and

²⁴ "SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust." Conference at Musgrove Plantation, Simons Island, GA, May 6-9, 1994. Transcripts available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

²⁵ "The Collapse of Détente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan." Conference in Pocantico Hills, NY, October 22-24, 1992. Transcript available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

they never believed that supporting revolutionaries in Africa took precedence over relations with the US. At the time, they did not comprehend the weight that Brzezinski and other American officials assigned to Soviet maneuvers in Africa, leading to surprise at the backlash they received from American officials. As Dobrynin argued at the conference, there was an assumed harmony between the Foreign Ministry and the International Department only because the two institutions did not communicate with one another. Since the Soviet bureaucracy lacked lateral clearances, meaning that Foreign Ministry and International Department officials at the same level did not read each other's reports or forge a common policy, representatives in each bureaucracy frequently did not have a grasp on what decisions were being made in the other. This meant that they could not anticipate or discuss how the initiatives of one bureaucracy would impact the other.²⁶ Thus, officials in various Soviet bureaucracies had different understandings of their responsibilities, and this allowed different and sometimes contradictory conceptions of what détente entailed. Similar divides existed between the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Culture, and other bureaucracies that had a role in negotiating détente with the US. Stronger leadership at the top may have softened these differences, but the collective leadership model under Brezhnev gave latitude to key bureaucrats to shape their own policies, a standard that only increased as Brezhnev's health steadily declined.

The third rift in the Soviet foreign policy bureaucracy came from within the various ministries themselves. Former Soviet diplomat Victor Israelyan has examined this issue in the context of the Foreign Ministry. First, he identifies a generational difference between the "Stalinists" and the "pragmatists." The Stalinists were the diplomats who came into the

²⁶ Ibid.

Foreign Ministry under Molotov during the 1930s and early 1940s. Typically Party functionaries, they did not speak foreign languages and had not traveled abroad. Israelyan describes this generation as “diligent, obedient, persistent,” “fanatically devoted” to communist ideology, and firmly convinced that the Western capitalist regimes would soon fall to revolution.²⁷ In contrast, Dobrynin represented a new generation of “pragmatists” who began to take many of the critical positions in the Foreign Ministry in the 1960s and 1970s. Generally well-educated with extensive experience working overseas, they retained their predecessors’ belief in communism, but doubted the Soviet Union’s ability to bring communism to advanced capitalist countries and gave priority to national security concerns over ideological struggles. They also sought to create mutually beneficial relationships with capitalist countries, playing down the concept of revolutionary struggle with the US and Western Europe.²⁸ By the Gorbachev period, the pragmatists themselves were displaced by a new generation, practitioners of the “new thinking.”²⁹ The largely generational differences regarding the role of ideology in setting foreign policy and the proper approach to dealing with the capitalist world often set diplomats at odds when formulating foreign policy.

²⁷ Victor Israelyan, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War: A Soviet Ambassador's Confession* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 239-41.

²⁹ The fault lines between the pragmatists and the new thinkers remained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his memoirs, Dobrynin wrote of Gorbachev’s foreign policy: “Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had no coherent, balanced, and firm foreign policy to end it in a fitting and dignified way on the basis of equality. As the Cold War had begun to wind down in the second part of the 1980s, this balance of power with the West was widely recognized and could have created a base upon which to transform international relations into a new and nonconfrontational era. With an inexplicable rush, they actually gave away vital geopolitical and military positions which we had, instead of using them to achieve a new era of stability and equal cooperation.” Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 636. Anatolii Cherniaev, a new thinker and one of Gorbachev’s top foreign policy advisors, defended Gorbachev’s policies at the Musgrove Conference in May 1998: “Now you have heard both the positions of the new thinking and the old thinking here. It is precisely the position of old thinking to present national interests as contrary to universal human values. If we had taken the position presented by Dobrynin, it would have meant prolonging the final stage of the Cold War for many more years.” Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989* (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 199-200.

Moreover, Israelyan notes several divisions within the pragmatist generation at the Foreign Ministry, indicating the diversity of opinions about foreign policy priorities in Moscow. Embassy diplomats and their partners at the Foreign Ministry's American Department, many of whom cut their teeth under Dobrynin in Washington, fit in the category of the "Americanists." These officials felt that, given its shared superpower status with the US, the Soviet government should always prioritize American relations when setting policy with other countries. They often complained when operations in the developing world took place without sufficient consideration of how they would affect Soviet-American relations. A second category of pragmatists, the "disarmamentists" shared the Americanists' prioritization of arms limitations in Soviet foreign policy, though Israelyan contends that they often had a "broader outlook on the world" than their Americanist colleagues. Still another group, the "Europeanists," argued that the Foreign Ministry should focus its energies on wooing West European states. They believed that the US would always remain the primary antagonist of the Soviet Union, so stronger ties with its Western European allies could weaken the NATO alliance. An offshoot of the Europeanists, the "Germanists," asserted that relations with the US and Western Europe, as well as arms limitations efforts, entirely depended on the Soviet Union's ability to maintain its superpower status while settling the issue of a divided Germany. Lastly, Israelyan recognizes the Foreign Ministry diplomats who emphasized maintaining relations with the socialist world and who lamented the fact that the Central Committee of the Communist Party handled foreign relations with socialist states rather than the Foreign Ministry. While other blocs existed in the Foreign Ministry, Israelyan stresses these as the most important, each with its own proposal for winning the

Cold War.³⁰ The real divides in the Foreign Ministry highlight the danger inherent in only studying the top Kremlin leadership and not the complex Soviet foreign policy bureaucracy. Divergent understandings of Soviet global priorities led diplomats to differing and sometimes contradictory suggestions for foreign policy initiatives.

The fourth rift in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus took shape between the Moscow leadership and local Party leaders. After Brezhnev explained the goals of the Moscow Summit at the May 1972 Party Plenum, and again following Nixon's visit in May, city and oblast Party committees submitted reports on local reactions from Party officials. Most reports contained overwhelming support for détente and the new steps to limit the arms race. One concluded that establishing a closer relationship with the US would be "the greatest victory of Soviet diplomacy," and another praised "the titanic work" of Brezhnev.³¹ Many, however, demonstrated critical attitudes about negotiating with Nixon, particularly as the US pursued the Vietnam War. One official emphasized that Nixon must be reminded that "the Soviet people will never give up their principles or their ideology. They always will strengthen international friendship and brotherly cooperation with the people, and they will defend their interests to the end."³² Another official stated that, while he whole-heartedly supported the policy of détente, "I don't trust Nixon. Having analyzed his long political journey, his political deviousness and demagoguery, I think that this is nothing more than cozying up to voters in an attempt to gain political support. We need negotiations with Nixon and for peace, but we should be careful with him."³³ Granted, the divide between the

³⁰ Israelyan, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War*, 241-43.

³¹ RGANI, f. 5, op. 64, d. 64, ll. 5-9; f. 5, op. 64, d. 64, ll. 14-19.

³² RGANI, f. 5, op. 64, d. 64, ll. 5-9.

³³ RGANI, f. 5, op. 64, d. 64, ll. 25-27.

Kremlin and local Party officials had the least impact of the rifts in the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus, as these leaders had no direct influence over foreign policy. Yet Moscow remained conscious of the concerns of local leaders, and the Soviet press, led by *Pravda*, began a campaign to depict Nixon as a peacemaker and an ideal negotiating partner.³⁴

The divide between the Moscow leadership and embassy officials opened up the fifth major rift in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus. Dobrynin led the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., from 1962 to 1986. Particularly during détente, Dobrynin served as the face of Soviet diplomacy, conducting the primary negotiations for superpower agreements and managing crises through talks with top American officials. Dobrynin used his affable personality and close connections with Kremlin elites to develop an extensive network of American contacts. In addition, he utilized his ties with prominent Americans in public affairs, culture, business, and the press to build closer Soviet-American relations, and he encouraged other diplomats at the embassy to do the same.

Dobrynin's primary tool for diplomatic negotiations was known as the backchannel.³⁵ Dobrynin himself defines the term as "the methods used by the White House and the Kremlin for the direct exchange of information and views, in strict confidence and outside the normal diplomatic channels that existed in the State Department and our Foreign Ministry." He insists that, while most Americans associate the confidential channel with the Dobrynin-Kissinger discussions of the Nixon administration, the channel itself has a longer history in Soviet-American relations, existing in some form for most of his tenure as ambassador.³⁶

³⁴ Michael V. Paulauskas, "A Personal Affair: Diplomatic Negotiations and the Portrayal of Detente in *Pravda*, 1972-1975" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006).

³⁵ The term "backchannel" remains contested. Other variants include "the Channel," preferred by Kissinger, or "the confidential channel."

³⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 53.

Prior to Dobrynin's time in Washington, the White House and the Kremlin occasionally utilized confidential channels, generally to solve specific problems prior to American recognition of the Soviet Union, when no official channels existed, or during World War II, when Roosevelt preferred to work around the State Department.³⁷ During Dobrynin's tenure at the embassy, however, backchannel diplomacy became a normalized process, as the Soviet ambassador met with top American officials on a regular basis to seek solutions to the problems that faced the superpowers, making it a unique institution that requires specific attention from historians. Arguing in favor of the backchannel, Dobrynin states: "It provided the freedom of personal chemistry," which he views as an essential component of diplomacy, "and made it possible to explore uncharted diplomatic territory, which was often precisely what was needed to break the stalemates that characterized the Cold War."³⁸

Backchannel talks under Dobrynin took on a standard form agreed upon and nurtured by both him and his American negotiators. In practice, the US president appointed one of his deputies, usually Robert Kennedy in the John F. Kennedy administration and Dean Rusk in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, to take charge of negotiations over a particular issue. Dobrynin then met with the designated official periodically to share any statements from the Kremlin or the White House. They gave preliminary responses to these memos and "thought out loud," identifying points of conflict as well as possible avenues of compromise. The secrecy of this step of the process was essential, as any leaks of proposed solutions could turn

³⁷ Richard A. Moss, "Behind the Back Channel: Achieving Detente in US-Soviet Relations, 1969-1972" (Doctoral Dissertation, The George Washington University, 2009), 5-6; Edward M. Bennett, *Recognition of Russia: An American Foreign Policy Dilemma* (Waltham, MA: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1970), 89-126; Kimball, *The Juggler*, 31-37; Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 121-27.

³⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 53.

the American public against the negotiating process, while decreasing the willingness of the injured party to offer compromises. The meetings typically took place informally over lunch or drinks without an interpreter in order to encourage friendly relations and to facilitate the process of thinking out loud. Following each meeting, the American negotiator forwarded a memo of the conversation to the president, while Dobrynin sent the Politburo his notes, composed by memory after the end of the conversation.³⁹ The diplomats waited for further instructions from their home governments before meeting again to repeat the process. Once the framework for a potential solution fell into place, the negotiations shifted to normal diplomatic channels to settle the final details.

Despite Dobrynin's diplomatic skills and connections in both Moscow and Washington, the Kremlin's repeated unwillingness to fully disclose information to him hindered his effectiveness and his ability to negotiate détente. This problem first came to light during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Kremlin chose not to inform Dobrynin of its plans in Cuba, leading Dobrynin to falsely assure American leaders of the defensive nature of

³⁹ Dobrynin's decision not to take notes during meetings, writing his telegrams from memory after the end of the meeting, was quite controversial in Washington. When interviewed for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomat Studies and Training, American Ambassador to the Soviet Union Malcolm Toon stated, "I can't prove that he distorted what he heard or was told, because we don't have access to that sort of information in Moscow. But I do know, on the basis of my many conversations with Gromyko, that he didn't understand some of the finer points involved in the SALT II negotiations, primarily because Dobrynin himself didn't understand." Toon suggested that due to Dobrynin's habit of not taking notes, American diplomats should have never attended meetings with him alone. See "Interview with Malcolm Toon, June 9, 1989," The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004too01>. In his interview for the same project, Helmut Sonnenfeldt expressed similar reservations, stating, "It didn't keep me awake at night, but sometimes I wondered, when I heard Dobrynin talk, just how perfect his comprehension actually was." See "Interview with Helmut Sonnenfeldt, July 24, 2000," Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2007son01>. Other sources maintain the veracity of Dobrynin's reports. After publication of a volume of documents that places four years of Dobrynin's reports to the Politburo next to Kissinger's reports to the president, Kissinger remarked: "Dobrynin's telegrams show a perception and sweep rarely found in diplomacy. Since both Dobrynin and I functioned as our own note takers, there was considerable possibility of a misunderstanding or miscommunication, especially with respect to details in the complex negotiations on a broad range of subjects we conducted. It did not happen." See *Soviet-American Relations: The Detente Years, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), xi.

Soviet weapons on the island. For this error, he received criticism from American officials, who questioned how they could trust him to report accurately on the attitudes of Soviet leaders if Moscow did not inform him of events that could lead to such a dangerous turn in superpower relations.⁴⁰ This lack of information on the Soviet Union's activities, particularly in the developing world, continued to haunt Dobrynin, as he was not informed of Soviet actions in Angola or Ethiopia, and he received no advance warning of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. As a result, the person who best understood the current moods and trends in American politics at times had no opportunity to advise the Kremlin leadership on how Soviet actions in the developing world would be received in Washington, and he could not soften the blow of these decisions by speaking in an earnest and informed matter about these topics to American leaders as they happened.

This faultline between the Kremlin and the embassy affected other diplomatic efforts, including the SALT agreements, which Dobrynin negotiated as the Soviet representative in the backchannel. Dobrynin and the Foreign Ministry received limited and often inaccurate data on the Soviet Union's military weaponry and nuclear capabilities, as full intelligence was generally limited to the general secretary, the KGB, and a few top military and defense officials. Therefore, Foreign Ministry officials relied mostly on American publications for statistics, while Dobrynin attempted to learn more about Soviet arms from American scientists and the diplomats with whom he negotiated. During talks, Dobrynin never made the first proposal, since he had few reliable estimates of the actual numbers of Soviet

⁴⁰ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964"* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 252-53. Dobrynin explained to Kennedy that he received all of the information that the Kremlin wished to provide him, and while this did not satisfy Kennedy's complaints, historians Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko contend that this was sufficient to convince him that Dobrynin did not have advance knowledge of the missile bases, and therefore, did not intentionally mislead them. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 81-82.

weapons. Rather, he allowed American officials to present the initial proposals and then either agreed to their numbers or suggested revisions after further research. Soviet diplomats even used American names and abbreviations for Soviet weaponry in their memos back to the Kremlin, since they did not know the Soviet designations.⁴¹ This information gap placed Soviet negotiators at a disadvantage, as they struggled to build agreements that effectively limited nuclear arms without crippling the Soviet Union's ability to defend itself.

The final rift in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus occurred within the embassy itself. This reflects the broader divide between the various Soviet bureaucracies in Moscow, since embassy diplomats frequently represented several ministries and departments centered in the Kremlin. Despite Dobrynin's effective work to coordinate the approach and activities of embassy personnel, fissures remained that created a disparity between different diplomats' conceptions of détente. For example, in 1975, the Citizen Exchange Corps, a nonprofit NGO dedicated to building cultural exchanges between the US and the USSR, opened negotiations with the embassy's cultural affairs division for an exchange program with bilingual educators. The American delegation's proposed visit to Moscow did not go as planned, however, after the Soviet government denied one American participant a visa in the so-called "Fishman Affair," discussed in greater detail in chapter 6. In this incident, poor communication between the cultural and consular divisions, as well as a disagreement over what sort of delegates were acceptable in an exchange program, stifled the program and generated bad press for the Soviet Union, the CEC, and the prospects for effective cultural exchange between the superpowers.

⁴¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 193-94. Dobrynin regularly wrote the Kremlin for instructions on how to proceed with American proposals. However, backchannel meetings frequently featured what Dobrynin and his American counterparts refer to as "talking out loud," or informal discussions where the participants sought mutually acceptable solutions to the problems confronting the superpowers. Dobrynin often conducted these discussions without hard instructions from the Kremlin, making a lack of information a serious problem.

In sum, these rifts had a profound effect on international affairs, allowing multiple leaders and bureaucracies to influence the conduct of foreign policy both in Moscow and on the ground level. Thus, while it is important to study the debates and initiatives of the Politburo, this dissertation argues for an expanded focus that encompasses the rest of the foreign policy apparatus to gain a more complete understanding of international affairs during the Brezhnev years. Moreover, while the post-Cold War historiographical debate over whether Brezhnev and the Politburo acted primarily out of ideological or imperial concerns remains relevant, my research suggests the need to move toward a broader discussion of how this divide influenced different aspects of the Soviet foreign policy apparatus. Indeed, given the different visions of détente held by the Foreign Ministry and the International Department, it seems that the divide between revolutionary and imperial tendencies transcends individuals and must be discussed along bureaucratic lines as well.

This depiction of the Soviet foreign policy apparatus has direct bearing on other historiographical discussions in the field, including the recently reignited debate about the meaning of détente. Previously, memoirists and scholars described the rise of détente as a consequence of new developments in the international arena, such as the increasing strategic parity among the superpowers and the Sino-Soviet split.⁴² Jeremi Suri counters that it was not merely a response to new conditions on the international stage, but also a conservative reaction to the international protest movement that emerged in the late 1960s. In Suri's estimation, "the promise of détente became a stick with which to beat domestic critics."⁴³ Others, such as Zubok, have argued that, on the Soviet side, détente boiled down to

⁴² Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 123-25, 191-94; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 191-95; and Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 27-73.

⁴³ Suri, *Power and Protest*, 261.

Brezhnev's personal ambitions to become a peacemaker.⁴⁴ This dissertation highlights the complex process by which the Soviet government negotiated détente, as various groups in the Soviet bureaucracy with influence over foreign affairs had different and sometimes contradictory ideas about how to approach superpower talks. While the Soviet Embassy may have been staffed largely by diplomats who believed in the importance of improving Soviet-American relations, it did not exist in a vacuum, contending with groups in Moscow that opposed détente or had other ideas about the Soviet Union's priorities in global affairs. These differences ultimately undermined détente at the end of the 1970s.

In examining the Soviet Embassy, I limit my research to one institution in the Soviet bureaucracy that directly faced the consequences of these rifts. This choice in part reflects a practical consideration, given the largely classified nature of files from the International Department and the Foreign Ministry. More importantly, the embassy provides an ideal case for studying this phenomenon because, while Foreign Ministry diplomats dominated its personnel, it received instructions from various bureaucracies, reflecting the diverse organizations that the embassy had to accommodate to fulfill its obligations. Notwithstanding Dobrynin's central role in negotiations, the embassy's distance from the Kremlin demonstrates the extent to which these rifts and the resultant difficulty in identifying a single grand strategy could wreak havoc on Soviet foreign policy initiatives.

Sources

This dissertation makes use of a diverse array of sources from Russian and American archives to chart the embassy's activities during détente. The State Archive of the Russian

⁴⁴ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 201-15.

Federation, *fond* (collection) R-9576, houses the records of the Union of Societies of Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries (SSOD), the institution responsible for negotiating cultural exchanges with US authorities during *détente*. These documents include communication between Moscow officials and embassy representatives and talks with American cultural agencies. The files make it possible to ascertain the role that Soviet diplomats envisioned for increased cultural relations in the broader framework of *détente* while providing a lens onto how lower-level officials participated in negotiations. *Fond* R-9518, the records of the Committee for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, liquidated in 1967, provides additional background on the Soviet conduct of cultural relations before *détente*.

Central Committee materials from 1970 through 1979 (*fond* 5, *opisi* (lists) 62-64, 66-69, and 73-76), available at the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, show how Moscow elites envisioned *détente*, how they discussed it with lower-level officials at the embassy, and how these officials reported back on talks with American diplomats. In particular, these files include closed discussions regarding preparations for Soviet-American summits, evaluations of the results of negotiations, and plans for improving the image of the USSR in the US through a massive propaganda and public relations campaign. The collections pertaining to Party congresses and plenums (*fondy* 1 and 2) provide drafts of speeches by Soviet leaders concerning superpower relations, such as Brezhnev's address at the May 1972 Party Plenum, where he first told Party members about the secretly negotiated SALT accords.

State Planning Committee files (*fond* 4372) at the Russian State Archive of the Economy shed light on how diplomats conducted negotiations while establishing how economic relations fit into the broader conceptualizations of *détente* held by embassy

representatives and Moscow officials. Records concerning trade deals negotiated through embassy officials and the collection of the Ministry of Trade (*fond* 465) offer memoranda of conversations between embassy representatives and American business officials as well as orders to the embassy regarding the expansion of trade with the US.

Perhaps the most valuable potential collection of documents is held in the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, but Russian national security concerns have created strict access policies that limit the availability of such sources. While most files on *détente* remain classified, I received limited access to *fond* 192, the records for the Soviet Embassy in Washington, including discussions between embassy diplomats and various Soviet officials about the advisability of working with various American private and state organizations, as well as plans for approaching potential new negotiating partners. The *fond* also includes documents describing embassy negotiations with American cultural and economic organizations, reports of crimes committed against embassy personnel, travel plans for embassy officials, and other files detailing embassy activities and organization.

This dissertation also draws upon American archival materials to fill in the blank spots of history created by Russian archives. In particular, the Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts and the Kissinger Papers at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and the National Security Archive include declassified discussions between Kissinger and Dobrynin. These materials illuminate Dobrynin's role in fostering *détente* and shed light on how the positions that officials on both sides took at the negotiating table affected the practice of *détente*. At the National Security Archive, transcripts from the Brezhnev-Carter Project conferences, in which Dobrynin and other high-ranking embassy personnel participated, provide a valuable source for determining how key officials, in

hindsight, assessed their roles in negotiations. The diaries of Anatoly Cherniaev, a member of the International Department during détente, help to decode the attitudes prevalent among Moscow elites who dictated the broad visions of détente. In addition, the Dmitry Volkogonov Collection at the Library of Congress offers critical documents on the Brezhnev era, such as portions of the general secretary's personal diaries and material pertaining to his foreign policy initiatives. Further, the W. Averell Harriman Papers provide a unique perspective on negotiations as Harriman, an elder statesman in the Democratic Party, had close ties with Dobrynin. The Library of Congress also contains the files of journalists like Henry Brandon, who conducted extensive interviews with American policymakers in the 1970s, asking pertinent questions about the Soviet ambassador.

Lastly, published document collections,⁴⁵ works by Soviet authors on détente, and memoirs by Soviet and American diplomats offer valuable insights into the role of the embassy in negotiations.⁴⁶ These sources are especially crucial in studying high diplomacy

⁴⁵ There are also several useful published document collections: William Burr, ed. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: New Press, 1998); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XII: Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970* (Washington: GPO, 2006); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIII: Soviet Union, October 1970-October 1971* (Washington: GPO, 2011); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIV: Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972* (Washington: GPO, 2006); *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011); "Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/index.html>; and *Soviet-American Relations: The Detente Years, 1969-1972*. Additional documents are available online through the Digital National Security Archive, <<http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>>.

⁴⁶ For memoirs by American diplomats from this period, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983); Kissinger, *White House Years*; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982); and *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). The most important Soviet memoirs include A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniia diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Iu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko i M. S. Gorbacheva* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1994); Georgi Arbatov, *The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics* (New York: Times Books, 1992); E. I. Chazov, *Zdorov'e i vlast': Vospominaniia "kremlevskogo vracha"* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992); A. S. Cherniaev, *Moia zhizn' i moe vremia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1992); _____, *Sovmestnyi iskhod: dnevnik dvukh epokh, 1972-1991 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008); Alexandra Costa, *Stepping Down from the Star: A Soviet Defector's Story* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1986); Dobrynin, *In Confidence*; _____, *Sugubo doveritel'no: Posol v Vashingtone pri shesti prezidentakh SShA (1962-1986 gg.)*

and life at the embassy, as Russian materials on these topics remain mostly classified.

American newspapers, Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Soviet Embassy publications such as *Soviet Life*, and Dobrynin's writings and speeches enhanced these sources.

One of the consequences of the secrecy of the backchannel during the Nixon and Ford administrations is that only Dobrynin and Kissinger know all that happened in their discussions. While many of their reports of these conversations have been declassified in recent years, both men had reasons for fashioning their version of events in a way that put them in the best possible light. This means that reports often differ on who proposed a particular initiative, who raised a sensitive topic, or who won an argument. In addition, both men wrote memoirs that address the backchannel negotiations. Kissinger published three massive volumes of memoirs starting in 1979, which historians have criticized for their biased accounts. One historian has described them as "perhaps the most determined effort ever" on the part of a state leader "to fix the image of their period."⁴⁷ Kissinger fashioned himself as the ultimate diplomat, rarely outwitted by his opponents, firmly in control of the backchannel, and ahead of the curve in most of his initiatives. He composed the first two volumes of his memoirs in the years immediately following his time in office, and since he remained a prominent figure in the foreign policy elite, he consciously fought off criticism

2nd ed. (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2008); Andrei Gromyko, *Memoirs*, trans. Harold Shukman (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster: My Thirty-Two Years in Intelligence and Espionage against the West* (New York: Basic Books, 2009); and G. M. Kornienko, *Kholodnaia voina: svidetel'stvo ee uchastnika* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001).

⁴⁷ Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, xiii. Dobrynin, attempting to explain the differences between the accounts of the backchannel participants at a conference in the 1990s, recalled that he called Kissinger after the publication of the first volume of the American diplomat's memoirs. Dobrynin complained about several passages that he viewed as more fiction than fact, particularly in Kissinger's descriptions of overwhelming Brezhnev in negotiations. Kissinger joked that no one would know, since Brezhnev was dead and Soviet ambassadors did not write memoirs. "Global Competition and the Deterioration of US-Soviet Relations," Conference at the Harbor Beach Resort, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, March 23-26, 1995. Transcript available at the National Security Archive.

from the left that he was a warmonger and from the right that he was soft on communism.

Writing after the collapse of the USSR and his departure from foreign policy circles, Dobrynin did not have to defend himself against these sorts of domestic critics, perhaps giving him less reason to distort his record than Kissinger. Dobrynin's memoirs, published in 1995 in Russia and the United States, represent a particularly valuable source because, in contrast to Kissinger, information on Dobrynin's life remains limited. Dobrynin frames his narrative of the second half of the Cold War partly as an eyewitness account of the inner workings of both Washington and Moscow. Without ignoring the importance of strategic interests and conflicting ideologies, Dobrynin asserts that personalities played the pivotal role in shaping Soviet-American relations. He makes ample use of anecdotes to explain how the strengths and weaknesses of leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain determined the direction of the superpower conflict.

Yet Dobrynin's memoirs remain a subjective source that must be handled with caution. Like other former policymakers, Dobrynin aims to defend his role in superpower negotiations. Consistent with his position as an "Americanist" in the Foreign Ministry, Dobrynin presents himself as a stalwart advocate for closer Soviet-American ties, unlike other actors on either side whom he blames for thwarting his efforts. He downplays or ignores incidents in the documentary record that demonstrate his willingness to use force or the threat of force to strengthen the Soviet position on the world stage or press the American side for concessions in negotiations. Moreover, the memoir reflects Dobrynin's acute sensitivity regarding his position as the primary mouthpiece of the Soviet leadership in Soviet-American talks. Like Kissinger, Dobrynin assigns himself a starring role in superpower diplomacy, while portraying other representatives of particular Soviet

constituencies as interlopers who have exaggerated their influence.

Methodology

My methodology is informed by the “new diplomatic history,” an approach taken by recent scholars to revitalize the discipline of international relations. Writing in the context of American history, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman explains that this methodology refers to studies with “global themes,” meaning multinational, multi-archival research that discusses how events in one country affect policy decisions in another. This could suggest transnational history, or studying nongovernmental organizations whose membership transcends national boundaries. Hoffman also writes that some new diplomatic historians expand the scope of research beyond security concerns to examine “domestic themes” in political, economic, and cultural institutions. This often entails using the methods of social and cultural history to explain how elite understandings of race, gender, and national identity affect the construction of foreign policy.⁴⁸

My research builds on the recent work by new diplomatic historians to revive personal diplomacy as a field of interest among scholars. The most notable example of this

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, "Diplomatic History and the Meaning of Life: Toward a Global American History," *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 499-518. For examples of this methodology in practice, see "Sidelights of the Week." See Christian G. Appy, ed. *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). This work includes chapters on how officials' racial attitudes shaped early American policy in Vietnam, how understandings of familial relationships molded US policy toward Asia in the first decades of the Cold War, and how *Time's* coverage of the Shah in Iran drew from and reinforced Orientalist and Cold War discourses. Vladislav Zubok has employed this approach in the Soviet context by exploring the affects of cultural and generational shifts on the policies pursued by top leaders. Zubok, *Failed Empire*. For other theoretical works on the new diplomatic history, see Michael J. Hogan, "The 'Next Big Thing': The Future of Diplomatic History in a Global Age," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (January 2004): 1-21; Lynn Hunt, "Where Have All the Theories Gone?," *Perspectives* 40 (March 2002): 5-7; Michael Hunt, "The Long Crisis in US Diplomatic History: Coming to Closure," *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 115-40; and Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 807-31.

trend is Frank Costigliola's work on the personal relationships of Joseph Stalin, President Roosevelt, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Costigliola argues for the importance of "tracing the political consequences of the relationships, personalities, emotional lives, emotional dispositions, sensibilities, and cultural assumptions" of these leaders, emphasizing "emotional belief," or the leap in logic from what one knows to what one wants to believe. This, he contends, represents a challenge to Western conceptions of realism in foreign affairs, since "realistic" policies are always filtered through flawed human beings with cultural ideas formed in a specific context that shape their assumptions and policies.⁴⁹

I acknowledge these lessons in examining personal diplomacy during détente, especially with regard to the figure of Dobrynin, whose personality and life experiences played a key role in determining the embassy's approach to détente. I show how Dobrynin and other Soviet diplomats at the embassy brought cultural assumptions about the US and their American partners to the negotiating table, and how they used these conceptions to formulate policy and explain their viewpoints in a language that they felt would resonate with their American counterparts. Thus I analyze the tropes employed by Dobrynin and other diplomats to explore how this culturally constructed understanding affected talks and changed over time as they became more familiar with American politics and society. Similarly, I scrutinize the language used in internal memos about negotiations to see how embassy diplomats attempted to gain approval for their policy recommendations by framing reports in a way that would appeal to the Kremlin. Finally, I pay attention to the language

⁴⁹ Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*.

employed by diplomats to see how they communicated visions of détente to the Soviet and American publics.

I follow Library of Congress standards for transliteration. In instances that a different spelling is common practice in English, however, I follow the established standards. For instance, I use “Moscow” instead of “Moskva,” and “Anatoly Dobrynin” instead of “Anatolii Dobrynin.”

Overview of Chapters

Moscow on the Potomac comprises seven chapters and covers the period from 1969 to 1979. An analytical biography of Dobrynin, chapter 1 explores his education, the development of his understanding of American politics and culture, and his diplomatic career from the end of World War II through his first seven years as ambassador, ending in 1969. It also describes the “Dobrynin school” of diplomacy, or the unique environment that he created in Washington for Soviet diplomats, explaining why both the ambassador and the institution proved effective in conducting diplomacy with the US.

The next four chapters focus on the activities of Dobrynin in negotiations with top American officials. Chapter 2 introduces the backchannel between Dobrynin and American National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, depicting its origins, the surprising optimism that characterized President Richard Nixon’s first few months in office, and the cycle of stagnation and attempts to reboot the backchannel that occurred in 1970 and the first part of 1971. Chapter 3 tackles the increasing success of the backchannel from spring 1971 to spring 1972, and, like the previous chapter, charts the challenges posed by the Soviet and American bureaucracies and by conflicts in the developing world. Chapter 4

shifts gears to discuss personal diplomacy, with specific emphasis on the ways that Kissinger and Dobrynin crafted a friendship that then worked as leverage in backchannel talks.

Chapter 5 covers the decline of détente, arguing that the various crises in American and Soviet domestic politics, bilateral relations, and the developing world all placed the embassy on the sidelines, preventing it from pursuing potential breakthroughs in superpower talks or ameliorating crises.

The final two chapters represent a case study in how lower-level diplomats at the embassy implemented détente and promoted improved Soviet-American relations, with special focus on the embassy's Cultural Department. Chapter 6 investigates embassy diplomats' work with the American Department of SSOD to expand relations with mainstream cultural organizations. Chapter 7 describes the embassy's uncomfortable relationship with Soviet-American friendship organizations. Both of these chapters highlight the embassy's attempt to construct an image of the USSR as a dependable great power with whom the US should develop friendlier ties.

CHAPTER 1

“THE BEAR THAT WALKS LIKE AN AMERICAN”: SOVIET AMBASSADOR ANATOLY F. DOBRYNIN AND THE DOBRYNIN SCHOOL OF DIPLOMACY

On April 6, 2010, Dobrynin died at the age of ninety. Eulogists from around the world praised the man who had played a critical role in Cold War superpower relations as Soviet ambassador to the United States from 1962 to 1986. Robert D. McFadden of *The New York Times* wrote, “To a generation of Washington officials in a perilous nuclear age, Mr. Dobrynin was the pre-eminent channel for Soviet-American relations: a tough, nuanced, charming ambassador who was, as admirers and detractors put it, no more duplicitous than he had to be.”⁵⁰ Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev telegraphed Dobrynin’s family that the ambassador was “a talented and intelligent person, a top professional and a legend of Russian diplomacy.”⁵¹ Describing Dobrynin as “a great statesman and a brilliant diplomat,” Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin proclaimed that Dobrynin’s tenure at the embassy came during “one of the most difficult and dramatic periods in relations with the US” and that “Dobrynin’s diplomatic prowess and political vision often helped to find a way out of crisis situations, to solve enormous global challenges at the negotiating table.”⁵²

In their own tributes, the diplomats and politicians who worked with Dobrynin

⁵⁰ Robert D. McFadden, "Anatoly F. Dobrynin, longtime Soviet Ambassador to the US, dies at 90," *New York Times*, April 9, 2010, A19.

⁵¹ "Soboleznovaniia v sviazi s konchinoi diplomata Anatoliiia Dobrynina," <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/7393>.

⁵² "Predsedatel' Pravitel'stva Rossii V. V. Putin napravil telegrammu soboleznovaniu vdove diplomata A. F. Dobrynina Irine Nikolaevne v sviazi s ego konchinoi," <http://premier.gov.ru/events/messages/10126/>.

offered even more adulatory assessments. Former First Deputy Foreign Minister Anatolii Adamishin told the newspaper *Kommersant* that Dobrynin was a “giant of Soviet diplomacy” who “literally oozed kindness” when sharing lessons with the younger generation of diplomats.⁵³ American diplomat Henry Kissinger highlighted the former Soviet ambassador’s commitment “to the pursuit of peace, to the reduction of tensions, and to the advancement toward a more peaceful world.” Kissinger acknowledged that “at first he was my professional partner,” but then “gradually he became my personal friend.”⁵⁴ Iurii Subbotin, who served at the embassy during Dobrynin’s tenure, provided the most effusive praise, dubbing Dobrynin “a diplomat from God, an intellectual, a genuine Russian genius, and a good person.” Subbotin concluded that, while the title of the 1967 Soviet film *Ambassador of the Soviet Union* refers to Alexandra Kollontai, the phrase, in his mind, should be associated only with Dobrynin.⁵⁵

Acclaim for Dobrynin’s diplomatic skills and personal attributes extend beyond the memoriam published after his death. In his memoirs, Kissinger writes, “Subtle and disciplined, warm in his demeanor while wary in his conduct, Dobrynin moved through the upper echelons of Washington with consummate skill.”⁵⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor during the Carter administration, who frequently played chess with Dobrynin during breaks in talks, describes the Soviet ambassador as “an amiable bear,” yet one “who could all of a sudden turn quite nasty,” if provoked. Brzezinski refers to Dobrynin as a

⁵³ Aleksandr Reutov, "Koloss sovetskoi diplomatii," *Kommersant*", April 8, 2010.

⁵⁴ Legend of Soviet Diplomacy Remembered, *Russia Today*, April 10, 2010 (<http://rt.com/usa/news/dobrynin-ambassador-cuba-crisis/>).

⁵⁵ Iurii Subbotin, "Sovetskii diplomat ot Boga," *Parlamentskaia gazeta*, April 9, 2010, 17-22.

⁵⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 140.

“skilled and sophisticated debater,” pointing out his ability to use charm or aggression to further the Soviet position in negotiations.⁵⁷ Following his retirement, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev mentioned the Soviet ambassador twice during an interrogation by the Party Control Commission about the publication of his memoirs abroad, characterizing Dobrynin as the Soviet Union’s “most intelligent ambassador abroad.”⁵⁸

Despite the near-universal praise heaped on him by Russian and American reporters, diplomats, and political leaders, Dobrynin has received relatively little treatment in the historical literature on Soviet-American relations in the second half of the Cold War. Most authors have focused on the American side of détente, privileging Kissinger’s role in so-called backchannel negotiations between Kissinger and Dobrynin. Such authors frequently cite Dobrynin’s memoirs to discuss the Soviet perspective, but give insufficient attention to his critical position in determining the outcome of talks.⁵⁹ Those works that do concentrate on the Soviet side of the story downplay the role of the embassy by focusing on the formulation of policy in the Kremlin rather than on policy implementation on the ground level, where Dobrynin added nuances to policy and raised important issues with American leaders while “talking out loud” to seek solutions to the challenges facing the backchannel.⁶⁰

This chapter aims to restore Dobrynin’s place as a central figure in the conduct of superpower relations. It looks into his past to assess how he gained his unique perspectives on the United States and superpower relations, and explores the qualities that allowed him to

⁵⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 152-53.

⁵⁸ A. N. Artizov et al., eds., *Nikita Khrushchev, 1964: Stenogrammy Plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Materik", 2007), 438-48.

⁵⁹ For example, see Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*; Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*; and Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*.

⁶⁰ For example, see Zubok, *Failed Empire*; and Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

become a successful diplomat, Soviet bureaucrat, and arbiter for détente, themes that persisted through his negotiations with Kissinger. Moreover, it suggests that Dobrynin helped foster a specific atmosphere in the embassy that shaped the ideas and approaches of hundreds of Soviet diplomats in this period, persuading them of the value in seeking closer ties with the US. As files on Dobrynin remain largely classified in Russian archives, this chapter relies on published document collections, memoirs, American archival records, and Russian materials when available.

Anatoly Fedorovich Changes Professions

Information on Dobrynin's youth remains limited, making his memoirs a critically important source. Dobrynin constructs his early career as a typical example of the remarkable social mobility characteristic of the Stalin era, while distancing himself from the most negative aspects of that period. For example, despite the fact that his coming of age coincided with both the Great Purges and the height of the gulag, Dobrynin has little to say about the repressive aspects of Stalinism. As such, Dobrynin is careful to situate himself as more than just the product of his historical context. While it is reasonable to assume that no man, even one as maneuverable as Dobrynin, could have managed to stay above ideology in the Stalin era, Dobrynin presents himself as the ultimate pragmatist in foreign policy, downplaying ideology in favor of practice concerns.⁶¹ Thus Dobrynin's ultimate goal is to portray himself as both the model new Soviet diplomat and the prototypical new Soviet man.

⁶¹ Indeed, while Dobrynin describes himself as a communist, he writes: "The fact is that I served my country to the best of my ability as citizen, patriot, and diplomat. I tried to serve what I saw as its practical and historic interests and not any abstract philosophical notion of communism. I accepted the Soviet system with its flaws and successes as a historic step in the long history of my country, in whose great destiny I still believe. If I had any grand purpose in life, it was the integration of my country into the family of nations as a respected and equal partner. But for this it is always necessary to consider the realities of the world and one's own country." Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 4-5.

Dobrynin's narrative of his childhood and early career suggests that, while he took a path to the diplomatic service that may seem unconventional to Western eyes, he gained experience that proved vital to his work as an ambassador. He was born on November 16, 1919, to a family of modest means in the village of Krasnaia Gorka during the Russian Civil War. His father worked as a plumber, and his mother split her time between the home and her part-time job as an usher at the Malyi Theater in Moscow, allowing Dobrynin cheap access to theatrical productions in the Soviet capital. Dobrynin excelled in academics, winning second prize at the Moscow Olympiad for mathematics. Although admitted to prestigious Moscow State University in 1937, he followed his father's advice to complete his undergraduate studies at the Moscow Aviation Institute before taking work as a designer at Experimental Aircraft Plant No. 115, headed by famous aircraft designer Aleksandr Iakovlev. Dobrynin's position as a manager in a critical military industry during World War II reflects his rapid professional ascent in his chosen field. In the summer of 1944, the Communist Party Central Committee summoned him to its headquarters, where an official in the personnel department informed him that he would be sent to study at the Higher Diplomatic School.⁶² Dobrynin, reluctant to give up his promising career as an aircraft designer, initially refused, only to be told by the official that he should regard the assignment as a wartime order that had to be fulfilled unconditionally, as "it is wartime and the party knows better where and how to use its people."⁶³

Dobrynin and his 150 fellow graduates, the largest class in the Higher Diplomatic School's history, thus became part of the so-called "Stalin Enrollment." Having eliminated

⁶² At the time, the Higher Diplomatic School was the top institute for future members of the Soviet foreign service. It became the Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR in 1974.

⁶³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 13-14.

much of the previous generation of diplomats in the prewar purges, Stalin hoped to avoid a return to older, bourgeois approaches to diplomacy by appointing engineers who had no previous diplomatic experience. These new Soviet diplomats also would have complete allegiance to Stalin, as they received their new positions thanks to his regime.⁶⁴ Dobrynin recounts a telling anecdote from after his appointment as Soviet ambassador to the US, when he questioned Viacheslav Molotov, foreign minister from 1939 to 1949 and 1953 to 1956, about his recruitment. Molotov recalled that, during a 1944 Politburo meeting, Stalin instructed him to oversee the expansion of the diplomatic corps, as the approaching end of the war would result in the establishment of new diplomatic relationships and the expansion of older diplomatic ties. Molotov asked where he would find potential students who had already acquired the requisite training in liberal arts and foreign languages. Stalin instructed Molotov not to worry about these skills, which could be taught later, but instead to look for engineers at defense plants who got along well with the workers. Dobrynin states, “Stalin reasoned that if a young engineer managed to handle the difficult day-to-day problems and conflicts that were inevitable in those hard times, and the workers still respected him, he was a real diplomat, or at least had the necessary abilities to become one.”⁶⁵

While it may not have been the primary reason for his promotion, Dobrynin’s background as an engineer did ultimately gave him an advantage in strategic arms limitations negotiations during détente. Dobrynin protégé and former Foreign Minister Aleksandr

⁶⁴ Several historians have written on the immediate effect of the purges on the Soviet diplomatic corps. See, for instance, Teddy J. Uldricks, *Diplomacy and Ideology: The Origins of Soviet Foreign Relations, 1917-1930* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1979); and Alastair Kocho-Williams, "The Soviet Diplomatic Corps and Stalin's Purges," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 1 (January 2008): 90-110. This parallels Stalin’s attempts to educate and promote engineers to managerial positions. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite, 1928-1939," *Slavic Review* 38, no. 3 (September 1979): 377-402. Victor Israelyan, a member of Dobrynin’s graduating class, writes about it in similar terms. Israelyan, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War*, 18-22.

⁶⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 15-16.

Bessmertnykh notes the rarity of having a diplomat who knew the definitions of such terminology as “multiple reentry vehicles” and “phased array radars.” He concludes: “I do not think that anyone but Dobrynin could have been able to conduct those talks so effectively. His aviation engineering background was a great asset” in decoding the precise meaning of these new technologies to the arms race.⁶⁶ Indeed, Dobrynin later joked that, while they had to explain to Gromyko how missiles could fly without a propeller, Dobrynin could rely on his technical education and remaining connections at the Iakovlev firm to better understand weapons technology.⁶⁷ Such training had real value given the dearth of information on military technology that Dobrynin received from military circles.

After graduating from the Higher Diplomatic School in 1947 with a dissertation on American policy in the Far East during the Russo-Japanese War, Dobrynin held a series of jobs in Moscow while he waited for an opportunity to serve abroad, the ultimate goal of any ambitious young, Soviet diplomat.⁶⁸ As an assistant professor at the Institute of International Relations and then as the assistant chief of the Educational Department of the Foreign Ministry, he gave lectures on US foreign policy. His professional hopes seemed in danger when, in 1947, he refused an offer from Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Vyshinsky to become the head of the Educational Department. Dobrynin recalls his fear this would lead him into a dead-end job doing work that he loathed, pushing papers, writing instruction manuals, and laboring outside the realm of practical diplomacy. Vyshinsky,

⁶⁶ Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, "Posol velikoi derzhavy," *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, no. 12 (December 2009).

⁶⁷ “SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust,” Conference at Musgrove Plantation, Simons Island, Georgia, May 6-9, 1994. Transcript available at the National Security Archive.

⁶⁸ Dobrynin later published his dissertation under a pseudonym, as Foreign Ministry personnel were forbidden to publish under their given names. See Aleksandr Solomonovich Dobrov, *Dal'nevostochnaia politika SShA v period russko-iaponskoi voiny* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1952). For the circumstances of the publication of Dobrynin's dissertation, see Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 19.

likely indignant that Dobrynin had turned down a position equal in rank to a general, sent him back to his job as a rank-and-file clerk with little hope for future promotion to an assignment outside the country.

As luck would have it, only a few months later, a way out of this predicament presented itself when Valerian Zorin returned from his post as ambassador to Czechoslovakia to take a job as deputy foreign minister. Zorin needed diplomats to serve in his secretariat, and Dobrynin's department head, an old friend of Zorin, used his influence to get Dobrynin an appointment as one of Zorin's assistants. From this modest start, Dobrynin rose through the ranks over five years, moving from second secretary to first assistant. As Dobrynin remembers this period in his career, it provided him with an opportunity to study the business of policy formation in the Kremlin, to learn to examine materials carefully, to provide analysis to superiors, and to implement his superior's suggestions made by superiors when their recommendations were returned. After years of working together, Zorin grew to trust Dobrynin, and when Dobrynin requested transfer to an embassy in 1952, Zorin helped him acquire a post in Washington.⁶⁹

Dobrynin arrived at the embassy in 1952 as its fourth most senior diplomat, and he left in 1954 as minister-counselor, the top post after the ambassador, when he was only thirty-four years old. Although Ambassador Georgii Zarubin initially assigned him to cover American domestic politics and economics, Dobrynin quickly demonstrated proficiency in dealing with matters of grand strategy and high diplomacy. In accounting for his meteoric rise, Dobrynin credits his ability to anticipate instructions from Moscow. Whereas the other members of the senior diplomatic staff at the embassy often submitted recommendations that

⁶⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 19-24.

met with negative responses, Dobrynin contends that his experience working under Zorin had given him the instincts necessary to anticipate Moscow's desires and to supply it with the requisite information or recommendations.

Dobrynin's subsequent few years were spent in various positions of responsibility under Foreign Minister Molotov. During Molotov's visit to the United States in 1955, Dobrynin served as his primary advisor and translator. Shortly thereafter, he returned with Molotov to Moscow to serve as his assistant. There, Dobrynin witnessed Molotov's fall from power, as well as the rise and fall of Molotov's replacement, Dmitrii Shepilov, before Andrei Gromyko eventually assumed the position of foreign minister in 1957. Perhaps eager to distance himself from the revolving leadership at the Foreign Ministry, Dobrynin successfully petitioned for a return to a diplomatic job in the field. With Gromyko's recommendation to UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, Dobrynin assumed the position of undersecretary general for special political affairs at the UN.⁷⁰

The two years that Dobrynin occupied this position proved essential for his future career, as he adopted what I call the "chameleon" approach to diplomacy, immersing himself in American society and taking up American cultural practices to better understand popular opinion and the motivations of political leaders. First, Dobrynin improved his fluency in English to the point where he edited all of his UN documents in English. Second, living on Manhattan's Upper West Side, outside of the Soviet UN Mission, gave him greater freedom to develop close friendships with influential Americans in a variety of fields, who later formed the basis of the complex social network that he relied upon as ambassador. By the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 28-33. For more on Molotov's fall and Shepilov's role in the failed coup of Khrushchev, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 266-69, 288-89, and 311-23.

end of his tenure at the UN, Dobrynin felt comfortable enough in American society to spend his remaining dollars taking his wife Irina on a two-week vacation road trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles to San Diego. Weather interfered with their return flight, and they concluded the trip with a three-day bus ride from Phoenix to New York.⁷¹ Few Soviet citizens in the late 1950s had a chance to immerse themselves in American culture unfettered by official oversight, and Dobrynin made the most of this rare opportunity.

When he returned to Moscow in 1960 to serve as chief of the American Department at the Foreign Ministry, Dobrynin cultivated ties with top Soviet officials that ultimately led to his appointment as ambassador. In regard to his key role in negotiations at the 1960 Paris Summit and the 1961 Vienna Summit, Dobrynin again credits his ability to predict leaders' reactions, only now he demonstrated this skill in regard to American responses to Soviet proposals. This talent enhanced his reputation at the highest levels of the Soviet bureaucracy as an expert on the United States. Dobrynin recalls that, at Politburo meetings on foreign policy issues, Khrushchev often pontificated about new approaches to Soviet-American relations, presenting ideas that "ranged from the genuinely interesting to the impractical and bizarre." When Khrushchev asked Dobrynin how he felt about a given proposal as chief of the American Department, Dobrynin frequently had to do his best to talk Khrushchev out of hare-brained schemes in the most diplomatic manner possible. Dobrynin implies that this careful dynamic with Khrushchev paid dividends: in January 1962, the Politburo approved Dobrynin's candidacy to replace Mikhail Men'shikov as Soviet ambassador to the United States. At the age of forty-two, without any previous experience as an ambassador, Dobrynin

⁷¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 33-35.

accepted the top position in the Soviet diplomatic corps.⁷²

Mr. Dobrynin Goes to Washington

The announcement of Dobrynin's appointment met with glowing reviews from both American officials and the American press. *Newsweek* quoted a veteran Washington official saying, "No Soviet official has ever been held in higher regard by his Western colleagues."⁷³ Referencing Dobrynin's days at the UN, Joseph Wershba of the *New York Post* claimed, "He is nobody's bootlicker—but he has a respect for the proprieties."⁷⁴ President John F. Kennedy apparently agreed with these reviews, as he wrote in a June 1962 letter to General Secretary Khrushchev that Dobrynin had "already made a place for himself here in Washington as an intelligent and friendly representative" of the USSR.⁷⁵ Even commentators skeptical of Dobrynin's potential effect on policy found positive things to say about the new ambassador. One official, cited in a *Newsweek* article suggestively entitled, "The Bear that Walks Like an American," expressed skepticism that Dobrynin's appointment would herald a new era of superpower diplomacy before remarking, "Yet it must be admitted that if the Russians really wanted a modest thaw, they would probably find Dobrynin a more effective agent than anyone else."⁷⁶

These reports tended to accentuate the positive impact that Dobrynin's

⁷² Ibid., 46-48.

⁷³ Edward Weintal, "The Bear That Walks Like An American," *Newsweek*, May 7, 1962.

⁷⁴ Joseph Wershba, "New Soviet Ambassador Has Respect of East and West," *New York Post*, December 29, 1961.

⁷⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-63, Volume VI: Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges* (Washington: GPO, 1996), 133.

⁷⁶ Weintal, "The Bear That Walks Like An American."

“Americanness” would have on superpower relations. Referring to Dobrynin’s nickname in Soviet circles as “the Amerikanets”—or “the American”—*Newsweek* quoted an American diplomat who argued that, thanks to Dobrynin’s earlier years in the United States, “he could pass for any American in any crowd on Fifth Avenue at lunchtime.”⁷⁷ Another official in the *New York Post* similarly emphasized, “If he didn’t break out into Russian, you’d think you’d been talking to an American.” Paraphrasing a famous quote by Stalin, the author of the article characterized Dobrynin as “a throbbing example of Russian revolutionary content—but also of American efficiency in style.”⁷⁸ The Associated Press described Dobrynin in larger-than-life terms, writing that the ambassador “is a big, hearty, energetic, outgoing man well over 6 feet tall, with a booming voice, a bone-crushing handshake and a quick sense of humor. He speaks good French and good English and his accent has been described as American.”⁷⁹

Several observers compared Dobrynin with his predecessors, emphasizing the generational shift that Dobrynin’s appointment represented and its potential to alter future superpower relations. In his cable to Kennedy on Dobrynin’s appointment, American Ambassador to the USSR Llewellyn Thompson declared that Dobrynin embodied a new generation of Soviet leaders and that “you can get on the same wavelength as him.”⁸⁰ One American official quoted by *Newsweek* hinted at this: “He has a keen sense of humor and intellectual honesty. He even engages in small talk, and I have never known another Russian

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wershba, “New Soviet Ambassador Has Respect of East and West.”

⁷⁹ “New Russian Envoy is Affable Extrovert,” *The Evening Star*, January 2, 1962.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Steele, “Anatoly Dobrynin Obituary,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/apr/16/anatoly-dobrynin-obituary>.

who does.”⁸¹ The *New York Post*’s Joseph Wershba predicted that Dobrynin would show Americans whether the “long-awaited ‘new’ generation” of Soviet officials would be different from the old. He elaborated: “All sources agree that he is an altogether engaging character. He is 6-foot-1, speaks English fluently, has a lively, witty style and is an authentic personality in his own right in a way that Menshikov could never bring off, despite his attempts to be ‘Smiling Mike.’” Wershba further speculated that Dobrynin’s appointment signaled Khrushchev’s desire for somebody at the embassy who was “thoroughly knowledgeable about U.S. affairs, who will tell him the truth about American attitudes towards the Soviet Union, and who will be capable of carrying through meaningful diplomatic conferences with Secretary of State Rusk and President Kennedy.” He concludes, “Most Americans—and many Russians, too—feel that Menshikov never really fulfilled these requirements.”⁸² In his memoirs, Secretary of State Dean Rusk seems to endorse this assumption, writing, “When John Kennedy took office, the Soviets guessed that an ambassador with Dobrynin’s temperament and personal style would be more effective than his predecessor, Mikhail “Smiling Mike” Menshikov, a cold warrior of the old school.”⁸³

Prominent American diplomat Chip Bohlen summarized Americans’ assessment of Dobrynin with three words: “Dobrynin is different.”⁸⁴ Those who commented on Dobrynin’s appointment saw the potential for these differences to play a decisive role in redefining the relationship between the superpowers. The suggestion that Dobrynin was “one of us” no

⁸¹ Weintal, “The Bear That Walks Like An American.”

⁸² Wershba, “New Soviet Ambassador Has Respect of East and West.”

⁸³ Dean Rusk and as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 360.

⁸⁴ Weintal, “The Bear That Walks Like An American.”

doubt also reflected wishful thinking on the part of those who desired an improvement in superpower relations. By branding Dobrynin as more “American” than other Soviet diplomats, these authors maintained that Dobrynin understood American intentions and thus could accurately interpret and convey American attitudes and policy approaches to Moscow. Moreover, commentators saw great potential in Dobrynin’s relative youth to bring about a sea change in Soviet policy that would lead to a less volatile Cold War.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

As it turned out, Dobrynin barely had time to settle into the position before he faced a major test of whether all this Soviet and American confidence in him was justified. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the thirteen-day period in October 1962 when the superpowers stood at the brink of nuclear warfare, occurred only seven months into Dobrynin’s tenure. On the one hand, the standoff laid bare the inherent weaknesses in Dobrynin’s position and impeded his attempts to negotiate with American authorities. On the other hand, it gave Dobrynin an opportunity to practice the secret backchannel diplomacy that eventually defined his tenure at the embassy and propelled him to success. Since “the Caribbean Crisis,” as it was known in the Soviet Union, has been covered in depth by many historians, this section will focus solely on Dobrynin’s role in the crisis as a case study of his early diplomatic work as ambassador.⁸⁵

The decision by Khrushchev and other top-ranking officials not to keep Dobrynin in

⁸⁵ In this section, I rely heavily on Dobrynin’s memoirs and Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*. For other recent works that examine the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Alfred A. Kopf, 2008); Sheldon Stern, *Averting 'The Final Failure': John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Zubok, *Failed Empire*; and Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*. Robert Kennedy’s memoir of the crisis was recently reprinted, and it remains an important source on the Cuban Missile Crisis. See Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

the loop on the dramatic policy changes that led to the crisis left Dobrynin in the awkward position of having to respond to events without complete information. Although Dobrynin had close connections with Politburo members, including Khrushchev, he had no advance knowledge of the plan to send missiles to Cuba. Unaware of this development, Dobrynin unknowingly misled American leaders during private meetings about Soviet actions in Cuba. As he wrote in his memoirs, “In seeking to keep the secret, Moscow . . . virtually made its ambassador an involuntary tool for deceit, for I kept stubbornly telling the Americans that we had nothing but defensive weapons in Cuba,” in line with with instructions from the Foreign Ministry.⁸⁶ For example, on September 4, Dobrynin assured Robert Kennedy that the Soviet Union intended to send only defensive weaponry to Cuba, citing the Soviet leadership’s commitment to the nontransfer and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.⁸⁷ Furthermore, on October 18, prior to meeting with President Kennedy and Secretary of State Rusk, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met with Dobrynin to review information on American attitudes regarding Cuba. Unaware that Gromyko wanted to gauge how American leaders might react to Soviet missiles in Cuba, Dobrynin assured Gromyko that President Kennedy had abandoned designs on invading Cuba, fearing Soviet reprisal elsewhere in the world. Gromyko, convinced that Kennedy would not commit any aggressive acts in Cuba, conveyed these reassuring messages back to Moscow.⁸⁸

In fact, Dobrynin learned of the Soviet missile installations in Cuba from American sources. Prior to the evening of October 22, he received an advance copy of President Kennedy’s speech on national television demanding that the Soviet government halt

⁸⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 74.

⁸⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 453-54.

⁸⁸ Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble"*, 231-32.

construction of the missile sites and announcing his determination to quarantine Cuba to prevent the delivery of offensive weapons. With no instructions from his government on how to proceed, Dobrynin was left “severely confused,” and after forwarding the address to the Kremlin, he began security preparations at the embassy.⁸⁹ KGB Station Chief Aleksandr Feklisov checked his office’s emergency electrical generator in case the American government cut off the power to the embassy, and secured the KGB’s private oxygen supply. Dobrynin met with Feklisov to coordinate security for the embassy, its staff, and Soviet citizens traveling in the United States, including tours from the Leningrad Symphony Orchestra and the Bolshoi Ballet. He instructed embassy diplomats to stay home and to avoid social activities such as shopping or going to the movies.⁹⁰

While still struggling to make sense of the developing situation, Dobrynin worked to maintain communication with American leaders, who proceeded to unload their frustrations on Dobrynin as the chief representative of Soviet power in Washington. Late at night on October 23, Robert Kennedy arrived at the Soviet Embassy, unleashing an emotional tirade that, as Dobrynin described it, “abounded in repetition and digression.” Kennedy complained that both Dobrynin and Khrushchev had falsely assured the president that only defensive weapons would be stationed in Cuba. The attorney general disparaged the still fledgling private channel with Dobrynin: “Why on earth should we turn to a confidential channel, if . . . even the ambassador, who we believe enjoys the full confidence of his own government, does not know that there are already long-range missiles on Cuba that could strike the United States?” Dobrynin found himself navigating between Scylla and Charybdis,

⁸⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 78-79.

⁹⁰ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 248-49. While serving as station chief in the US, Feklisov used the pseudonym “Alexander Fomin.”

forced to either endorse accusations that he had lied to the Americans or admit that his own leader had kept him in the dark about major policy initiatives. Ultimately, Dobrynin chose the latter course, telling Kennedy that he received all of the information that the Kremlin wished to provide him. While this did not fully satisfy Kennedy, historians Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko conclude that this did convince him that Dobrynin had no advance knowledge of the missile bases, and, therefore, did not intentionally mislead them.⁹¹

Dobrynin confirms this in his memoirs: “He was right, and I had not much to say to him in reply except to confirm that I had no real information from my government. The conversation was tense and rather embarrassing to me.”⁹² The Cuban Missile Crisis had exposed Dobrynin’s weak spot to his American negotiating partners, a position that persisted throughout his tenure at the embassy despite his close ties to Politburo members. This barrier between Moscow and Washington haunted Dobrynin, particularly in regard to Soviet policy in the Third World later in the détente era, when wars erupted in Angola and Afghanistan.

Perhaps remarkably given this fact, Dobrynin nonetheless managed to play a key role in the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Robert Kennedy may have grumbled about the backchannel, but he still chose to rely heavily on it in order to communicate with the Kremlin. Kennedy and Dobrynin spoke with one another on an almost daily basis in the early morning hours to assure secrecy.⁹³ Their most important meeting came on October 27 after the downing of a U-2 spy plane and reports of Cuban antiaircraft fire on American reconnaissance planes seemed to escalate the situation. In response, President Kennedy sent Robert Kennedy to meet with Dobrynin to solve the crisis. When the attorney general

⁹¹ Ibid., 252-53.

⁹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 81-82.

⁹³ Ibid., 75-76, and 82-83.

suggested that the Soviet government withdraw its missiles from Cuba in exchange for an American commitment not to invade Cuba, Dobrynin inquired about previous indications that the US might withdraw Jupiter missiles from Turkey as part of a deal. As instructed by the president, Robert Kennedy conceded the missiles on the condition that it remain a secret in order to placate America's NATO allies. The two composed a proposal for settlement through a backchannel, and eventually, both parties accepted the compromise, ending the crisis.⁹⁴

The Cuban Missile Crisis had a second positive outcome for Dobrynin in that it secured his victory in a power struggle for the exclusive role of Soviet envoy to the various backchannels that would develop in the coming years. Prior to the events of October 1962, multiple Soviet officials stationed in the United States had jockeyed for this position. In particular, in the time between Men'shikov's return to the USSR in January 1962 and Dobrynin's arrival in Washington in March, Soviet military intelligence officer Georgii Bol'shakov had maintained a confidential channel with Robert Kennedy.⁹⁵ Once Dobrynin established himself at the embassy, his channels competed with those of Bol'shakov, with both he and Bol'shakov reporting separately on their meetings with top Kennedy administration officials. Before the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev already wrote to President Kennedy emphasizing his "complete trust" in Dobrynin in an attempt to undermine the unorthodox Bol'shakov backchannel of the attorney general and the intelligence officer in favor of regular diplomatic channels.⁹⁶ The personal rapport between Kennedy and

⁹⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble"*, 281-82.

⁹⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 52-54.

⁹⁶ Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble"*, 184. Dobrynin also suggests that he was instructed to slowly take control of the Bol'shakov channel due to shortcomings in Bol'shakov's abilities. See Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 53.

Bol'shakov, however, made it difficult to shut down this channel, leaving Dobrynin in a precarious situation as ambassador, since Bol'shakov, a "gregarious man," served as a "competitor for Robert Kennedy's attention."⁹⁷ Only as a result of the crisis did Dobrynin—who provided a direct and official line to the Politburo—became the sole contact. Pushed aside, Bol'shakov became expendable. President Kennedy allowed his name to be published in connection with the duplicitous information fed to the US through backchannels, leading to the Kremlin's decision to recall Bol'shakov in 1962. Thus, while Dobrynin weathered the Cuban Missile Crisis, Bol'shakov became a victim of bureaucratic exile.⁹⁸

For Dobrynin himself, the critical role played by his backchannel with Robert Kennedy in resolving the crisis confirmed for him the usefulness of a confidential channel between the White House and the Kremlin. He writes in his memoirs that he "can not tell how the Cuban crisis would have ended if these contacts had not been there," implying the potential for nuclear war, the worst of possible outcomes. Further, the crisis "provided guidelines for my future diplomatic activity which I followed for the remainder of my quarter-century as an ambassador." He continues: "I tried to be an active participant in the constantly functioning confidential channel at the highest level, in order to ensure possibilities for a candid if not always pleasant dialogue between the leaders of both countries. I venture to think that at times this appeared to be the only way of preventing the

⁹⁷ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 322-23. Indeed, Dobrynin does not demonstrate a particular fondness for Bol'shakov, complaining that while the security officer served as a "good mailbox" between Soviet and American leaders in the absence of a proper ambassador, he did not have a sufficient grasp of Soviet or American policy to do much else.

⁹⁸ Naftali and Fursenko speculate that Bol'shakov had never been popular in military intelligence circles given his personal connections with the Kennedy family and his independent manner of operations. They also suggest that the Kennedys sacrificed him in order to deflect blame for not having detected the missile sites until October. See *Ibid.*, 322-23.

Cold War from turning into a hot one.”⁹⁹ In other words, he made the constant maintenance of a confidential channel between the American and Soviet leaderships his top priority as ambassador, seeing this communication as necessary to prevent a disagreement from escalating into a nuclear war.

Overall, the Cuban Missile Crisis made clear both the strengths and weaknesses of Dobrynin’s position as ambassador. On the one hand, his lack of information led him to inadvertently lie to President Kennedy and his advisors, raising doubts as to whether they should trust the veracity of his promises. The incident also profoundly affected his approach to dealing with his own government; he would no longer parrot official lines from Moscow without investigating them more carefully. “This deliberate use of an ambassador by his own government to mislead an American administration,” he later wrote, “remained a moral shock to me for years to come and left me more cautious and critical of the information I received from Moscow.”¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, Dobrynin found himself in a unique position to negotiate the resolution of the crisis. He had the ear of many of Kennedy’s top aides and, through direct contact with Moscow, he helped produce a settlement that avoided undue embarrassment for either side. In the long run, Dobrynin’s ability to function effectively as ambassador without receiving complete information from Moscow would continue to play a role in his negotiations for arms limitations during the administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon.

⁹⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 93-94.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

The Backchannel after the Cuban Missile Crisis

The years between 1962 and 1969 proved to be essential in the development of closer superpower relations. Dobrynin describes in his memoirs how, after the conclusion of the crisis, “relations with the Kennedy administration began settling into a more realistic mode in which the emphasis had to be on communication, discussion, negotiation, and continuous adjustment if not solution of the differences” between Moscow and Washington.¹⁰¹ In this new atmosphere of cooperation, the superpowers touted major accomplishments in negotiations, including the installation of the so-called “hotline” that allowed for instantaneous communication between the White House and the Kremlin during emergencies, and the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, which prohibited nuclear testing in the atmosphere, underwater, and in outer space. Still, significant challenges remained in regard to arms limitations and a final settlement on Germany, which would not be effectively addressed until the Nixon administration.

During this period, the backchannel became the primary vessel for negotiations between Dobrynin and leading American officials. In this context, many of the traits that characterized Dobrynin’s approach to diplomacy came to the fore. First, almost all of Dobrynin’s negotiating partners highlight his pragmatic, not overtly ideological approach to talks. Journalist Henry Brandon’s interviews with several American policymakers in the early 1970s highlight this feature. Robert McNamara, who served as defense secretary under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, noted, “Dobrynin is not polemical, he’s serious,” and Joseph Sisco, who served in the State Department from 1951 to 1976, reported, “He’s a thorough professional technician possessing an understanding for the American way of life.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 96.

He has a quick intellect, an attractive personality, and avoids personal acrimony. . . . He's more pragmatic than ideological and less dogmatic than most Russians I have met."¹⁰² McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, told Brandon, "I never had to repeat anything twice to him, and he is also very skilled in presenting his own case in a reasonable way."¹⁰³ Former Ambassador to the USSR and Democratic Party elder statesman W. Averill Harriman put it best: "Dobrynin doesn't give anything away, but he has the facility of understanding Americans and presenting the Russian point of view in a manner that Americans can understand. He probably does equally well in explaining the American point of view to the Russians. He's frank about the problems he has and presents them in a legitimate manner." In sum, Dobrynin "has plausible explanations for the Russian positions" and "he's ready to discuss difficult situations."¹⁰⁴

American diplomats all suggest that this approach to negotiations played a major role in helping to ease Cold War tensions during the Kennedy administration. Understanding that presenting proposals with any tinge of ideological content or language could turn off his American partners to further discussions, Dobrynin framed Soviet proposals in a way that his American interlocutors would find sympathetic, identifying the stumbling blocks that prevented progress in negotiations and attempting to find common ground. Presented in these terms, Soviet concerns with particular issues made more sense to American diplomats, which then made them feel more comfortable going forward in the negotiating process

¹⁰² "Sisco" and "McNamara," Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰³ "Dobrynin," page 11, Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁴ "Dobrynin," page 6, and "Harriman," Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

knowing that their positions would be clearly explained to the Kremlin.

Second, Dobrynin's use of humor to defuse awkward or tense moments and anecdotes to clarify difficult situations made an impression on all of his negotiating partners. Two examples shed light on this aspect of Dobrynin's persona. In July 1969, Henry Brandon had dinner with several prominent American officials at the home of then CIA director Richard M. Helms. Brandon recalls that the American officials began swapping anecdotes told to them by Dobrynin. Helms started, telling a story about a major Soviet airplane factory, where the first test model lost a wing on its initial test. The engineers tried to fix the flaw, but on the second test flight, the plane once again lost a wing. The next day, the manager, who had been fretting the potential consequences of a third failed test, received an anonymous note, suggesting that they put a row of holes at regular intervals on the wings. This worked, and the plane flew flawlessly. The manager later discovered that one of the cleaning women left the note, and when he called her in for an explanation, she simply said that toilet paper always tore at the wrong place until they put holes in it.¹⁰⁵ Robert McNamara went second, telling a story Dobrynin had conveyed about a boy working in a bakery during the war. To prevent theft, the bakery placed guards at the exit doors to search everyone before leaving. Stealing declined, but when one of his co-workers had a birthday, the boy decided to surprise him with a party and a gift of bread. The boy thought he could sneak the bread out by rolling the dough into a long noodle and wrapping it around his chest. To the boy's relief, the guards didn't search him, but rather escorted him to a mandatory parade where he had to stand at attention. As he stood there for hours, the dough began to

¹⁰⁵ "Notes from dinner with the Helms, July 29, 1969," Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

rise and his clothes began to bulge. The police noticed this and arrested him.¹⁰⁶

Although Brandon's notes do not explain the context for these stories, both are revealing for several reasons. First, they show the strong impression made by Dobrynin's anecdotes, as his negotiating partners clearly remembered them beyond the talks. More importantly, they demonstrate a more realistic depiction of Soviet society than these men received from previous Soviet diplomats. Whereas many Russians might have found anecdotes about workplace theft, forced participation in marches, and engineering failures at factories familiar and amusing, Americans were not used to hearing such stories from cold warriors such as Dobrynin's predecessors. To his American partners, Dobrynin's anecdotes suggested that he did not take ideology too seriously, a fact that seemed to earn him their respect.

A further example of Dobrynin's use of anecdote comes from Joseph Sisco, who recalled that, during tense negotiations over the Middle East, Dobrynin referenced a scene from Gogol's *Dead Souls*, in which a landowner attempts to borrow money using "dead souls"—that is, serfs who were dead, but not yet registered as dead in the census—as collateral. The moneylender consents to the loan, but requests a receipt for the serfs before handing over the money. The landowner persists that he will not hand over the receipt until he receives the cash. The two finally agree to place the money and the receipt for the serfs in the middle of the table so that each could snatch the others' contribution to the deal. Sisco notes that "with a twinkle in his eyes," Dobrynin concluded that superpower diplomats faced a similar situation in Middle East negotiations: "the only trouble is that neither party is

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

willing to move its contribution to the middle of the table.”¹⁰⁷ In this way, Dobrynin defused a tense situation with a joke, while suggesting that both sides ought to take the first step to offer their end of the compromise.

Although the backchannel helped facilitate superpower diplomats to discuss their problems, they could not solve them without consensus between Moscow and Washington. On the twin issues of recognition of the postwar division of Germany and reduction of the superpowers’ respective military forces in Europe, negotiators hit brick wall after brick wall. Khrushchev directed Dobrynin to continue pressing Soviet demands, despite providing no room for concessions that would make a breakthrough possible. With no new directions, Dobrynin simply repeated that the Soviet side sought a demilitarization of Germany and/or a neutral Berlin, recognition of the status quo in Germany, and a nonaggression treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. For his part, Rusk, his partner in these discussions, restated that no solution was possible that did not ensure the security of West Berlin. Dobrynin and Rusk met every few weekends to discuss these issues informally. Eventually, Rusk joked that these talks had become so repetitive and monotonous that they could save time by assigning a number to each question and answer for both sides. Rusk explained: “After I say, for instance, ‘I have asked question number five,’ you would reply, ‘Answer number six,’ and so on. Then you can send home a detailed report, and I can inform the president about the meeting.”¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, Khrushchev could not accept that the American commitment to West Berlin represented a broader commitment to West European security, and this was one

¹⁰⁷ “Dobrynin,” pages 8-10, Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁸ For the initial discussions of Germany between Dobrynin and Rusk, see Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 63-67. For discussions after the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 98-99.

concession that American officials simply could not make.¹⁰⁹

If Khrushchev's inability to compromise over certain matters prevented the backchannel from achieving better relations in this period, skepticism over the importance of improving Soviet-American relations permeated the Soviet bureaucracy. On July 30, 1962, Dobrynin sent a note to Moscow describing a conversation he had with Jacqueline Kennedy. The first lady suggested that the Soviet government send equestrian Sergei Filatov, gold medalist in the 1960 Olympics, to serve as a goodwill ambassador at an American equestrian competition. He could take photos with the first lady, start the race, and give interviews to the press. Dobrynin recognized that showing off a legitimate Soviet star to an American audience at a popular sporting event would have a decidedly positive effect on the Soviet Union's image in the US, and he strongly recommended that Moscow agree to the proposal. However, both the Soviet Sports Committee and the cultural affairs office responded negatively to Dobrynin's request.¹¹⁰ This episode highlights Dobrynin's work to expand relations beyond top-level talks, something that was not yet a priority for the Kremlin bureaucracy, but later became crucial to détente.

Following President Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, international events undermined Dobrynin's work more seriously than the Kremlin's lack of interest in cultural exchanges. First, American escalation of the Vietnam War cooled Soviet enthusiasm for Soviet-American diplomatic initiatives beginning in 1965. During the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the Politburo sent Council of Ministers Chairman Aleksei Kosygin to the US for urgent talks with Johnson to kick-start

¹⁰⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 542.

¹¹⁰ Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 9518, op. 1, d. 350, ll. 143-45.

superpower negotiations. However, Kosygin, irritated over American support for Israel, proved unprepared to begin negotiations with Johnson over antiballistic missile systems.¹¹¹ In an attempt to improve his international prestige before his term ended, Johnson tried to initiate arms limitations negotiations by brokering a final summit through the backchannel. Moscow did not even bother to respond until Dobrynin stressed that the Kremlin's silence "was becoming embarrassing." Pushed to act, the Kremlin sent an invitation for Johnson to visit Moscow on August 17, 1968. Three days later, Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia, effectively ending backchannel negotiations for arms control as well as any hope for the summit meeting.¹¹² Oleg Kalugin, then deputy chief of the Washington station for the KGB, claims that he witnessed Dobrynin read the telegram announcing the invasion. According to Kalugin, Dobrynin called the operation a "monstrous folly" and "idiotic," predicting that it would become "a crippling blow to all our good beginnings with America." He advised his staff to "brace ourselves for a lot of unpleasantness."¹¹³

In sum, Dobrynin's work with his backchannel partners prepared the ground for détente and garnered some early successes, including the installation of the hotline and the Limited Test Ban Treaty. At the same time, most leaders in Moscow and Washington were not yet ready to pursue greater progress at this time. Germany remained a thorn in the side of negotiations, and conflicts in Vietnam and Czechoslovakia drew leaders on both sides away from the table. Major breakthroughs in talks had to wait until conditions changed a few years later.

¹¹¹ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 198-200.

¹¹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 177-87.

¹¹³ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 118-19.

“My Favorite Bolshevik”

During his early years as ambassador, Dobrynin built on the extensive network of American contacts that he first established during his previous tours of duty in the US. Bessmertnykh emphasizes his “rare gift for building and maintaining reliable contacts in the upper strata of the US elite,” boasting that “there were no influential figures in America he was not acquainted with.” Dobrynin’s network of contacts seems especially impressive given that he not only courted government officials and Congressmen, but also central figures in public affairs, culture, business, and the press. Moreover, Dobrynin “never leaned toward any particular political party,” as he understood that policy initiatives required some level of bipartisan support to succeed and that the party that held power at any given point in time could quickly lose it.¹¹⁴

The clearest demonstration of Dobrynin’s efforts to build connections with the American elite comes through his relationship with W. Averell Harriman, the Democratic Party mainstay who held tremendous sway in Washington from the Roosevelt administration through the Reagan administration. Harriman, who alternately described Dobrynin as “my favorite Bolshevik” and “the nicest Bolshevik I know,”¹¹⁵ served as the US ambassador to the USSR during World War II and Secretary of Commerce under President Harry S. Truman. He played various roles in the State Department under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, including chief negotiator at the Paris peace talks on Vietnam, and he continued as an elder statesman of the Democratic Party during the Nixon years, advising leaders and grooming young talent. He served as a liaison between Party figures and international

¹¹⁴ Bessmertnykh, "Posol velikoi derzhavy."

¹¹⁵ Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; and Lars-Erik Nelson, Steven Strasser, and Fred Coleman, "Moscow's Mr. Fixit," *Newsweek* May 21, 1979.

leaders, particularly in the Soviet Union, where his work as wartime ambassador had earned him lasting respect.¹¹⁶ Harriman kept a detailed record of his relationship with Dobrynin. His files include memoranda of conversation, gift cards sent on Harriman's birthdays and wedding anniversaries, and invitations to parties, films, and lectures. They provide an important source in determining how Dobrynin established and maintained his network of contacts, calling on them to help him solve diplomatic challenges as they arose.

Dobrynin made an indelible impression on Harriman during their first meeting on April 2, 1962, shortly after Dobrynin assumed the ambassadorship. Harriman's report of the conversation emphasizes that, after exchanging pleasantries, Dobrynin conveyed greetings from Khrushchev, with whom Dobrynin implied that he had "a close and cordial relationship." Then the conversation turned to Laos, where American-sponsored right-wing General Phoumi Nosavan continued his war against state forces despite urging from President John F. Kennedy and the CIA to lay down his arms and join a coalition government. Harriman asked Dobrynin for advice on "how to 'twist General Phoumi's arm,' since he understood the Soviets were expert in that field." Dobrynin demurred, suggesting that it was actually the Americans who were specialists when it came to the "twist." He "confessed that he had not learned the dance but understood how it was done. He then demonstrated with gestures that 'you simultaneously wipe your back with an imaginary towel while grinding out an imaginary cigarette on the floor in front of you, first with one foot and then the other.'" Following the meeting, Dobrynin talked with the media, and Harriman

¹¹⁶ For works on Harriman's life, see W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946* (New York: Random House, 1975); Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992); and Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made: Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986). Unfortunately, Harriman's memoirs cover his work only during World War II.

notes that he “handled them pleasantly without saying anything of substance.” Apparently satisfied with Dobrynin’s ability to discuss important issues, talk to the media, influence the Moscow leadership, grasp American cultural references, and employ humor in official talks, Harriman concludes, “In the whole conversation he showed himself a great improvement over his predecessor in personality and temperament.”¹¹⁷

After meeting Harriman, Dobrynin maintained ties in a number of ways. He sent Harriman gifts each year on his birthday, wedding anniversary, and Christmas, usually consisting of Harriman’s “favorite Russian products”: vodka and caviar. The gift tags and thank you notes saved by Harriman indicate that, occasionally, Dobrynin would include other items in his gift packages, such as a “charmingly decorated” lacquer box, a book on the Bolshoi Theater, and Russian chocolates, sent from Dobrynin’s wife Irina to Harriman’s wife Marie. Harriman reciprocated, in kind, and in 1968, sent a paperweight model of the *Caroline*, the family plane that John F. Kennedy used while campaigning.¹¹⁸ While this exchange of gifts may seem superficial, it served to sustain lines of communication with Harriman, even during Republican administrations, and it helped keep the relationship between Dobrynin and Harriman friendly. The fact that Harriman saved these mementos provides an indication of the value he placed on this relationship.

Even when Republicans held the reins of power under Presidents Nixon and Reagan, leaving Harriman with less influence on policy decisions, the two figures continued to meet in both official and social capacities. They frequently dined together, sometimes including their wives in the festivities, and they used these opportunities to discuss the approaches of

¹¹⁷ Box 455, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁸ For the gift tags and notes thanking Dobrynin, see Box 998, Folder 1, and Box 455, Folders 1 and 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

their respective nations to the major questions of international affairs.¹¹⁹ These talks were candid, informal, and did not contain the kind of ideological overtones that colored meetings between other prominent state officials. Additional meetings allowed Dobrynin to gain access to Harriman's circle of powerful allies in the Democratic Party. In April 1975, for example, Dobrynin suggested that Harriman invite some of his Democratic friends in Congress to his house one afternoon for drinks, where Dobrynin could meet with them and answer questions about Soviet policy.¹²⁰ Discussions over dinner or drinks often provided Dobrynin and Harriman with information they could not receive from other sources, private insight into the other country's affairs, and critical contacts, as they sought to improve superpower relations and put their personal stamps on détente's successes. During the Nixon administration, conversation repeatedly turned to Kissinger, and Dobrynin gave frank evaluations of the national security advisor's approach when meeting with Harriman. When the backchannel produced positive results, Dobrynin had nothing but praise for Kissinger. In June 1973, Harriman recorded that Dobrynin "was still very high on Kissinger and said that Kissinger was a relief from the State Department, that the State Department niggled and quibbled over every unimportant detail whereas Kissinger was prepared to give in on unimportant small points for other larger, far-seeing policies."¹²¹ When things did not go as well, Dobrynin could be far more critical of his negotiating partner. For instance, in April 1974, Dobrynin confided to Harriman that Kissinger had not informed the embassy of

¹¹⁹ Box 445, Folder 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁰ Although Harriman does not follow up on this in his files, he seemed amenable to the idea, and it likely occurred. Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²¹ "Notes from dinner with Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin on June 4, 1973," Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

American intentions to raise the alert status of the American nuclear arsenal during the October War between Arab and Israeli forces in 1973. Dobrynin bluntly stated that “if [Kissinger] had checked with him there never would have been a so-called crisis.” This prompted Harriman to note in his record of the conversation that “the whole thing seems to be a fairly shabby affair,” taking Dobrynin’s side and blaming Nixon and Kissinger for undermining the basis of détente.¹²²

Just as Dobrynin provided Harriman with informal assessments of the progress of negotiations, Harriman served as a source for Dobrynin to better understand American political life. When Dobrynin asked about Harriman’s predictions for the Republican presidential primaries, he responded that the Republican establishment would probably select Richard Nixon unless polls suggested that Nixon could not defeat a Democratic opponent. In that case, Harriman argued, they would likely turn to Nelson Rockefeller. When Harriman said that Rockefeller was “playing an intelligent game,” acting coy about his intentions until the public mood became clearer, Dobrynin interrupted: “Do you think Rockefeller is really intelligent?” Harriman replied, “Well meaning, and better than Nixon, but still a Republican.” He advised Dobrynin to focus on negotiating with Johnson on Vietnam and arms limitations immediately, as the Republicans would undoubtedly take a more hawkish position on these questions.¹²³ A few months later, Harriman broached this topic again to repeat his position on Nixon and Rockefeller and add that he felt Robert Kennedy would

¹²² “Memorandum of Conversation with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, April 18, 1974,” Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²³ “Memorandum of Conversation with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, January 7, 1968,” Box 455, Folder 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

most likely win the Democratic nomination.¹²⁴ In this sense, Dobrynin's American contacts, particularly seasoned experts like Harriman, gave him insider knowledge on political shifts in power in Washington, as well as on the prospects for Soviet-American relations should a particular candidate get elected.

In addition, Harriman and Dobrynin reviewed Soviet and American history, sometimes for their own edification, sometimes to shed light on current affairs. In the same January 1968 conversation where they appraised the probable results of the Republican primary, Harriman and Dobrynin discussed Khrushchev's legacy. Harriman brought up the so-called corn campaign, when Khrushchev attempted to dramatically increase corn production in the Soviet Union. Dobrynin agreed with Harriman's critique that it was unwise to plant corn in an environment not suited for it. He followed by criticizing the virgin lands campaign, Khrushchev's attempt to open up the Soviet steppe to agriculture. On this matter, both Harriman and Dobrynin concurred that Khrushchev should have expanded in small steps rather than trying to force change on a massive scale. Harriman concluded: "The purport of Dobrynin's remarks was that Khrushchev was turned out because he went off on his own sometimes unwisely without full consultation." This discussion of Soviet history merits attention because, far from mere small talk, it provided a vehicle for both men to indirectly indicate to the other their personal leadership style. Indeed, Dobrynin used this conversation about Khrushchev's campaigns to emphasize the "very serious" and "sincere" nature of the present Party leadership, in contrast to "impulsive" gamblers like

¹²⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, April 1, 1968," Box 455, Folder 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Harriman added that Dobrynin never disputed his assertion that "Khrushchev's aversion to Nixon was shared by all good Russians."

Khrushchev.¹²⁵

Moreover, in April, Dobrynin asked Harriman a lengthy set of questions about his experiences negotiating with Stalin and Molotov during World War II. At the end of the conversation, Dobrynin affirmed Harriman's depiction of Molotov as "an extraordinarily rigid individual who was difficult to negotiate with." Unlike the Khrushchev discussion, which Dobrynin transparently used to distance the current leadership from the impulsive former first secretary, Harriman wondered why Dobrynin insisted on discussing Molotov, but speculated that it was to gain insight into Harriman's perspective on the history of Soviet-American relations.¹²⁶ Regardless, Dobrynin's comments to Harriman match Dobrynin's later comments in his memoirs, suggesting that he spoke with candor when discussing philosophical and historical topics with Harriman.¹²⁷ These conversations illustrated that Dobrynin understood diplomatic problems within a longer historical perspective, and used history as a tool to explain changes in Soviet foreign policy to his American partners.

Dobrynin's contacts were not limited to the world of politics, as demonstrated by his relationship with PepsiCo CEO Donald M. Kendall. For years, Kendall endeavored to open the Soviet market to Pepsi products, and in 1959, as a young executive in charge of

¹²⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, January 7, 1968," Box 455, Folder 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, April 1, 1968," Box 455, Folder 2, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁷ For example, in his memoirs, Dobrynin states that Khrushchev fell out of favor because "in the opinion of his colleagues [he] had become uncontrollable in his emotions and willful in making decisions," pursuing "sudden turns and radical innovations." Regarding Khrushchev and the corn campaign, he writes, "Corn was his hobby and he tried to have it cultivated in Russia wherever possible, even where the conditions were unsuitable. Moscow's climate was certainly unfit for this crop, and he had been told so by Soviet specialists, but he did not trust them." Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 62, 128-30. He characterizes Molotov as "utterly dogmatic" and incapable of the "traditional diplomatic give-and-take through which one side can hint something new to the other." He also describes his year of working under Molotov as "the most difficult period in my whole career." Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 28-32.

international sales, he successfully obtained permission to serve Pepsi at the 1959 American Exhibition in Moscow. This resulted in the iconic photographs of Kendall and his close friend, then Vice President Richard Nixon, sipping Pepsi with Khrushchev. According to Kendall's account, Khrushchev enjoyed Pepsi, drinking at least a half-dozen cups of the American beverage and passing some out to other people in his entourage.¹²⁸ The beverage was also a hit with less prominent Soviet visitors to the exhibition. One pensioner wrote in the exhibition's visitor's book that he was "very happy to have survived to the day when I, with my own eyes, was able to see the American National Exhibition," concluding, "Thank you for the wonderful drink Pepsi Cola!"¹²⁹

While Pepsi made quite an impression on both the top Soviet leadership and the ordinary visitors to the American Exhibition, a trade deal came into place only fifteen years later, thanks to the intervention of Dobrynin. In order to expand his business into the Soviet Union, Kendall made full use of his political connections. When Nixon rose to the presidency in 1969, Kendall received access to Kissinger and Dobrynin, who put him in touch with the Soviet officials who helped him conclude the trade deal.¹³⁰ From that point,

¹²⁸ Donald M. Kendall, "Donald Kendall's experience," http://www.pepsico.com/Global-Sites/Russia/Donald_Kendall_Experience.html.

¹²⁹ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 193-200.

¹³⁰ Joseph Finder, *Red Carpet* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983), 209. Kendall's ties to the Nixon administration were legendary. Kissinger often took Kendall's calls about Soviet trade, and in September 1972 Kendall even persuaded him to bring up the issue of delays in the Pepsi deal in his upcoming meetings with Brezhnev. Kissinger-Kendall Telephone Conversation, September 6, 1972, 6:10 PM, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSArch. Kendall's standing with Kissinger was so solid that he felt comfortable calling in April 1973 to make a suggestion for the next ambassador to the Soviet Union. Kendall recommended Maurice Stans, the former Secretary of Commerce who had been indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice in connection with Watergate. Kissinger did not agree with the choice, citing the scandal surrounding him and claiming that Stans did not have "the sense of subtlety" needed in Moscow, but he promised to listen to Kendall's full pitch later in the week. Kendall expressed a hope that something could be done for Stans in the wake of Watergate. Kissinger-Kendall Telephone Conversation, April 2, 1973, 3:31 PM, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, NSArch. As Seymour Hersh has explained, Kendall also played a critical role in bolstering the Nixon administration's resolve to block the Allende presidency in Chile,

Kendall became one of the few American businessmen with ties to the top Soviet leadership. Through his connections at the embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Kendall even met with Brezhnev, later telling Alistair Horne that “if [Brezhnev] had been born in the US, he would have been head of the Barnum and Bailey Circus!”¹³¹

In exchange for getting him the appropriate connections in Moscow, Kendall became a regular Dobrynin confidant, informing the Soviet ambassador of the internal dynamics of future Republican presidential administrations. In 1976, Kendall told Dobrynin that he consulted with President Gerald Ford about his presidential campaign, criticizing the incumbent president’s anti-Soviet public statements.¹³² During the Reagan administration, Kendall informed Dobrynin of conflicts within the top leadership, reporting on conversations with officials such as Al Haig and George Schultz and advocating closer ties with the Soviet Union.¹³³ Kendall also put Dobrynin in touch with key businessmen in the US. In 1977, for example, Kendall flew with the Dobrynins in a private jet to Alaska, where they planned to visit some early settlements in the former Russian colony and visit several oil processing facilities as guests of the Atlantic Richfield Company.¹³⁴

Dobrynin’s promotion of personal contacts with American figures such as Harriman and Kendall demonstrates his foresight as a diplomat. While busy negotiating détente with Nixon and Kissinger, he nevertheless invested energy into maintaining his relationship with Harriman, even though he understood that it could not bear immediate fruit. Rather, he

as “Nixon was primarily protecting the interests of his corporate benefactors.” Seymour M. Hersch, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 296.

¹³¹ Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*, 146. Kendall also informed Horne that Brezhnev told anti-Semitic jokes and, nudging the American businessman, said, “Don’t tell Henry!”

¹³² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 366.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 488-89, 509.

¹³⁴ “Soviet Ambassador Begins Tour of State,” *Anchorage Daily News*, October 28, 1977, 2.

grasped that the cyclical nature of American politics and the fact that someday in the future, Harriman might be relevant again. He also understood the value that Kendall would have as a contact, providing him with insider knowledge of Republican administrations and top business circles.

Diplomatic Chameleon

As the Harriman relationship suggests, during his time as ambassador, Dobrynin perfected his skills as a “chameleon,” immersing himself in American culture and blending in with American society at all levels. Dobrynin’s ability to mingle with members of high society proved essential to his success. Harriman told Brandon, who was writing an article on Dobrynin in 1970, that he recently invited the Soviet ambassador for a two-day trip to Harriman’s vacation home at Hobe Sound. Harriman observed that Dobrynin spent his time swimming in the pool, walking along the beach with his wife, and driving around the countryside, and that he “fitted in easily” with high society “and didn’t need to be entertained.”¹³⁵

Moreover, Dobrynin flourished in the party scene in Washington, making quick friends with members of the Washington elite and pursuing contacts with the movers and shakers of the city’s capital. *Newsweek* noted Dobrynin’s affinity for the party scene upon his arrival in Washington: “Dobrynin’s partiality for things Western extends to Scotch-and-soda and Washington cocktail parties, which other incredulous diplomats say the Russian attends because he actually enjoys them.”¹³⁶ In her diary, Lady Byrd Johnson describes how

¹³⁵ “Harriman on Dobrynin,” Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁶ Weintal, “The Bear That Walks Like An American.”

at one party for the diplomatic corps in the first months of the Johnson administration, she “had a whirl with everybody from the French Ambassador to Anatoly Dobrynin of Russia, which I am sure caused all the lady reporters to get out their pads and pencils (But he was covering the territory, because he got around to [the Johnsons’ daughter] Lynda Bird too!).”¹³⁷ Dobrynin hoped to use the party to make an impression on the new president and his family, and, at least in Lady Bird’s case, it seems to have been successful. At other points in her diary, she refers to Dobrynin as “affable,” “talkative,” and “beaming,” stating that “there is always a little rustle of excitement when [Dobrynin] rises” to give a speech at these events, as he speaks “in very clear English and very clear words and with dramatic effect.”¹³⁸

When attending these parties, Dobrynin always brought his wife Irina, who also had been an aircraft engineer during World War II and developed a fluency in English and a love of American culture while stationed in the US with her husband, and their strong relationship improved his image among key segments of the Washington elite. Lady Bird recalls how, during a state dinner, the two women discussed the challenges of interacting with old friends at home after embarking on their new lives in Washington. Irina chimed in that “when they were at home in Russia, their old-time neighbors kept on giving Dobrynin advice as Ambassador, just as though he were still the boy next door.” This personal interaction reflected well on the Dobrynins, and Lady Bird gushed that Irina was “vivacious” with perfect English and that they made an “attractive couple.”¹³⁹ Years later, writing in his diary about a 1982 dinner for the diplomatic corps, President Ronald Reagan expressed similar sentiments about the Dobrynin family: “Everything we’ve heard is true—[the Dobrynins] are

¹³⁷ Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 70.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 482, 541, 644, and 692.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 482.

a most likeable couple. In fact so much so you wonder how they can stick with the phoniness of the Soviet system.” Four days later, Reagan felt compelled to revisit this topic: “Truth is he and his wife are most likeable and very much in love with each other after 40 years of marriage.”¹⁴⁰ In this sense, Dobrynin’s cultivated public image of himself as a family man at Washington parties helped humanize him to American guests, even appealing to hardliners like Reagan, who did not expect or desire to find him likeable.

In 1976, *Parade* magazine painted a picture of the Dobrynins as the life of the party. One hostess recalled that “the Dobrynins made a big splash on the Washington social scene when they first took over the embassy,” and, when compared to previous ambassador Men’shikov, “they seemed especially relaxed and sophisticated.” Dobrynin made use of his legendary storytelling and joke-telling abilities to captivate guests. The wife of famous Washington lawyer Sylvan Marshall, who frequently entertained the Dobrynins, told *Parade* that “if you ever go to a dinner party and sit next to him, you’ll have the time of your life.” Irina, a skilled concert pianist, sat at the piano and encouraged guests to sing along with her. As Robert McNamara’s wife said, “They knew all the music and lyrics to American and international, as well as Russian songs.”¹⁴¹ When the embassy hosted a party for members of the Washington elite, they did not turn down the invitation, and fourteen years into their stay in Washington, the Dobrynins were still much sought-after guests by elites looking to throw showy cocktail parties.

Dobrynin used the festive environment of the parties to maintain his contacts with

¹⁴⁰ Ronald Reagan, ed. by Douglas Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 70.

¹⁴¹ Connecticut Walker, “Presenting the Soviet Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin,” *Parade*, March 17, 1976. Connecticut Walker was the pen name of Brooke Shearer, journalist and wife to Strobe Talbott, who later served as director of the White House Fellows program.

American officials, sometimes taking them aside to discuss the important business of the day. Lady Bird explained that at one black-tie diplomatic reception: “Dobrynin of Russia and Dean Rusk sat on the sofa in the Red Room for over an hour talking quietly, while people passed, casting glances over their shoulders, wishing, I suppose, that they could eavesdrop.”¹⁴² The Soviet Embassy also threw several dozen parties a year, where Dobrynin pulled aside influential Americans to conduct important business. *The Evening Star* describes an embassy party for Red Army Day with about 600 guests, where “party talk focused on trade ties and cultural exchanges rather than saber-rattling.” The article notes: “In a corner of the dining room, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin was seen in long conversation with a foursome which one guest assumed was a delegation of East European diplomats getting the latest word from Moscow.” The author discovered that, to her surprise: “the foursome was from the US Department of Commerce. They declined to be identified, ‘because we’re here unofficially,’ one of them explained.”¹⁴³

Beyond attending the high-society events to nurture his network, Dobrynin pursued other methods of blending into American culture that would help him better understand American society. The Dobrynins continued their habit of taking road trip vacations, and by 1976, they had driven across the country in a rented car several times, developing friendships and shooting endless reels of home movies. By this time, they had reportedly visited every state except Alaska, and had seen every major city except New Orleans. Unlike most ambassadors’ wives, Irina did most of the family’s shopping.¹⁴⁴ She drove her own car, and when the Dobrynins arrived in Washington in 1962, she endured an ordeal experienced by

¹⁴² Johnson, *A White House Diary*, 286.

¹⁴³ Ruth Dean, “600 at Soviet Fete,” *The Evening Star*, February 24, 1970.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, “Presenting the Soviet Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin.”

every American, standing in line for three hours to take a driving test, rather than requesting diplomatic privilege and receiving a license without the wait.¹⁴⁵ The Dobrynins were avid cyclists, and the ambassador sometimes rode to McDonald's with his granddaughter for dinner.¹⁴⁶ Dobrynin took part in American cultural events when he traveled as well. Sometimes he did this as an official representative of the Soviet government, including at boxing matches between American and Soviet competitors and performances by the Soviet dance, theater, and music troupes visiting Washington.¹⁴⁷ Frequently, though, Dobrynin attended events on his own initiative. During his interview session with Dobrynin, Brandon noted that, when on business trips to his favorite American city, New York, Dobrynin did his best to take in a musical, which he viewed as the quintessential American art form.¹⁴⁸

In this regard, Dobrynin was not merely a keen observer of American society, but also a participant in it. His engagement with Americana allowed him to better understand his negotiating partners and the nature of his position as representative to the US, as well as to report more accurately to Moscow on the public mood. As part of their interview, Harriman told Brandon: "It is difficult to explain why certain Russians are more at ease than others.

¹⁴⁵ Weintal, "The Bear That Walks Like An American."

¹⁴⁶ Matt Schudel, "Anatoly Dobrynin, former Soviet ambassador to U.S., dies," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2010. *Newsweek* notes that two days after the Dobrynins returned to Washington in March 1962, they rented bicycles in East Potomac Park. The stand was closed, with a sign reading "US Government Property. The article concludes, "The stand had been taken over by the CIA." See Weintal, "The Bear That Walks Like An American." Veteran journalist Marvin Kalb also notes Dobrynin's bicycle trips to McDonald's as a sign of the ambassador's unique interaction with American culture. See "Anatoly Dobrynin, Key Soviet Diplomat, Dies at 90," National Public Radio, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125754070>.

¹⁴⁷ Since Dobrynin had to seek permission from the State Department to travel in the country, with details that included flight itinerary, the identification numbers for both the primary and reserve airplanes, the identity of flight crew members, and a list of estimated times that the plane would fly over certain towns, records of his trips exist in the Archive of Foreign Policy. For the boxing match, see Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF), f. 192, op. 59, p. 368, d.1, l. 95.

¹⁴⁸ "Dobrynin Interview," pg. 22, Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Why for instance, was Mikoyan much easier to talk to than Molotov? Why is Dobrynin more a man of the world than Malik or Menshikov or Zorin? Perhaps because he knows that it is important for him in order to succeed in his job.”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, without his commitment to blending into the American scene, Dobrynin would not have been able to accomplish his main tasks as ambassador as effectively. He would not have had such an extensive network, which proved critical to accomplishing diplomatic tasks, and he would not have had such a firm grasp on American popular opinion or the attitudes of American policymakers, a necessary tool for him to frame his diplomatic initiatives to his American partners.

Any account of Dobrynin’s tenure at the embassy would be incomplete without a discussion of his interactions with Moscow, which demonstrate his unique ability to explain American affairs in a way that made sense to Politburo members, who generally had a weak grasp of American politics. Dobrynin served as ambassador under five general secretaries and survived cataclysmic moments in superpower affairs, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. If there is a plethora of evidence suggesting why, under these trying circumstances, most American officials wanted Dobrynin to remain in Washington, there is much less to explain why the Soviet government left him in the US for twenty-four years.

Several sources argue that Dobrynin stayed in Washington because his return to Moscow would have posed a threat to Gromyko. According to this argument, Dobrynin built enough prestige abroad that the only other suitable post would be foreign minister, where his direct superior, Gromyko, was comfortably ensconced. American journalist Connecticut Walker, for example, gave credence to this theory during the Cold War by writing that

¹⁴⁹ “Harriman on Dobrynin,” Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Dobrynin's "skillful behind-the-scenes stage-setting and presence at top-level negotiating sessions fuel rumors that he may one day replace Andrei Gromyko as Russia's foreign minister."¹⁵⁰ After the end of the Cold War, KGB General Kalugin and former Dobrynin aide Iulii Vorontsov both supported this assertion.¹⁵¹

That said, Dobrynin states just the opposite in his memoirs, explaining his longevity as a result of the fact that Brezhnev valued stability and expertise in establishing his foreign policy team. He supports this position with two anecdotes. First, he describes how, during each trip to Moscow, he gave a full debriefing on American affairs to Brezhnev. When he asked for instructions, Brezhnev simply replied, "What instructions do you need?—you know better than I how to deal with the Americans. Let there be peace; that's the main thing." Second, Dobrynin addresses Brezhnev's attitudes toward Gromyko, writing: "Contrary to Khrushchev, who at times imposed his will on Gromyko (as well as on other colleagues), Brezhnev gave his foreign minister full rein because he was sure that Gromyko was a better specialist in international affairs than he was. Besides, Brezhnev and Gromyko were friends."¹⁵² In Dobrynin's view, desire to maintain stability in the hierarchy, as well as concern for continued professionalism drove the Kremlin to keep Dobrynin in Washington. Moreover, by the time détente began, Dobrynin had an extensive network of sponsors in the Soviet Union who could intervene on his behalf against opponents in the Moscow bureaucracy who wished to remove Dobrynin, perhaps because he had become too

¹⁵⁰ Walker, "Presenting the Soviet Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin."

¹⁵¹ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 115; and Gagik Karapetian and Valdimir Grachev-Selikh, eds., *Ot Molotova do Lavrova: Nenapisannnye vospominaniia Iuliia Vorontsova* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Tsentr Rerikhov; Master-Bank, 2011), 138.

¹⁵² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 130-31.

“Americanized.”¹⁵³

There were other practical reasons for the Soviet government to allow Dobrynin to stay in Washington. His job performance generally met their expectations. Dobrynin told Brandon that the primary responsibilities of a good ambassador are “to report to his superiors as true and fair a picture as possible; secondly, to provide them with honest proposals of how to act under certain circumstances; and thirdly, to have the courage to tell the facts as they are and to advise his government what reactions it can expect from certain decisions.”¹⁵⁴

Dobrynin adhered to these criteria, producing long, detailed memos that honestly reported the progress with negotiations. He also provided generally accurate recommendations for proceeding, and advised the Soviet government on how the Americans might react to specific proposals. Moreover, Dobrynin’s memoirs make clear that he did not want to leave.¹⁵⁵

Perhaps most importantly, no other Soviet diplomat could replicate Dobrynin’s extensive network of American friends in high places. Dobrynin spent his entire career establishing contacts with prominent Americans, and the loss of such a network would undoubtedly play a major role in damaging future relations.

Thus, by making himself indispensable to both his Soviet bosses and his American negotiating partners, Dobrynin assured that he would hold onto the post of ambassador longer than any other Soviet diplomat. An American diplomat interviewed by *The New York Times* expressed it best: “He simply has to have some sensitivity to the flow of things and events in Moscow and Washington and a shrewd sense of how to position himself in both

¹⁵³ Ibid., 354.

¹⁵⁴ “Dobrynin,” page 13, Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 601-2.

capitals so he's with the flow and it doesn't run over him." The anonymous official also credits "that special feel he has for 'translating' from the Russian into American and from the American into Russian, and doing it in such a way that the objective is achieved without the undesired effects of anger and resentment."¹⁵⁶ Bessmertnykh, who helped Dobrynin compose the reports of conversations that he submitted to the Kremlin, repeated this praise, explaining that Dobrynin provided arguments in favor of closer Soviet-American relations to leaders in both Moscow and Washington. In times of great tension, he showed sensitivity in phrasing his comments to both parties in such a way that the policy of Soviet-American rapprochement would be understood as the best way to proceed.¹⁵⁷ Dobrynin's ability to sense the political mood of the time and place and incorporate it into his negotiations served him well as the superpowers entered détente, the most important period in his ambassadorial career. In sum, Dobrynin's efforts to become a diplomatic "chameleon" were central to his accomplishments as a Soviet diplomat, as he successfully retained his message, but changed his method of presentation to promote closer Soviet-American relations both in Washington and in Moscow.

The Public Face of Anatoly Dobrynin

Outside of Washington's social circles, Dobrynin seemed more than happy to avoid the public spotlight. He rarely granted newspaper interviews and he almost never appeared on national television. As he told Connecticut Walker of *Parade*, "Well, I have been a

¹⁵⁶ Anthony Austin, "Ambassador Dobrynin, Key Man in Arms Talks, Long Esteemed as Bridge to Kremlin," *New York Times*, June 4, 1979.

¹⁵⁷ Bessmertnykh, "Posol velikoi derzhavy."

faceless diplomat for the last 18 years and managed to do all right.”¹⁵⁸ In his interview with Brandon, Dobrynin noted that he gave ten speeches the previous year and sixteen speeches the year before that. The embassy press office did not make copies of these speeches available to the public, so the public reach of these speeches did not extend far beyond the limited number of people who actually heard him speak.¹⁵⁹

A rare copy of one 1964 speech that Dobrynin gave at the Economic Club of Detroit helps explain his approach to handling the American public.¹⁶⁰ It came in the early years of Dobrynin’s ambassadorship, before he reached the pinnacle of his influence. This speech, “The Soviet Union Today,” covers a variety of topics, though Dobrynin focuses on economic issues, due to his intended audience of businessmen at the Economic Club. There are moments when Dobrynin’s charm comes to the fore. In starting the speech, Dobrynin explains that he was initially hesitant to accept the invitation, since it was an election year and he was told that presidential candidate Nelson Rockefeller would be giving a speech on the same day in an adjacent building. Dobrynin quipped: “I was afraid I might be involved in the election campaign, which is something a foreign diplomat should never do. But then I glanced at the prices per plate at the bottom of page one of the announcement sheet (\$2.75 per plate) which seemed far too low for a campaign luncheon and concluded that I am on the

¹⁵⁸ Walker, "Presenting the Soviet Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin."

¹⁵⁹ “Dobrynin,” page 22, Box 57, Folder 5, Henry Brandon Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁰ Two copies of this speech survived. The Economic Club printed the first copy itself in limited quantities. It is an edited copy of the text and it contains some parts of the question and answer period. The second copy can be found in the Harriman Papers at the Library of Congress. This version is largely unedited, with Dobrynin’s cuts and additions, including passages that were trimmed off for the Economic Club’s publication. Harriman acquired it from the Economic Club in an attempt to better understand Dobrynin during the early years of his tenure in Washington. In discussing the text of the speech, I use the Harriman copy, and when examining the question and answer period, I use the Economic Club copy.

safe side. I suppose I was given a diplomatic discount!”¹⁶¹ Other one-liners pepper the speech. For example, when discussing the “hot line” between the White House and the Kremlin, he declared, “It is said that this line is so hot that no one wants to touch it and when it is ringing at one end—for testing, you know—everyone hopes very much that it is a ‘wrong number.’”¹⁶² Dobrynin’s jokes reflect his deep familiarity with American culture, down to the minutia of the cliché banquet speech.

Much of the twenty-seven page speech focuses on economic issues in an attempt to cater to the interests of the businessmen in the crowd. In these areas, he parrots Khrushchev-era Soviet tropes, quoting a string of statistics reflecting tremendous economic growth and concluding that the Soviet Union “produces in 8 days the same amount of products as all pre-Revolution Russia during the year of 1913.”¹⁶³ Dobrynin emphasizes that he did not cite these figures to boast of Soviet successes or to suggest that life is perfect in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Dobrynin has no quarrel with American visitors to the USSR who “like to report back home that there are still few motels in the Soviet Union, that our roads are not as good as highways here, or that we still lack shiny American bathrooms.” Rather, he suggests that, due to the promise of continued economic growth and the strength of the planned economy, “We will have more and more of these things in the future. There is no doubt about it.”¹⁶⁴ Citing figure after figure, Dobrynin echoes Khrushchev’s promises that the Soviet Union would “catch up and overtake America”: “We still have many difficulties to overcome and

¹⁶¹ “The Soviet Union Today,” program and page 1, Box 455, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, page 16.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, page 5.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, page 6.

many goals to attain and mistakes on that road are inevitable. But we see our future very clearly and we are determined to build in a short period of time a new society in which everyone is happy.”¹⁶⁵

When addressing recent developments in Soviet-American negotiations, Dobrynin seems much more comfortable, although he still does not deviate from the Party line. In these passages, he quotes American and Soviet leaders who favor better relations. Dobrynin expresses optimism about progress in superpower relations, noting that the past year witnessed the installation of the hotline and the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. These agreements are important, he suggests, because they demonstrate that the Soviet Union and US can find mutually acceptable solutions to the problems of the day if there is a mutual desire to pursue them. Still, Dobrynin expresses concerns about hotbeds of tension that remain unaddressed, including the German question.¹⁶⁶ He proposes other areas in which the superpowers could make progress, including a treaty for nuclear nonproliferation and a general renunciation of the use of force to settle territorial disputes.¹⁶⁷ Dobrynin effusively declares that “the Soviet people are deeply convinced that differences in the way of living, in our political and social systems, must not be an obstacle not only to maintaining normal relations between our countries, but also to fruitful cooperation between us in the interests of the people of the world.”¹⁶⁸ He wraps up his speech by addressing the issue of trade between the USSR and the US. He argues that while Soviet-American trade remains minimal, other West European countries have taken advantage of trade deals with the USSR, suggesting that

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., page 13.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., page 16.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pages 19-20.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pages 21-22.

it would be wise for the US to do the same. He asks the members of the Economic Club to get involved in increasing business ties between the superpowers, and he encourages everyone present to visit the USSR, as “world affairs are now everybody’s business and anyone is most welcome to contribute to the cause of peace.”¹⁶⁹

The question-and-answer period demonstrates Dobrynin’s ability to deal with groups of people in informal conversation. It featured queries about Soviet-American trade opportunities, the relative lack of Soviet tourists in the US, the condition of Sino-Soviet relations, Soviet taxes, and the method that would eventually be used to select Khrushchev’s successor. On the last question, Dobrynin turns on the charm one last time, assuring the audience that, while Khrushchev was nearly seventy years old, he was “in very good health and full of energy.” “Maybe you do not feel it,” Dobrynin cracks, “but I feel it on an every-day basis.”¹⁷⁰ Here, the Soviet ambassador reveals his aptitude for dodging tough questions and evading uncomfortable conversations, using humor to defuse the situation. Given the advanced age of subsequent Soviet leaders Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, this use of humor would become a familiar part of Dobrynin’s repertoire.¹⁷¹

Thus, while Dobrynin seemed much more at ease in private discussions with individuals like Rusk or Harriman, he functioned reasonably well as a public speaker. At times, he relied on Party tropes, particularly when discussing issues like economics, where he had no expertise. When the discussion shifted to topics within his field, however, he spoke

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pages 25-26.

¹⁷⁰ Anatoly Dobrynin, "The Soviet Union Today," ed. Economic Club of Detroit (Detroit: Economic Club of Detroit, 1964).

¹⁷¹ For example, on February 9, 1984, as rumors began to spread in Washington that Yuri Andropov died, Dobrynin attended a reception honoring former Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Another former secretary of state, Alexander Haig, inquired about the reports, with Dobrynin asking, “Would I be here if he were dead?” After additional questions, Dobrynin joked, “Come, now, you’ll kill him with all these questions.” Madeleine G. Kalb, "The Dobrynin Factor," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 13, 1984.

much more authoritatively. He did not deviate from the Party line, but at the same time, he had sufficient understanding of the topic that he did not need to rely on the boilerplate language that filled his earlier comments on economics. Mostly, Dobrynin displayed a desire to communicate with his audience, cracking jokes, taking audience questions seriously, and giving concrete ways to improve superpower relations a year and a half after the Cuban Missile Crisis. This alone separated him from his predecessors at the embassy, who generally did not speak English well and did not place much stock in understanding the American public.

The Dobrynin School of Diplomacy

Prominent officials and veteran diplomats from the Soviet period often describe the Soviet Embassy as “the Dobrynin School” of diplomacy, referring to the way that working in Washington under Dobrynin served as a formative experience in the careers of young diplomats.¹⁷² Indeed, an impressive array of Soviet diplomats cut their teeth at the embassy, including future Ambassador to the US and Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh; future ambassadors to the US Viktor Komplektov, Yulii Vorontsov, and Sergei Kisliak; and other prominent diplomats, including Georgii Mamedov, Vitalii Churkin, and Viktor Isakov. Further, Dobrynin’s influence stretched over the entire American Department at the Foreign Ministry, which was led during détente by Georgii Kornienko, who previously served under Dobrynin at the Soviet Embassy. These officials confronted unique circumstances in

¹⁷² Robert English notes that Bessmertnykh assigned the embassy this title during an interview in 1993. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 150, and 298, n.179. Other memoirists make use of the term as well. See, for example, Pavel Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 248. The term also appears in the post-Soviet Russian press. "Dobrynin ushel - dobryninskaia dipshkola ostalas'," <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=351978>.

Washington, facilitated by Dobrynin's position in the Soviet government, and as a result, built successful diplomatic careers. Moreover, they frequently retained much of the pragmatism advocated by Dobrynin in conducting foreign policy. Years after the Cold War, Dobrynin's aide on arms control issues, Aleksandr Ereskovskii, explained his personal philosophy on diplomacy to a friend, American diplomat Brandon Grove. Ereskovskii stated that "a diplomat must be a creative negotiator," and he expressed his belief in "the power of negotiations," presenting initial positions and working to find a mutually acceptable compromise. Thus, Ereskovskii endorsed the attitude that "a modified treaty is better than no treaty." He also stressed the importance of conveying "the truth" to the center, even if it was unpopular with the Moscow leadership.¹⁷³ Dobrynin epitomized all of the qualities listed by Ereskovskii, suggesting the profound impact that the junior diplomat's apprenticeship at the embassy had on his future attitudes in negotiations.

The significance of the "Dobrynin school," however, extends beyond the lessons passed down by the Soviet ambassador to top embassy diplomats, as he helped shape an environment at the embassy that impacted all Soviet diplomats stationed there. Examples of Soviet embassies in other countries or time periods help explain why the Washington embassy in this era was so exceptional. Viktor Kravchenko, who worked for the Soviet Purchasing Commission at the embassy before defecting in April 1944, described it as a "chunk of pure totalitarianism torn loose from the banks of the Moscow River and deposited intact on the shores of the Potomac." Few Soviet diplomats knew English, making it hard for them to become acquainted with Americans, even the host family with whom Kravchenko lived. The officials were forbidden to pursue friendships with Americans, except for

¹⁷³ Brandon Grove, *Behind Embassy Walls: The Life and Times of an American Diplomat* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 284.

business purposes, when they could tap a special stipend to wine and dine them, fishing for information, all of which had to be reported to the appropriate authorities. The Party strictly regulated their reading materials, with close attention paid to what kinds of books they requested at the library, and it implicitly discouraged them from reading mainstream American newspapers such as *The New York Times*. Rather, to play it safe, Kravchenko states that they read the American Communist Party paper the *Daily Worker*, the pro-Soviet Russian language paper *Russkii golos*, and weeklies that were friendly to the Soviet Union, such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. Any private comments critical of Soviet authority were reported to one's superiors, who made decisions about appropriate punishment. The embassy closely monitored correspondence, requiring that all holiday cards be printed and mailed through embassy offices. Kravchenko notes that many embassy representatives still became friendly with one another, discussing their innermost secrets, fears, and complaints, but did so carefully to avoid spies. Praising the abundance of consumer goods and American civil liberties, he concludes that his bosses and his American interlocutors had no clue how many embassy representatives were in "a state of complete disillusionment," having been "infected by the democratic contagion in America."¹⁷⁴

Aleksandr Kaznacheev faced similar troubles during his stint at the Soviet Embassy in Burma in the late 1950s. Before departing for his new assignment, Kaznacheev was told by his boss that the embassy in Burma was "one of the best we have in Southeast Asia," with a tight, friendly group of colleagues and no complaints of difficult working conditions.¹⁷⁵ He arrived to find things worse than he anticipated. Kaznacheev was the only Soviet diplomat in

¹⁷⁴ Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 458-72.

¹⁷⁵ Aleksandr Kaznacheev, *Inside a Soviet Embassy: Experiences of a Russian Diplomat in Burma* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1962), 13-14.

the embassy who spoke Burmese; in fact, according to his memoirs, he was the only Soviet official to speak Burmese in the entire Soviet foreign policy apparatus.¹⁷⁶ All of the senior diplomats were Party functionaries with little understanding of foreign affairs and no knowledge of foreign languages.¹⁷⁷ Owing to his poor connections in Moscow, the ambassador was a weak, secondary figure, and true authority at the embassy rested in the hands of the elite intelligence officers, who poached the ambassador's best personnel for intelligence services and openly flouted his authority.¹⁷⁸ Surveillance in Burma mirrored the experience of Kravchenko in the US. In particular, the Burmese embassy's Komsomol unit, the official youth organization of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had a constant schedule of obligatory meetings and events, effectively taking up any time that otherwise might be used for mischief and providing a forum for official censure of unauthorized behavior.¹⁷⁹ Diplomats had to live on the embassy compound in cramped quarters designed to allow neighbors to monitor their colleagues' behavior, and one of Kaznacheev's coworkers even lived in a retrofitted bathroom. They coped with this situation by drinking a considerable amount of alcohol.¹⁸⁰

By 1959, Kaznacheev had been recruited to serve as an intelligence officer, and he soon developed "an uneasy double life," having grown disillusioned with Soviet life. During the day, he officially served as a junior diplomat at the embassy, while simultaneously working as a full-time agent-interpreter for Soviet intelligence. By night, he became "Mr.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 46-48; and 199-202.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 55-57.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 57-60.

Alex,” a European who spoke Burmese and had a wide array of friends through Rangoon University and other cultural institutions. The rift between “Mr. Alex” and “Comrade Kaznacheev” grew increasingly wide, and while Soviet intelligence expected him to report on his friends, he found himself increasingly sympathetic to the Burmese, spending all of his free time with his Burmese friends in the countryside. This led to his eventual decision to defect.¹⁸¹

In contrast to Kravchenko and Kaznacheev, Alexandra Costa had a more positive opinion of her time in service at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., from 1975 to 1978.¹⁸² Certainly some aspects of her experience bear a strong resemblance to Kravchenko’s recollections. For example, Costa, who did most of the domestic chores, found herself enamored with Western consumer goods, including air conditioned cars, coffee makers, dishwashers, plastic wraps, disposable mops, no-iron sheets, Teflon pans, Western fashions, and Barbie dolls. Most impressive to Costa were the goods for babies, including disposable diapers, baby food, baby formula, and instant baby cereals, all of which meant that she would not be stuck in the kitchen doing chores for half of the day. At the grocery store, Costa marveled at the colors of the labels and the variety of food products, and she was amazed at how easily she could purchase a car, which could take several years in the Soviet Union.¹⁸³

Like Kravchenko, Costa also griped about her work, especially the slowness of receiving a response from Moscow. Costa’s husband served as the representative of the Soviet All-Union Copyright Agency, newly created after Soviet leaders signed the Universal Copyright Convention in 1973 as part of a renewed effort to demonstrate their commitment

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 223-24; and 241.

¹⁸² When she served at the embassy, Costa’s name was Elena Mitrokhina.

¹⁸³ Costa, *Stepping Down from the Star*, 19-26; and 35-36.

to international standards during détente. She worked as his assistant, and her fluency in English, developed during her training as a linguist and a sociologist, allowed her to manage the agency's correspondence. They had little authority to make decisions on the spot, and the Soviet bureaucracy could be very slow to respond, frustrating their American partners, who could provide answers to their questions almost instantaneously.¹⁸⁴ Costa also cited incidents of diplomats with insufficient English language skills, although that seemed much less common during her time at the embassy.¹⁸⁵ Just as in Kaznacheev's time, official meetings at night were part of life at the embassy, but for Costa, they consisted of seemingly unobtrusive women's meetings once per week on Wednesday nights.¹⁸⁶

Unlike Kravchenko, Costa does not portray the Soviet Embassy as a totalitarian extension of the USSR on American soil. She describes Soviet diplomats in the US as consummate professionals who were knowledgeable of world affairs and overwhelmingly friendly. In fact, at parties where they personally knew everyone at the affair, they would openly debate topics such as American electoral politics and Soviet-American relations without fear of surveillance by American or Soviet intelligence forces. While the state encouraged Soviet officials to live in apartment buildings with other Soviet citizens for both security and surveillance reasons, it did not insist upon it, and by the end of their stay in Washington, Costa and her family lived in a building with no other Soviet families.¹⁸⁷ Embassy officials, at times, seemed to have an unfriendly relationship with their superiors in Moscow. Costa and her husband had to call on a high-ranking colleague at the embassy for

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 8-10; and 71-72.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 43-44.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 33-34; 37; and 123.

help when the copyright office in Moscow attempted to veto their choice of apartments due to it exceeding the maximum size for a foreign representative of the bureaucracy, despite the fact that it fit within the allocated budget. Promising to fix the problem, their friend responded: “Oh, no, not again. When will those idiots in Moscow get in touch with reality?” He forwarded a letter to the Moscow office telling them to “lay off and let the embassy decide what was appropriate for its members.” The problem soon went away, demonstrating the ways that the embassy was not merely an extension of the center, often coming into conflict with Moscow over living conditions and policies.¹⁸⁸

Costa explains how Soviet diplomats in the US in this period had a much more intimate relationship with life in their host country. Unlike Kravchenko, Costa did not shy away from making American friends, even if she remained careful about keeping some of them private from other Soviet representatives.¹⁸⁹ Costa and her acquaintances at the Soviet Embassy all read *The Washington Post* and watched Walter Cronkite’s evening news program, stopping after it aired to discuss the issues with fellow Soviet diplomats. Costa even embraced American popular culture, becoming a devoted fan of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Star Trek*.¹⁹⁰ Costa’s family enjoyed weekend trips in the summer to Pioneer Point, a vacation home on Maryland’s Eastern Shore acquired by the embassy in 1972. It featured a summer home for the ambassador, cottages for embassy diplomats, tennis courts, and a *banya*, or traditional Russian sauna. This gave Soviet diplomats additional opportunities to meet American citizens with no ties to the American government, as they visited local stores

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 37-39.

and antique shops during their time on the Chesapeake.¹⁹¹ While Kravchenko explained that accessing mainstream American culture or meeting with private American citizens was out of bounds at the embassy in the mid-1940s, Costa developed a close bond with American citizens and culture that gave her a better understanding and appreciation of her host country.

Costa concludes that the close ties forged by the embassy with Americans and their institutions changed the way that she and her colleagues understood the US. She writes that, during her first vacation to Russia during her stay at the embassy, she began to realize that she thought of Washington as “home,” missing her car, the TV shows, and the open discussions with embassy friends about US politics. She found that after living in Washington, she had trouble connecting with her old friends in Russia.¹⁹² Later, at their welcome-home party, Costa’s husband brought this up with their high-ranking friend at the embassy, saying, “It’s as if we were talking a different language. We couldn’t understand each other.” Their friend explained that this was a normal reaction for embassy diplomats. Suggesting that they were now members of a fraternity of “Soviet Americans,” he noted that working at the embassy made people think in global terms, rather than the internal politics of Moscow. Stating that the change was permanent, he declared, “When you return to Moscow, you will continue to socialize with people you met here at the embassy, rather than with your old friends, because we know the same things, we think the same way. You will feel like a foreigner in Moscow for many years to come, and the only people you will be comfortable

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 39. *Washington Life* magazine recently wrote an article on the vacation home, including photo spreads of its grounds. Deborah K. Dietsch, "Dacha Sweet Dacha," *Washington Life* Summer 2007, 95-100.

¹⁹² Costa, *Stepping Down from the Star*, 63. She confirmed these feelings in an interview with the *Chicago Sun-Tribune*, saying: “I loved the life in the embassy. . . . The people with whom I socialized, the upper strata, were the brightest, most intelligent people in my life. . . . They were far better informed, of course than people in Moscow. They had a different outlook from living [in Washington] and being exposed to information.” Rudy Maxa, "Moscow on the Potomac - Soviets in US a sophisticated, but wary, bunch," *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 24, 1986.

with are those with the same experience.”¹⁹³

Costa explains that this change was so dramatic that when Soviet diplomats returned home after their tour in Washington, which usually lasted three years, they engaged in “taking a piece of America home with us.” To varying degrees, they all attempted to make money by smuggling in goods to sell on the Soviet black market. More importantly, though, they sought to import the creature comforts that they enjoyed in Washington back to the USSR. As she writes, “It is almost impossible to go back to the drab Soviet environment after living in the US for a period of time, so the solution was to re-create the American environment in your own little world in Moscow—your home.” To this end, Costa purchased shag carpets, wallpaper, a washer, a dryer, boxes of books and records, and other major appliances, bought in sufficient numbers to maintain this standard of living for a long time. She even attempted to have her car shipped home, though this ultimately proved impractical.¹⁹⁴ In this sense, becoming a “Soviet American” had an intellectual and cultural component, represented by the difficulty Costa and her colleagues found in talking with their old friends in the Soviet Union, and a material component, as they sought to maintain their American standard of living when their tours ended.

Other embassy diplomats reported a similar response to living in Washington, as their worldviews changed in such a way that left them isolated, even among other members of the Foreign Ministry. Sergei Tarasenko, a junior diplomat at the embassy who eventually served as an aide to Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, told political scientist Robert English that the American Department became “a separate ministry” within the Foreign Ministry, as a

¹⁹³ Costa, *Stepping Down from the Star*, 77-78.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-99; and 124.

rift developed between those with experience in the US and those who worked on other regions. He continued that serving in the US required “a higher level of professionalism and culture, and such experience changes your outlook.”¹⁹⁵ Kalugin, the KGB agent stationed at the embassy, expressed similar feelings, stating that living in America gave him his first “twinge of doubt” about the Soviet system, as he learned to speak his mind and lost his unquestioning respect for authority after he “tasted the freedom of American life.”¹⁹⁶ Even Dobrynin harbored these sentiments, telling English of the “deep respect, even love” for the US that developed among specialists on American affairs. He concluded, “Often we felt more at home in Washington than in Moscow. After all, who could we talk to back there? Nobody really, except Arbatov and Primakov,” two academics who had traveled throughout the West.¹⁹⁷

Although this new atmosphere can be explained by a number of generational factors, with an embassy staffed by well-educated diplomats who were more open to Western culture than any previous group of Soviet officials, it also owed a great deal to the Dobrynins.¹⁹⁸ A 1976 article about the couple noted that there were about 700 people connected with the Soviet Embassy, including spouses and 200 children, who frequently had less exposure to

¹⁹⁵ English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 298, n.181.

¹⁹⁶ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 30; and 133-34.

¹⁹⁷ English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 127. This statement may have been somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as Dobrynin expressed a rivalry with Arbatov in past statements. Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor during the Carter administration, wrote that the only time Dobrynin “lost his cool” in negotiations was when Brzezinski mentioned Arbatov: “Dobrynin would become red in the face and vehemently inform me that Arbatov was a man of no standing and little influence—a creation of the American media.” Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 153. Dobrynin repeated his claims that Arbatov had little real influence during détente at conferences on the collapse of détente in the 1990s. “The Collapse of Détente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan.” Conference in Pocantico Hills, NY, October 22-24, 1992. Transcript available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹⁸ Sergei Zhuk, for instance, has examined the increasing openness of Soviet students of the US to Western culture. Sergei Zhuk, “Closing and Opening Soviet Society,” *Ab Imperio* 2011, no. 2: 123-58.

English and the difficulties of living abroad. Dobrynin's wife Irina told the reporter that she often served as "den mother," giving young embassy diplomats and their families advice on living on the US and listening to their problems. She claimed to take part in every activity with the staff, and she was a frequent participant in the embassy's social scene.¹⁹⁹ Dobrynin played an active role in managing his staff. In his eulogy for the Soviet ambassador, Subbotin recalls a New Year's party at the embassy at which Dobrynin greeted people from every department, knowing virtually all of them by name.²⁰⁰ The embassy regularly threw parties on the major Soviet holidays for its diplomats, at which they drank "rivers of champagne and vodka" alongside American journalists and politicians.²⁰¹ Moreover, Dobrynin sometimes pushed his staff to get involved in Washington society and meet Americans at parties outside of the embassy's walls. During a telephone call in 1973, Dobrynin told Kissinger that he sent an embassy diplomat to a reception because he was new in Washington and not yet familiar with the social scene.²⁰² Thus, despite the fact that Dobrynin spent tremendous energy on top-level diplomacy, he remained interested in life at the embassy, helping Soviet diplomats become more open to American society than they had been in the past.

Undoubtedly, working at the embassy had its drawbacks. Security concerns meant

¹⁹⁹ Walker, "Presenting the Soviet Ambassador and Mrs. Dobrynin," 4-5. The wife of the Polish ambassador in the late 1970s, Wanda Spasowski, who defected to the West in 1981, complained about Irina's participation. She wrote that at a party at the East German ambassador's residence, when the men smoked cigars after dinner, the women went to a separate room, playing "raucous jazz" and "screeching wildly, undulating vulgarly, lifting their skirts above their heads. . . . I'd never seen anything like it. And with that demon Mrs. Dobrynin leading them all! They carried on like witches." Maxa, "Moscow on the Potomac - Soviets in US a sophisticated, but wary, bunch."

²⁰⁰ Iurii Subbotin, "Sovetskii diplomat ot Boga," *Parlamentskaia gazeta*, no. 17 (April 9, 2010).

²⁰¹ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 115.

²⁰² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 14, 1973, 1:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

that the two large windows in Dobrynin's office had been bricked up, and a second room was built inside of the original room with magnetic radiation field between the outer and inner walls, leading to what Dobrynin described as a form of "continuous solitary confinement" that carried potential health risks.²⁰³ Other security hazards existed, including groups like the Jewish Defense League, which effectively declared war on Soviet civilians in the US, committing several acts of terror against Soviet property.²⁰⁴ The embassy sent lists of recent petty crimes committed against Soviet diplomatic personnel to the State Department on a regular basis, usually amounting to stolen car parts and broken car windows.²⁰⁵ Occasionally, they indicated violent attacks, including when five unidentified individuals reportedly attacked First Secretary Zhil'tsov outside of the Woodner Hotel. He attempted to fend off the attackers, but they stole his jacket from the car, as well as \$250.²⁰⁶ Another case involved the publication of Zhil'tsov's personal phone number in *The Washington Post*, resulting in multiple prank calls in the middle of the night.²⁰⁷

Other complaints were more mundane. Low salaries remained an issue, as most foreign ambassadors in Washington made two to three times as much as Dobrynin, while the American ambassador in Moscow earned four to five times as much as his Soviet counterpart. The Romanian ambassador's driver was even taking home pay equivalent to the

²⁰³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 55-57.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 56; 266-67; 365; Gal Beckerman, *When They Come For Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 212-13; 233; 238-40; and 515. This campaign even received coverage in the Soviet press. "Zaiavlenie gosdepartamentu SShA," *Pravda*, January 6, 1971, 5.

²⁰⁵ See, for example, AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 368, d. 1, ll. 26-27, 91-92; and op. 61, p. 376, d. 1, ll. 4-5.

²⁰⁶ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 368, d. 1, l. 65.

²⁰⁷ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 368, d. 1, ll. 1-3.

counselor at the Soviet Embassy.²⁰⁸ The embassy had such limited funds that it lacked sufficient cash to provide air conditioners to staff residences as late as the 1960s. Embassy diplomats also maintained a demanding schedule. Ereskovskii once joked that he worked “eight-hour days—from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM—and then from 8:00 PM until midnight.”²⁰⁹ In fact, one unmistakable way to determine which embassy officials doubled as KGB agents would be to examine their expenditures. Soviet officials affiliated with the KGB had more expensive apartments, personal automobiles, and unlimited budgets for wining and dining American officials, while those who worked exclusively for the Foreign Ministry lived a more plebian lifestyle. When taking an American to a restaurant, for instance, the embassy would contribute twenty to twenty-five dollars toward the whole meal, leaving the diplomats to cover any additional costs. For this reason, embassy diplomats without KGB ties often entertained their American counterparts in a more economical fashion than their KGB counterparts.²¹⁰

Despite these issues, the embassy remained an extremely desirable appointment in the Soviet Foreign Service, in no small part because of the new generation of Soviet diplomats, trained in academies run by the Foreign Ministry and schooled in the pragmatist approach to foreign affairs, and the influence of the “Dobrynin school.” In an attempt to explain what made this institution unique, Bessmertnykh stated that it was like “a miniature foreign ministry dealing with all the most important areas of foreign policy.” Unlike other embassies, it had departments covering a variety of geographical regions, as well as the normal departments on politics, economics, science and technology, cultural relations,

²⁰⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 55-57.

²⁰⁹ Grove, *Behind Embassy Walls*, 284.

²¹⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 355-56.

information, and, of course, consular work. In other words, as the largest Soviet diplomatic mission in the world, it functioned much like an independent foreign ministry, only on foreign soil.²¹¹ In his memoirs, Dobrynin explains that he had more freedom to maneuver than other Soviet ambassadors, allowing him to “improvise within certain limits” in informal conversations with American diplomats, introducing “new ideas and some flexibility within the rigid constraints of the Politburo.”²¹² This spirit of relative independence shaped embassy culture, at large, as lower-level diplomats experienced more freedom to meet with Americans and interact with American culture than previous diplomats in the US. The community that formed around these principles separated those who served in Washington from their other Soviet counterparts, even in the Foreign Ministry.

Conclusion

In his first interview as ambassador, Dobrynin stated: ““In the sixteenth century . . . when an ambassador had to travel 2,000 miles to his post by troika, he could and did shape policy. But now he is at the end of a telephone wire, and he has to do what he is told. Of course,” Dobrynin smiled, “there are different ways of telling the same thing.”²¹³ The first half of this quote reflects one theme of Dobrynin’s early years in Washington: the limitations placed on backchannel activities by Washington and Moscow. The Soviet and American governments were not yet prepared to compromise on key problems that blocked the further development of relations. Khrushchev’s stubbornness, American escalation of the Vietnam War, and the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia further delayed progress in superpower

²¹¹ Bessmertnykh, "Posol velikoi derzhavy."

²¹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 230-31.

²¹³ Cited in Weintal, "The Bear That Walks Like An American."

negotiations.

The quote, however, also highlights the fact that, despite tremendous roadblocks, Dobrynin influenced policy implementation on the ground level. His negotiating strategies employed pragmatism and humor to frame Soviet policies in a way that Americans could comprehend, while helping to identify mutually acceptable compromises that guided negotiations forward. American diplomats, for the first time in the Cold War era, felt they had a reliable Soviet partner in Washington with whom they could work and socialize. Dobrynin's willingness to throw lavish parties at the embassy and attend social events in Washington, D.C., allowed him to establish an impressive list of American contacts and friends that proved useful in building closer relations between the USSR and the US. His public presence, particularly in the early years of détente, was minimal, yet in time Dobrynin showed the public a more humane side of the Soviet Union that, for too long, had been dominated by his hawkish predecessors.

Most importantly during the period before 1969, the backchannel became firmly established as a means of coordinating relations between the superpowers. The Cuban Missile Crisis convinced Dobrynin to maintain a backchannel with American officials at all cost. The initial contacts with Robert Kennedy and Rusk gave Soviet and American diplomats practical experience in secret diplomacy that Dobrynin drew upon when he and Kissinger managed détente in the 1970s. In this sense, diplomats of the 1960s laid the foundation for détente, a development finally achieved during the Nixon administration. Dobrynin's ability to function in both the Washington and the Moscow bureaucracies proved essential to this approach, as he could serve as "translator," helping the two sides better understand one another. Finally, Dobrynin established his "school of diplomacy," training

junior Soviet diplomats in his pragmatist worldview and his methods for pursuing relations with other states, leaving a legacy that continues to impact Russian diplomacy today.

CHAPTER 2

CONFRONTATION AND APPREHENSION: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BACKCHANNEL, 1969-1971

Ambassador Dobrynin greeted the news of Richard M. Nixon's 1968 election to the presidency with wariness. Dobrynin's thoughts drifted to a day nine years earlier, when then Vice President Nixon visited Moscow engaged Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in the infamous "kitchen debate" over the virtues of each man's respective society. In his memoirs, Dobrynin remembers how Khrushchev, "infuriated by an anti-Soviet [American congressional] resolution referring to the 'captive peoples'" of Eastern Europe, "took Nixon for a ride on a motor launch down the picturesque Moscow River" following the debate. The ambassador recalled:

It was a weekend, and the boat stopped at sandy beaches, where Khrushchev introduced Nixon to ordinary citizens enjoying themselves in the sun. He then would ask them loudly and in a joking manner if they felt enslaved. The answer was always a burst of laughter. Throughout the trip he persisted in lecturing and teasing Nixon, who was made quite uncomfortable by his hectoring host.²¹⁴

The Soviet leadership feared that these initial contacts as well as Nixon's personal history of "anti-Sovietism, anti-communism, and militarism" could lead to only "hard times for Soviet-American relations."²¹⁵

In 1968, *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, displayed similar reservations about the new president. In an article published the week prior

²¹⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 197.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

to the election, “President or Sheriff?,” *Pravda* correspondent B. Strel’nikov characterized each of the presidential candidates as essentially identical, writing: “It is necessary to note that in a society of universal fear the slogan ‘law and order’ hypnotized many voters. But not all. Here today there is a very popular caricature: two Americans stand in front of portraits of the candidates. One American asks another: ‘Whose nightstick would you rather be beaten with? Vote.’”²¹⁶ Two days later, correspondent V. Nekrasov mirrored these feelings about the elections: “Many realize that, in the final analysis, nothing is decided, nothing is determined.”²¹⁷ Such critiques did not point to an optimistic future for Soviet-American relations.

The next four chapters explore how, despite the initial pessimism of Dobrynin and others, Soviet and American leaders ushered in a new era of superpower affairs that featured high-level talks to normalize the Cold War and several critical summits to formalize important new agreements, with pageantry designed to cement the image of a new superpower relationship in the public eye. These chapters examine the Soviet Embassy’s role in carrying out backchannel negotiations with Dr. Henry Kissinger, who served as national security advisor from 1969 to 1975 and as secretary of state from 1973 to 1977, and his successors in the Carter administration. These private talks led to a number of agreements to limit the arms race, including the first SALT treaty, signed by Nixon and Brezhnev in Moscow in 1972, and a second agreement, SALT II, with the preliminary framework approved in Vladivostok in 1974 before Brezhnev and President Jimmy Carter signed the final draft in 1979. The backchannel also aided in a dramatic expansion of

²¹⁶ B. Strel’nikov, “Prezident ili sherif?,” *Pravda*, October 29, 1968, 5.

²¹⁷ V. Nekrasov, “Nad chem zadumyaetsia Amerika,” *Pravda*, October 31, 1968, 5.

economic and cultural ties, serving as the primary forum to discuss superpower conflicts around the globe. From January 1969 to May 1972, alone, Kissinger and Dobrynin met a total of 40 times and spoke on the phone 450 times, meaning that they talked on average about four times a week, and records have been released for 653 telephone conversations over the entire eight years that Kissinger spent in office.²¹⁸

This chapter focuses on the period from January to December 1969, when Kissinger and Dobrynin established the backchannel, dealt with superpower conflicts in Vietnam and the People's Republic of China (PRC), and attempted to overcome the inertia that emerged when a consensus on how to solve certain problems was not immediately reached. It investigates the major problems facing Dobrynin and Kissinger in order to draw broader conclusions about the role of the backchannel and the nature of Soviet-American relations in the early détente period. Many historians have treated the backchannel as a shortcut that allowed Kissinger to work around the normal American bureaucracy to engineer dramatic accomplishments.²¹⁹ Even Kissinger's critics concede that it was successful in this respect, reserving their complaints for the lack of transparency in the process, Kissinger's lack of faith in a democratic approach, or Kissinger's personal insecurities or failings.²²⁰ I argue

²¹⁸ Moss, "Behind the Back Channel", 50; 54; Barbara Keys, "Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 4 (2011): 587-609.

²¹⁹ For example, in his recent dissertation, Richard A. Moss argues that, while the backchannel's successes could not be carried out over the long term, in the short term, it proved an effective and necessary component of détente. Moss, "Behind the Back Channel", 15-19. Jeremi Suri writes that the "most significant" result of the "Kissinger Revolution," as he describes it, was that he "insulated the day-to-day management of foreign policy from public interference." This "allowed for consistency and flexibility despite social disorder. It facilitated rapid breaks with established modes of behavior despite constant distraction." Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 247.

²²⁰ Robert Dallek, for instance, acknowledges that Nixon and Kissinger "feared a loss of control over policy making," but stresses their personal insecurities as the deciding factor. He argues that, while the normal bureaucracies "could waste time and energy in bureaucratic turf wars and were notorious for less than imaginative thinking," the administration's secrecy shielded it from critical discussions with experienced diplomats and officials "that might have produced a greater realism about international challenges." Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 110-11. Walter Isaacson suggests that Kissinger's various

that, while the backchannel provided a forum for two influential diplomats to discuss their national leaderships' respective concerns and to defuse tensions, negotiations remained a slow, arduous process that made substantial progress only after two-and-a-half years of wrangling, when conditions changed markedly. A fragile structure in these years, backchannel talks ground to a halt for months at a time in response to various crises, threatening to derail the détente initiative entirely.

Second, I break new ground by considering Dobrynin as a strategic thinker. Most histories of détente are written by American historians, who focus their attention on Nixon and Kissinger's innovations in international diplomacy, relegating Soviet diplomats to the role of reacting to American policy. The few historians of the USSR who have written on détente concentrate on what motivated Brezhnev and other members of the Politburo to pursue certain policies, downplaying the critical process of policy implementation.²²¹ The process of diplomatic negotiations between Kissinger and Dobrynin demonstrates that, from the start of the Nixon administration, Dobrynin understood Kissinger's policies of linkage and triangular diplomacy, sought to defuse his opponent's use of these strategies, and, in many cases, devised strategies to appropriate these policies and employ them against the US. Dobrynin's recommendations to the Foreign Ministry and the Politburo reveal a diplomat who sought, above all, to defend Soviet strategic interests. While he attempted to improve relations with the US, he was prepared to deal with a world in which that was not possible,

backchannels forced Kissinger's staff to squander their creative potential in the task of writing multiple memos depending on who was aware of different channels, policies, or agreements. Ultimately, Isaacson's primary critique lies in the effect on relations of Nixon and Kissinger's personalities, with "a penchant for secrecy, a distaste for sharing credit with others, and a romantic view of themselves as loners." Isaacson also quotes from an interview with Soviet academic Georgi Arbatov, who states, "The Channel was done largely to feed Kissinger's ego and grandeur, if I may be so blunt, and perhaps for Dobrynin's ego, too." Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 205-9.

²²¹ See, for example, Zubok, *Failed Empire*; Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

and he did not shy away from recommending assertive and even aggressive tactics in the Third World to allow the Soviet Union to negotiate with the US from a position of strength. In other words, Dobrynin did not simply react to Kissinger's actions, but conceived of strategies for dealing with Kissinger that dealt with the increasingly complex international scene. Even if the US came out on top in triangular diplomacy, it was not due to a lack of effort on the Soviet side.

While most Russian archival collections on détente remain closed, there is a wealth of recently declassified American archival and Russian published materials that serve as the basis for the next four chapters. In particular, in this chapter, I rely on the published document collection *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, initiated by a joint agreement between the State Department and the Russian Foreign Ministry. It contains the reports on backchannel discussions prepared by Kissinger for Nixon and by Dobrynin for the Kremlin.²²² Dobrynin's messages to Moscow come in two forms. First, after each meeting, Dobrynin filed a memorandum of conversation with the Politburo outlining the major developments. He sometimes made recommendations or observations in these reports, but he mainly sought to convey what was said about the major topics covered. Second, after important discussions or events, Dobrynin typically wrote telegrams to the Foreign Ministry with policy recommendations. More direct in these telegrams, at times Dobrynin made recommendations for Third World policies that had a positive influence on the superpower relationship. These reports help explain Dobrynin's attitudes toward the backchannel. Since disparities exist between Kissinger and Dobrynin's accounts of

²²² *Soviet-American Relations: The Detente Years, 1969-1972*. This collection was also published in Russian in two volumes. I cite the English-language version of the documents, except in instances when I discuss a specific issue with the language. *Sovetsko-amerikanskii otnosheniia: Gody razriadki, 1969-1976, Tom 1, Kniga 1 i 2*, ed. S. V. Lavrov, et al (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2007).

backchannel conversations, even on mundane issues, I tap declassified telephone conversation transcripts, memoirs, and other sources to clarify certain events.

The Big Issues

The period between Nixon's assumption of the presidency in 1969 and the summer of 1971 shepherded in a cautious beginning to détente. Leaders on both sides used this time to get acquainted with each other, negotiate some preliminary agreements, and gauge how seriously the opposing side took the matter of nuclear limitations. According to Dobrynin, in his first year of office Nixon "confirmed [Soviet] apprehensions" that arose after his election "because there were no attempts on his part to improve relations on the diplomatic level. He avoided making any statements about armaments control." In Dobrynin's opinion, Nixon represented the first US president to accept that "the nuclear power of the Soviet Union was as strong" as that of the US, and "he thought that there had to be some means of control: that there should be no political confrontation that would have brought about nuclear confrontation." Dobrynin concluded, "When Nixon came in, there was a combination of confrontation and apprehension on both sides, but at the same time a mutual desire to somehow control things."²²³ Détente developed slowly, with both sides taking time to size up their opponents and consider their positions.

Nixon's inauguration coincided with a number of critical issues facing superpower negotiators. Strategic Arms Limitations Talks, or SALT, had been delayed since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. There existed a general understanding that these negotiations should include both offensive weapons, such as intercontinental ballistic

²²³ CNN Cold War Series, "Interviews: Anatoly Dobrynin," <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/16/interviews/dobrynin>.

missiles (ICBMs), and defensive weapons, most notably antiballistic missile systems (ABMs), which theoretically could fire missiles at incoming ICBMs with the intention of destroying them before they reached their intended targets. The technology for such systems was, at the time, primitive and extremely unreliable, but both sides feared that the development of ABM systems would lead to a new and perhaps more dangerous arms race. European issues also served as a critical realm for negotiations. The Soviet government hoped to attain an agreement for a conference on European security to gain formal recognition of the postwar borders on the continent and of its role in European affairs. Moreover, the issue of West Berlin's relationship with West Germany remained unsettled. After the war, West Berlin remained under the control of the Western powers, despite the fact that it sat in the middle of East Germany, a Soviet satellite. The Western powers took a vague stance on whether West Berlin belonged to the Federal Republic of Germany, and saw East Germany as potential threat to the security of the supply routes that brought goods into the city by land.

The developing world also created a set of conflicts that demanded negotiations between Kissinger and Dobrynin. In the Middle East, Israel's defeat of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War allowed it to take control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Despite the 1967 UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel to return territory in exchange for peace and diplomatic recognition from the Arab world, the armies remained entrenched, and hostilities between the sides periodically erupted, with both the Soviet and American governments offering support to their allies and attempting to enforce the ceasefire. The Vietnam War continued in full force as Nixon came to office with the

promise of implementing a “secret plan” to achieve “peace with honor.”²²⁴ His strategy called for Vietnamization, or stepping up American bombing raids while decreasing the American troop presence and training the South Vietnamese army to fight on its own. Soviet-American diplomats met with the hopes of finding common ground for peace talks between the US and North Vietnam. Finally, by 1969 it was increasingly clear that China would play a central role in Soviet-American relations in the 1970s. The Sino-Soviet split, which had roots in ideological and personal differences between Chinese leader Mao Zedong and Khrushchev, escalated when Chinese leaders publicly denounced Soviet authority in the early 1960s. In 1969, armed hostilities broke out on the Sino-Soviet border, setting the stage for a diplomatic competition between the three powers during the Nixon administration.

Meeting of the Minds

Like many events in this period, Kissinger and Dobrynin explained the establishment of the backchannel in substantially different ways. On the evening of February 14, 1969, less than three weeks after Nixon took office, Kissinger attended a reception at the Soviet Embassy for American expert Georgii Arbatov, whom Kissinger had met during an earlier trip to Moscow. Kissinger reported to Nixon that Dobrynin had gone to bed with the flu, but had his aide call Kissinger to his apartment for a brief discussion. Dobrynin informed Kissinger that he had a message from Moscow for Nixon, which he would like to deliver personally to the president. On the topic of relations with the new administration, Kissinger wrote that Dobrynin requested a backchannel with someone who was not part of the official diplomatic establishment. He also relayed that Dobrynin expressed a willingness to proceed

²²⁴ This is the conflict between the communist North Vietnam and the anti-American South Vietnamese guerilla force known as the Viet Cong, on the one hand, and the US and the American-backed South Vietnamese dictatorship, on the other hand.

with discussions on the Middle East, but outside of the UN framework, with talks confined to two trusted officials in Moscow or Washington. Kissinger's description suggests that Dobrynin proposed the backchannel to Kissinger, looking for a venue to discuss a broad array of issues, from the Middle East to Vietnam to "any other political problem on our mind."²²⁵

Dobrynin's memo to the Politburo provides a significantly different characterization of this conversation. According to Dobrynin, Kissinger informed him that Nixon wanted to meet with him on February 17. Then Kissinger reportedly declared that the president requested a confidential channel with the Soviet government, mainly due to his belief that normal State Department channels were "not particularly reliable" and prone to leaking material to the press. In Dobrynin's version, Kissinger asked for direct negotiations between the national security advisor and the Soviet ambassador. Kissinger ended this portion of the conversation by giving Dobrynin his personal telephone number and saying that he was willing to meet "any time, any place," and Dobrynin assured Kissinger of his willingness to take on this obligation.²²⁶

The discrepancies between these two depictions of the initial meeting between Kissinger and Dobrynin are striking. Kissinger's memo suggests that the two men did not discuss the dimensions of the backchannel, leaving open the option of a channel in Moscow or in Washington with an unspecified person that Nixon trusted. Dobrynin's memo, however, indicates that they outlined more specific details about the backchannel's functions.

²²⁵ "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," February 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 4. Kissinger mentions that the reception was in honor of Arbatov. In Kissinger, *White House Years*, 112.

²²⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," February 14, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 4-6.

In this account, Kissinger stated outright Nixon's intentions to establish a backchannel between the national security advisor and the Soviet ambassador. Moreover, Kissinger reportedly directly told Dobrynin of Nixon's distrust of the State Department, implying that the critical negotiations should take place outside of official diplomatic channels. Dobrynin's report on the initial meeting also describes two moments when Dobrynin took a hard line toward his new negotiating partner that only were hinted at in the Kissinger memo. First, in his memo, Kissinger notes that Dobrynin had stayed in the same sanatorium with Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Kosygin, as if to highlight Dobrynin's ties with these top Soviet officials.²²⁷ In Dobrynin's memo, however, the ambassador states that Kissinger asked about the health of these officials, citing "various rumors" in Washington. Dobrynin responded by vouching that these leaders were "healthy and vigorous." Furthermore, Dobrynin informed Kissinger "in a personal, friendly way" to ignore the gossip about Soviet affairs that was "so abundant" in American circles.²²⁸

Second, in his memo, the ambassador mentions a conversation with Kissinger about the concept of linkage, or linking progress in one area of discussion with progress in another. Kissinger asked Dobrynin if he had heard about the "pleasant conversations" that the national security advisor had had with two Soviet officials in Washington about his thoughts on the future of Soviet-American relations. Dobrynin responded that he had, but that he "personally did not like one aspect of what [Kissinger] said to his Soviet interlocutors." Kissinger, "pricking up his ears," asked which aspect Dobrynin did not approve of, and Dobrynin responded that the comments could be interpreted to mean the US Government hoped to link

²²⁷ "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," February 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 4.

²²⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," February 14, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years*, 4-6.

progress on disarmament—one of the Soviet government’s primary goals—to issues such as the Vietnam War and the Middle East peace settlement. Dobrynin warned that trying to force concessions through these sorts of political games would not serve as an effective basis for constructive negotiations. According to Dobrynin, Kissinger became defensive, claiming that the officials misunderstood him and that he had merely been discussing “the impact of the overall political climate in the world on progress” in talks. He assured Dobrynin that Nixon “does not intend to put forward any preconditions with respect to the issue of beginning negotiations,” and that the president would be willing to open discussions “on several different problems *in parallel* and *simultaneously*,” emphasizing these words. Kissinger stressed their awareness “that the Soviet Union is a great power and that it cannot be forced to do something that it believes is contrary to its interests.”²²⁹ Kissinger glossed over this exchange in his memo, simply noting that Soviet leaders “were reluctant to accept conditions on the ground that they had to show their good faith,” but were “ready to proceed on the basis of equality” if American leaders “wanted simultaneous progress on several fronts at once.” He did not mention the issue of linkage, the misunderstanding between himself and the Soviet officials, or the early attempt by the two negotiators to set the terms for how they would discuss the multiple problems facing the superpowers.²³⁰

This meeting represents the birth of the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel, yet also demonstrates the challenges inherent in dealing with these sources. The document collection’s placement of Kissinger’s memos to Nixon on backchannel activities next to Dobrynin’s memos to the Politburo can be deceptive. After all, these respective sets of

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” February 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 4.

memos served different purposes. Kissinger frequently met with Nixon in person to discuss Soviet-American relations, so it was less critical for him to be precise and comprehensive in his descriptions. Dobrynin, however, needed to convey the full extent of discussions, since he could meet with Soviet leaders only during consultations in Moscow every few months.

Additionally, at this point in their careers, both Kissinger and Dobrynin were in tenuous positions. Kissinger had not yet established himself as Nixon's foreign policy guru and remained in competition for influence with Secretary of State William Rogers for much of Nixon's first term. By 1969, Dobrynin had served as ambassador for seven years, which already represented the longest tenure for any Soviet ambassador in the United States since official recognition in 1933. Dobrynin held the top overseas post in the Foreign Ministry and Gromyko was ensconced in his position as foreign minister, so any appointment back in Moscow would represent a demotion. Further, Dobrynin enjoyed living in the United States and performing his duties as ambassador, making it imperative for him to retain his post. After the removal of Khrushchev in 1964, Dobrynin understood how quickly the winds could change for an official, and he had little to no immediate feedback from the Politburo on his analysis, making it difficult to assess its reception in Moscow. Thus both Kissinger and Dobrynin framed their memoranda with an awareness of the fragility of their respective situations.

In his memoirs, Dobrynin addresses the issue of differing reports. He notes that, because of the secrecy of the backchannel, they held their meetings without secretaries, leaving no official record of the meetings except what they reported back to their superiors. He states: "Although at times it could have led to differing versions of what was actually said and meant (for the participants might also yield to the temptation of presenting themselves in

the best possible way, especially later, in their recollections and memoirs), no problems or arguments arose during the actual talks and negotiations over what had actually been said in previous conversations.” Dobrynin further argues that the two diplomats shared a clear understanding of what they had officially agreed upon and what they had discussed in moments when they were “talking out loud,” when they would “explore new ideas or approaches on a personal basis.” He concludes: “This enabled us to keep our frank exchanges in strictest confidence and preserve secrecy in negotiations. That was why our channel was of great value to both governments. Its importance should not be underestimated.”²³¹ In other words, Dobrynin recognized that the American and Soviet records of these conversations might contradict one another, especially in situations when a refashioning of the truth might help one party look better in the historical record or in the eyes of their bosses, although he suggested that such discrepancies were limited to minor issues and that, privately, they acknowledged exactly what each had said. The existence of this “private understanding” remains unclear, as no sources corroborate this argument, but future conversations demonstrate that disparities in the transcripts are sometimes more dramatic than Dobrynin would suggest.

Getting to Know You

On February 17, 1969, Nixon met with Dobrynin directly to set the tone for future talks. The initial part of the conversation took place in private and, as Dobrynin reported, the president went out of his way to create a friendly atmosphere. Nixon showed off the newly-decorated Oval Office, pointing to a presidential emblem that his daughter had embroidered,

²³¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 199-200.

new curtains and carpets, and the new furnishings, including a “trusty old desk” that Nixon used since his first election to public office. Nixon and Dobrynin sat near a lit fireplace, talking informally about the differences between Camp David and the Soviet leadership’s dachas. Nixon even joked about the kitchen debate, the same memory that gave Dobrynin such ominous feelings after Nixon’s elections, concluding, “We both, perhaps, talked too much then and without particular need.”²³² Nixon clearly did not want to repeat the intense theatrics of the kitchen debate, instead looking forward to a calmer, more businesslike approach to superpower relations.

At the end of their private discussion, Nixon returned to the issue of the backchannel, and from his first discussion with Dobrynin, he hinted that secret talks directly between the White House and the embassy would be closer and more secretive than ever. According to Dobrynin’s report, Nixon pointed to the past successes of confidential ties between Dobrynin and members of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Dobrynin noted that Nixon expressed his wish to “further develop and use such confidential channels with Moscow,” creating a forum for sensitive discussions known to “only a very small circle of people on the US side.” Nixon emphasized that this elite group included Secretary of State William Rogers, a close personal friend and a trusted advisor, and that he did not intend to keep secrets from him in Soviet-American relations. Still, Nixon stated, “it will be harder for [Rogers] than for Kissinger, because he is more visible, always surrounded by State Department officials,” making Kissinger a more logical partner for confidential talks with

²³² “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 17, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 14-18. In his memoirs, Dobrynin notes that Nixon had his granddaughter photographed at the president’s desk, “sitting with an important air,” further highlighting the attempt to create an informal, relaxed atmosphere for negotiations. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 198.

Dobrynin. Dobrynin agreed, in principle, to meet with whomever Nixon designated.²³³

Nixon thus took the first steps toward marginalizing his secretary of state and the other members of his foreign policy bureaucracy in his first meeting with the Soviet ambassador.

When Kissinger and State Department official Malcolm Toon joined Nixon and Dobrynin, the conversation shifted to a general overview of the major topics at issue in Soviet-American relations during Nixon's presidency. Nixon expressed a desire for a summit meeting with the top Soviet leadership after extensive preparations. They discussed curbing the arms race, putting an end to the war in Vietnam, settling the conflict in the Middle East, and easing tensions in Germany. While both sides articulated a willingness to move forward on multiple issues in parallel, they spoke only in general terms about these situations, and Dobrynin did not see a clear path to a quick solution to any of these issues. He reported that, on the one hand, "Nixon conspicuously tried to remain friendly, clearly avoided 'thorny issues,' and in his whole demeanor demonstrated his desire for improved relations with the USSR." On the other hand, Dobrynin concluded that Nixon's "position is still not defined and has not been worked out in any detail." His stance on Vietnam did not seem to differ significantly from that of President Johnson, he had unclear views on the Middle East, and he showed an early commitment to linkage in strategic arms talks that could forestall progress in this matter.²³⁴

Kissinger similarly expressed caution in a memo to Nixon, in which he responded to a note Dobrynin delivered from the Soviet leadership. With some surprise, he described the Soviet approach as "totally non-ideological—even anti-ideological," observing that "the

²³³ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," February 17, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 14-18.

²³⁴ Ibid.

arguments are posed strictly in terms of national interests and mutually perceived threats, without even the usual ritual obeisance to Marxist-Leninist jargon.” Kissinger optimistically stated that the Soviet leadership’s apparent willingness to move forward on a wide array of topics—including the Middle East, Central Europe, Vietnam, arms talks, and cultural exchange—provided the Americans with the linkage they desired, giving them the opportunity to make headway in areas of value to the Soviet side contingent upon progress in areas singled out by the American side. Kissinger urged discretion, however, identifying two possible reasons that Soviet leaders expressed hope for progress. The first possibility, as officials from the Johnson administration had also believed, was that Soviet leaders sought to work on areas in which American and Soviet interests overlapped, like strategic arms, compartmentalizing disagreements and using progress on some issues to prevent disagreements in others from contaminating the entire superpower relationship. The second possibility was that Soviet leaders wanted to “use the bait of progress in one area in order to neutralize our resistance to pressures elsewhere,” pursuing a more “adventurous” foreign policy. Kissinger leaned toward the second interpretation, emphasizing that a real improvement in Soviet-American relations could not come from arms limitations alone and that the US should hold off on concluding an arms limitations agreement until it achieved solid gains in areas such as the Middle East and Vietnam.²³⁵ Thus, while both Dobrynin and Kissinger saw reasons for optimism after the first meeting between the president and the ambassador, both expected a difficult period of negotiations ahead.

Indeed, much of the remainder of the first year of backchannel talks largely followed the pattern of this initial discussion, as Dobrynin and Kissinger familiarized themselves with

²³⁵ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” February 18, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 18-20.

one another, defined the purpose of the backchannel, and set out an agenda that would shape the next three years of talks. In their next meeting, on February 21, Dobrynin reported that Kissinger, on instructions from Nixon, set up the basic parameters for how their backchannel would function. The national security advisor requested that the backchannel facilitate the first exchanges between the Soviet and American governments on basic problems, as well as the most important issues confronting the superpowers. After these issues were settled in principle, Kissinger stated that they would be forwarded to the State Department and the Foreign Ministry for official talks. If difficulties arose in official channels, the topics could return to the backchannel for additional conversation. Kissinger suggested that this two-tiered approach to negotiations—to lay out the groundwork and work out the most contentious problems in the backchannel—would “best suit the US President, allowing him to personally exercise more direct leadership and observe the exchange of opinions on the aforementioned problems.”²³⁶ In this sense, more than any previous administration, Nixon and Kissinger sought to conduct the most sensitive business in Soviet-American through the White House, leaving the State Department to settle the details.

In many ways, Moscow quickly recognized and welcomed Kissinger’s dominance over foreign affairs. After a June conversation, Dobrynin detailed Kissinger’s activities in a memo to the Kremlin: “It can be stated with a good deal of confidence that at the moment Kissinger is the main—in fact, the dominating—influence on the President in the area of foreign policy.” He noted that Kissinger gathered all foreign policy materials, including

²³⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 21, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 20-25. At their next meeting, Dobrynin confirmed that the Soviet leadership would accept this proposal to a “very pleased” Kissinger, who, highlighting his close ties to Nixon, suggested that Dobrynin “go directly to him” with any questions about the president’s position on any matter. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 3, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 28-35.

intelligence, and reported directly to Nixon, and he prepared the agenda for meetings of the National Security Council, which met more regularly than under previous presidents. Dobrynin stated that State Department officials “bluntly” complained to him that if “Henry” is against one of their proposals, Nixon “will almost certainly reject it.” Furthermore, Dobrynin observed that Kissinger—whom he described as “an intelligent and erudite person” but “at the same time quite vain”—“conducts himself more freely in the presence of the President” than previous national security advisors, and “one feels the definite confidence of someone who has already gained for himself a firm position in the White House.” During a backchannel meeting over lunch, Kissinger even boasted to Dobrynin that “only two people can, at any given moment, provide a precise answer concerning the US position on a particular issue”: Nixon and Kissinger.²³⁷

Further, Dobrynin acknowledged that Kissinger had a personal stake in backchannel. He commended Kissinger for arranging meetings as soon as they were requested, and he frequently initiated backchannel meetings on his own, contributing to the “fairly good personal rapport” that they had developed. In fact, Dobrynin suggested that Kissinger “exercises personal control over all contacts” between the embassy and his twenty-five-person staff, and he made sure that all conversations between embassy officials and his staff were reported directly to him. Kissinger gradually restricted those conversations to push these issues into the backchannel. Dobrynin commented, “Evidently, [Kissinger] is using all this to reinforce his own authority with Nixon as the confidential channel of communication with the Soviet side.” The Soviet ambassador concluded that even though Rogers seemed to be gaining power over some aspects of foreign policy, using the State Department’s

²³⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 12, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 64-70.

“extensive apparatus,” Kissinger’s influence over foreign affairs was still “predominant.” Dobrynin wrote, “It would be best “to develop and utilize the Kissinger channel even more actively in order to exert influence and communicate our views on various issues through him to President Nixon personally.”²³⁸ In other words, Dobrynin recognized Nixon and Kissinger’s attempts to take foreign policy out of the realm of the traditional authorities, to seize the reins of the process and to place as much authority in the hands of the White House as possible. Dobrynin advised taking advantage of this state of affairs to handle sensitive issues outside the gaze of the public and the media, and he recognized Kissinger’s vanity, recommending that Soviet officials stroke Kissinger’s ego to manipulate the backchannel.

Thanks in large part to Kissinger’s influence in the administration, Dobrynin’s initial assessment of the Nixon administration was positive, if guarded. Dobrynin’s telegram to the Foreign Ministry on March 13 included his observations of Nixon’s behavior. Dobrynin stated that Nixon seemed to have acknowledged that brinksmanship was not an effective foreign policy, since both the US and the USSR had sufficiently large nuclear stockpiles to destroy the world several times over. While Nixon recognized the irreconcilable differences between the US and the USSR, he also promised to follow a “pragmatic course,” initiating talks when it would be beneficial for US interests or when compromise could be reached. Dobrynin expressed optimism regarding European affairs, as Nixon had implied he would respect the status quo and would not intervene in Soviet affairs in Eastern Europe. Dobrynin added that Nixon’s unwillingness to get involved in a conflict over West Berlin indicated that the time was ripe to reach a formal agreement normalizing West Berlin’s status. Dobrynin

²³⁸ Ibid.

did not foresee a quick end to the Middle East crisis, but argued that Nixon wanted to establish “a concrete, businesslike exchange of views” with the Soviet leadership on this matter, moving toward a possible resolution. Regarding SALT, Dobrynin sensed that American policymakers had given up on linking the start of talks with the resolution of Vietnam, making progress possible. Dobrynin suggested waiting until the US side “finds itself compelled to approach us” with a proposal for the initial stages of discussion, to counteract the impression that the Soviet side wanted an agreement more than the American side. Moreover, Dobrynin contended that “Nixon’s personal interest in meeting with Soviet leaders” to resolve issues such as SALT “could be important as a retraining factor that could have a positive effect on US Government positions on issues of interest to us.”²³⁹ Thus, just as Kissinger aspired to link progress on SALT to concessions from Soviet diplomats, Dobrynin hoped to use SALT and the promise of a summit to push the US to accept Soviet positions on other issues.

Dobrynin correctly identified Vietnam as the most pressing issue for the Nixon administration, and his recommendations reflect astute observations on the changing nature of international politics in the late 1960s. He wrote that Nixon’s policies did not differ much from those of President Johnson and that the Nixon administration did not believe it could reach an agreement with North Vietnam to end the conflict in the near future on terms “acceptable” to the US. Still, Dobrynin found reason for optimism, emphasizing the importance that Nixon attached to Soviet assistance in the initial round of the Paris Peace Talks. Dobrynin recommended using Nixon’s conviction that the Soviet leadership could, if it so desired, play a constructive role in ending the Vietnam War by nudging American

²³⁹ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” March 13, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 39-45.

leaders “in the most realistic direction possible,” cautioning against the American inclination to escalate violence in order to seek a “solution through a crisis” and pushing the president toward concessions and compromise with North Vietnam. Demonstrating an awareness of the emergence of “triangular diplomacy” between the US, USSR, and China, Dobrynin wrote: “While maintaining our policy of support for our Vietnamese friends—we could have a more realistic idea of where the Vietnam issue belongs within the framework of world politics, particularly in light of the deterioration of our relations with China and in view of the fact that Vietnam continues to restrict US freedom to maneuver, including vis-à-vis [Beijing], as well as [Beijing]’s freedom to maneuver vis-à-vis the US.”²⁴⁰ In other words, Dobrynin counseled that, as long as the Vietnam War continued, the US and China would have a harder time reconciling their differences. Soviet diplomats, he implied, should use that space to develop relations between the US and the USSR, ensuring that the Soviet Union would not find itself isolated, facing a US-Chinese alliance, at some point in the near future. Thus Dobrynin anticipated the way that China later altered the international scene, prescribing solutions for how the USSR could best position itself.

Dobrynin seems to have felt encouraged by the potential for US-Soviet relations three months into the Nixon administration. Regretting that talks were currently in a “suspended state,” Dobrynin nonetheless praised the approach behind the “businesslike” and “constructive” initial Soviet proposal, as “it helped allay the serious apprehension and doubts the new President had (in view of his past) regarding what Moscow’s attitude toward him was, whether there would be an opportunity for a private confidential dialogue with Soviet leaders, etc.” This, Dobrynin asserted, set the groundwork for productive talks on issues

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

such as the Middle East, and could be furthered by sending Nixon personal messages from the Soviet leadership. He maintained that, while they should continue to cultivate ties through official channels with the State Department, the backchannel with Kissinger represented “one of the most effective practical channels for us to influence the President and his policy at this time,” specifically in dealing with the most critical issues. In particular, Dobrynin pointed to “Kissinger’s obvious personal interest in being the President’s principal foreign policy advisor,” proposing that Soviet leaders play on the national security advisor’s ambition and vanity to achieve their goals. In this way, Dobrynin expressed hope for the future of superpower relations, even if Nixon’s ideological views and political past did not immediately bolster this view.

Despite Kissinger’s brash displays of confidence and Dobrynin’s plan to focus talks on the backchannel, lingering doubts remained about each side’s motivations and the soundness of Nixon’s new approach to conducting superpower relations. If Kissinger assumed an air of confidence around Dobrynin, other observers recognized the national security advisor’s insecurity. In his diaries, White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman recorded dozens of moments when Kissinger blew his top over Rogers’s involvement in Soviet-American affairs. For example, prior to Nixon’s first conversation with Dobrynin, Haldeman informed Rogers, under orders from Nixon, that the president would meet with Dobrynin privately, without a State Department representative. Rogers objected, arguing that the president should never meet with a foreign ambassador alone. Kissinger, protective of the backchannel, was “disturbed,” knowing that Dobrynin had a note for Nixon from the Soviet leadership and that, with a State Department official in attendance, “word will get out

and [Nixon] will lose control” of the backchannel.²⁴¹

Haldeman described the general contours of this conflict as a difference in philosophy between Nixon and Kissinger. He writes that while Kissinger emphasized the need to “maintain tight discipline on the little things or you can’t control the big ones,” Nixon felt that “you should lose the ones that don’t matter and save your strength and equity for the big battles that really count.” In other words, Kissinger believed that in order to maintain absolute control over foreign policy, the State Department should be cut out of all sensitive negotiations. This, of course, left every important decision in the hands of the White House and Kissinger’s office. Nixon had a more flexible view of the situation, only panicking when the State Department got involved in the most critical moments. The result is that, by October 1969, Haldeman “sense[d] a growing intolerance of K[issinger]’s attitudes and habits,” as he “overreact[ed] to each little aberration of Rogers” and bothered the president about it every time. Haldeman suggests that this led Nixon to keep Kissinger out of important discussions, frustrating Kissinger and leading to more and more complaining.²⁴²

Tensions built, leading to a dramatic moment when announcing the start of official SALT talks. Nixon assigned the task of briefing the press to Rogers. This sent Kissinger—who told Haldeman that he should brief the press and Nixon should receive all of the credit—into a fury. On October 27, Haldeman noted that Kissinger complained to Nixon about State Department contacts with Dobrynin, as well as policy issues in the Middle East. Nixon finally said, “Well that’s all for today, have to get to work,’ and got up and walked out into his little office.” Kissinger pleaded with Haldeman for a noon meeting to discuss Rogers, but

²⁴¹ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 30.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 98-99.

Haldeman convinced him to back off. That day, Nixon vented about Kissinger to Haldeman and others, claiming that Kissinger “is impairing his usefulness, and is obsessed beyond reason” with Rogers.²⁴³ Kissinger’s emotional response to the potential of Rogers to undermine his authority continued until Rogers left the administration in 1973. As historian Stephen E. Ambrose notes: “Haldeman was also the chief hand-holder. Almost every day, certainly at least every week, he had to reassure Henry Kissinger that the President really did love him and appreciate him and couldn’t get along without him and would someday fire Bill Rogers.”²⁴⁴ Kissinger may have put on an air of confidence when dealing with foreign diplomats, but those within the administration grew increasingly annoyed at his anxiety over his position in the administration. This angst would continue through the remainder of Nixon’s first term, even as Kissinger gained fame as an influential and effective diplomat.

Talking in Circles on Vietnam

According to Dobrynin, in his initial conversation with the president, Nixon “did not particularly try to hide” that “in the long term,” the Vietnam War would be the issue that “will trouble him the most.”²⁴⁵ While Dobrynin and Kissinger discussed SALT, Europe, and the Middle East in the first few months of backchannel discussions, the topic of Vietnam dominated their conversations. Talks on ending the Vietnam War did not make significant progress, despite the focus it received in the backchannel, where numerous scenarios for the resolution were discussed. As early as March 3, the participants picked up on a refrain that

²⁴³ Ibid., 103.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁴⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 17, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 14-18.

would be repeated time and again for the next four years. Dobrynin believed that Nixon's policy in Vietnam increasingly looked the same as the previous administration's approach, with an even greater willingness to use military actions to force North Vietnam to the negotiating table. He emphasized that such an approach "is most certainly doomed to failure," and encouraged Kissinger to "realistically assess" the situation. Kissinger alleged that he tried to arrange a confidential meeting with the North Vietnamese even before Nixon assumed the presidency, but the North Vietnamese responded with an "abusive letter" and "crude attacks against him personally." Instead of establishing a "businesslike discussion," Kissinger stated, the North Vietnamese spread anti-American propaganda about the war and continued "endlessly repeating demands that are clearly unacceptable in terms of US prestige." He warned that, unless it reached a settlement in the near future, the US would resort to military means to force a solution. Dobrynin again stressed that military attacks would not work, underscoring "the adventurist nature and the danger of such 'ideas.'"²⁴⁶ This circular conversation occurred multiple times from 1969 to 1973, and it highlights the extent to which Soviet-American efforts to settle the Vietnam War were slow, repetitive, and based on a real clash of ideas.

Nevertheless, the groundwork for discussions of a Vietnam settlement was laid in the early months of the Nixon administration. On March 11, 1969, Kissinger said that the American side could not permit a situation in which radical political change occurred in South Vietnam after a settlement, as some might accuse Nixon of having "'cut a deal' with the enemy, of having 'betrayed an ally.'" However, the national security advisor conceded that, if gradual changes took place after some time, the US would accept that, regardless of

²⁴⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," March 3, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 28-35.

the role played by the Viet Cong.²⁴⁷ In other words, Dobrynin reported that the US did not care if South Vietnam eventually removed its government or became communist. The US leadership simply wanted to make sure that it was free from blame from the press or political opposition for whatever happened. The American account does not contain a detailed description of this proposal. In its version, Kissinger merely implied the possible escalation of force if North Vietnam did not meet certain conditions.²⁴⁸

The two men met again on April 15 for dinner at Kissinger's home to discuss Vietnam, at which Kissinger presented a paper to Dobrynin that outlined many of the proposals previously mentioned in Dobrynin's memos. It repeated the American proposal, now with additional details, that both the US and North Vietnam withdraw forces from South Vietnam, installing a coalition government for five years, at which point elections would take place. American leaders expressed a willingness to see the Viet Cong participate in these elections and maintain an official political party. The US would not interfere if this party ultimately took power through nonmilitary means, as "the result of further appropriate internal 'Vietnamese processes' with the country itself." They could not accept "a forcible change in the present leadership in Saigon," though, as "all the US allies would then become suspicious of the current US administration."²⁴⁹ In Kissinger's account, Dobrynin asked him to understand "the limitations of Soviet influence in Hanoi." He complained, "Communist China was constantly accusing the Soviet Union of betraying Hanoi. The Soviet Union could

²⁴⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," March 11, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 36-39.

²⁴⁸ "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," March 19, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 35-36.

²⁴⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," April 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 53-56.

not afford to appear at a Communist meeting and find itself accused of having undermined a fellow Socialist country.” Dobrynin commented that, although the USSR did not have strategic interests in Southeast Asia, it needed to support North Vietnam because of solidarity with socialist states and the Soviet need to retain a leading role in the socialist world. He even claimed that “often Soviet messages were never answered by Hanoi so he could not guarantee what the reply would be or indeed if there would be a reply.”²⁵⁰ Dobrynin’s account does not contain evidence of this aspect of the discussion. In addition, while Kissinger reported that Dobrynin characterized the discussion as a critical meeting, Dobrynin himself wrote that it was more pedestrian and a repeat of earlier remarks by Kissinger.²⁵¹

On May 14, Kissinger invited the ambassador to meet again to discuss Vietnam, with the hidden intention of having Nixon call during the meeting to propose that Dobrynin meet with him personally. Nixon showed Dobrynin around the White House living quarters and his private office in the Lincoln Room, which Nixon thought would be impressive “since no one usually gets to go in there.”²⁵² Before bringing up Vietnam, he discussed in general terms the backchannel, SALT, trade relations, the Middle East, and his desire to arrange a Soviet-American summit. Nixon repeated that he was prepared to accept any kind of government that emerged in South Vietnam, stating that his speech was not “propaganda,” “a clever trick,” or “a political or military trap,” but rather a “sincere attempt” to break the impasse in negotiations. He assured Dobrynin that he sought a political situation to the

²⁵⁰ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” April 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 51-53.

²⁵¹ Ibid, and “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 15, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 53-56.

²⁵² Kissinger-Nixon Telephone Conversation, May 14, 1969, 9:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Also cited in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 59.

crisis, though if the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong continued to delay progress, he could not “wait forever” to “begin real negotiations” and would have to start considering “alternatives,” such as military action. When Dobrynin protested that “there can be no alternatives to a political settlement,” Nixon, “clearly not wanting the conversation to become contentious,” restated his dedication to a political solution before ending the conversation, sending his personal greetings to the Soviet leadership and inviting Dobrynin and his wife to a reception commemorating the tenth anniversary of Nixon’s first trip to the Soviet Union. The Soviet record of the conversation observes that, before the meeting with Nixon, Kissinger repeated the assurance that “provided there is a fairly reasonable interval between conclusion of an agreement and [the establishment of] such a system,” the American side was prepared to accept “whatever the South Vietnamese themselves agree upon.”²⁵³

Both diplomats seemed to think that they could link progress in Vietnam to future advances in other fields of negotiations. In talking points for an April 12 meeting, Kissinger suggested that, while Nixon “will ask nothing of the Soviet Union inconsistent with its position as a senior communist power,” an end to the Vietnam War would lead him to anticipate progress in bilateral relations.²⁵⁴ Although Kissinger stopped short of declaring that talks on other topics were contingent upon progress in Vietnam, he made it clear that a Vietnam settlement could accelerate breakthroughs in other fields. For his part, Dobrynin wrote after his initial meeting with Nixon that there was not “any doubt that the Vietnam question and our role in the talks remain an important tool in our hands for influencing the

²⁵³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 14, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 59-62.

²⁵⁴ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” April 12, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 50-51.

new administration in the United States.”²⁵⁵ By dangling the promise of Soviet aid in bringing the North Vietnamese to the table, Dobrynin believed that concessions could be received in other areas of interest to the Soviet leadership, such as SALT or the official recognition of the postwar boundaries. Thus, Dobrynin hoped to use Kissinger’s own linkage against him, tempting him with the concessions he implicitly requested to advance superpower relations.

While each side thought it could play the Vietnam card to gain ground in other areas of negotiations, both Kissinger and Dobrynin wrote that they would not allow this to happen. In his suggestions for how Nixon should conduct himself in a meeting with Dobrynin on May 14, Kissinger wrote: “I would *not* thank him for anything the Soviet Union did in Vietnam. Their contribution is too nebulous.”²⁵⁶ Kissinger realized that heaping praise upon his Soviet counterparts would give them an upper hand in future discussions. For his part, Dobrynin consistently reminded Kissinger that linkage was unacceptable. As early as March 13, Dobrynin reported optimistically that American leaders had given up the concept of linkage.²⁵⁷ He later summarized his comments to Kissinger in an October 9 discussion, simultaneously emphasizing the failure of linkage and the Soviet government’s preparedness

²⁵⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 17, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 14-18.

²⁵⁶ “Memorandum from Presidential Adviser Kissinger to President Nixon,” May 14, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 58-59. Either Nixon did not effectively deliver this part of the message or Dobrynin did not pick up on the cue, as Dobrynin reported that Nixon “is aware of the Soviet Government’s constructive role, which is aimed at peaceful settlement of the Vietnam conflict.” He concludes his report, “Nixon’s view that Moscow is playing a constructive role in this whole matter has been noticeably reinforced.” See “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 14, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 59-62.

²⁵⁷ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” March 13, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 39-45.

to move forward in solving any number of issues.²⁵⁸ In other words, while each diplomat recognized and encouraged linkages in memos to their leaders, they both denied them in private talks with the other side, hoping that they could hold out and use their position to gain leverage in future negotiations in other fields.

Conscious of the delicate nature of his attempt to link the Soviet ability to bring Hanoi to the table with progress in détente talks, Dobrynin did everything he could to shore up this position when it was threatened. He stated that, in an October 9 discussion, Kissinger opened a conversation by stating that American policymakers did not intend to “pester” the Soviet side any longer on Vietnam, due to their impression that the Soviet side lost all motivation to help end the conflict once the US side ceased bombing in North Vietnam. Dobrynin reassured Kissinger that the Soviet Union remained interested in settling the war as quickly as possible, and he blamed the US for delaying peace, pointing to the American unwillingness to establish a coalition government in South Vietnam, the attempts to link the potential for resolving other issues to a Vietnam settlement, and Kissinger’s threats of using military force to bring about peace talks. Dobrynin reported that, after fuming that two US proposals to Moscow on settling the Vietnam conflict had not received a response, Kissinger eventually calmed down and asked Dobrynin not to forward these grievances to the Kremlin, since he had not been authorized to mention them.²⁵⁹

Sufficiently concerned about Kissinger’s belief that the Kremlin wanted the Vietnam War to continue in perpetuity, Dobrynin penned an urgent telegram to the Foreign Ministry. Dobrynin wrote that this turn of events was not advantageous for Soviet authorities. Given

²⁵⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” October 9, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 79-80.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

their work to link Vietnam with other issues, Soviet interests in bilateral agreements, international problems, and ending war itself would be damaged. Having established the danger of a persisting conflict in Vietnam, he gave Nixon and Kissinger the impression that the Soviet Union, under certain circumstances, would provide help in settling the war, which could “promote a certain ‘unfreezing’ of the situation and a more flexible US policy in other areas.” Dobrynin proposed that the Soviet leadership satisfy Kissinger’s complaints by sending a response to the two American messages on Vietnam and made suggestions on how to proceed.²⁶⁰ Dobrynin recognized that the carrot he dangled—the hint that the Soviet government could influence Hanoi toward resolution of the Vietnam War—was in danger, and in order to encourage progress on other matters of interest to the Soviet state, action was required from the center to restate its interest in Vietnam.

Kissinger understood Dobrynin’s clever strategy and even praised him for it in his memoirs. In June, the American side expressed its preparedness to begin strategic arms talks, and “characteristically, even though the Soviets had professed their eagerness for talks for months, once we were committed they evaded a reply.” On October 20, after it became clear that Dobrynin needed to re-bait the hook, the Soviet leadership delivered notice that the Soviet government was prepared to start SALT negotiations by mid-November. As Kissinger wrote, “it was a shrewd move,” as the Kremlin understood that given the enthusiasm of many American officials for SALT, Nixon “could not possibly refuse” the Soviet offer. Moreover, “in the resulting climate of hope, any escalation in Vietnam would appear as hazarding prospects for a major relaxation of tensions.” In short, the Soviet leadership “applied reverse linkage to us,” and as Kissinger concluded, “Their calculation

²⁶⁰ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” October 10, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 81-83.

proved to be correct.”²⁶¹ In this instance, the Soviet leadership and the embassy successfully appropriated Kissinger’s concepts of linkage for their own gain.

Although it is difficult to evaluate the actual content of backchannel discussions on Vietnam, given the disparities between Kissinger and Dobrynin’s accounts of discussions, important observations can be made about these documents. Despite the depth of their disagreement, neither Kissinger nor Dobrynin described it in ideological terms, instead using realpolitik language when discussing it with superiors in the White House or the Kremlin. It would appear that both Kissinger and Dobrynin demonstrated a distinct awareness of how actions on the Vietnam issue would affect superpower relations with their allies. On the one hand, Kissinger emphasized that the US could not simply overthrow its ally, Thieu, before leaving Vietnam, as it would give the impression that the US was not a reliable partner for its allies and client states. On the other hand, Dobrynin apparently told Kissinger that the Soviet government continued its support for North Vietnam primarily to maintain its position as the leader of the world communist movement over China. In this sense, both Dobrynin and Kissinger demonstrated concern as to how Vietnam might impact their respective nations’ image in the international community, especially among allies. Both employed linkage, using the Vietnam crisis to try to extract concessions, yet they also both emphasized in their memos that they would not be duped by the other side’s attempts at linkage.

The Advent of Triangular Diplomacy

Authors on Soviet-American relations during détente have focused on Nixon and Kissinger’s work to open relations with China not merely for the sake of relaxing tensions

²⁶¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 305.

around the globe, but to conceive a new order to international affairs. William Burr describes this vision in *The Kissinger Transcripts*: “Putting Cold War containment policy on a new basis, the Nixon administration sought an equilibrium based on Sino-Soviet estrangement, cooperation with Moscow, and a covert tilt toward Beijing, while trying to ensure that neither power became too close to US allies in Asia and Europe.”²⁶² Burr continues, “As long as Moscow and Beijing were antagonistic, Kissinger saw limitless possibilities for subtly influencing both and balancing one against the other so that Washington could keep its options open while preserving its influence.”²⁶³ Thus the goal of American policymakers was to ensure that the US had better relations with both Moscow and Beijing than the two communist powers had with one another, all while maintaining the integrity of the various American alliances. In any dispute, the US would always have one of the other two powers on its side, ensuring that it was never isolated. Using this system, the US could preserve its position as the world’s top power, even following the debacle in Vietnam, which demonstrated America’s weakening position in the international arena. As Burr concludes: “Nixon’s rhetoric about a ‘lasting peace’ rested on a foundation of Cold War mistrust: ultimately, it was suspicion of Moscow that had drawn Nixon and Kissinger closer to Beijing. The goal was a détente that would contain the Soviets and sustain American power.”²⁶⁴

Other authors on this topic have agreed with this focus on the American move to initiate triangular diplomacy, maintaining that Soviet diplomats merely reacted to American

²⁶² William Burr, ed. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 17.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

advances in China, hoping to prevent a Sino-American condominium. Robert Dallek writes, “There is almost universal agreement that the opening to China was a wise act of statesmanship” on the part of Nixon and Kissinger, and “the policy itself deserves acclaim as not only a step away from more than two decades of tensions that risked world peace but also a device for pressuring the Soviet Union into more accommodating relations with the West.”²⁶⁵ Vladislav Zubok echoes this sentiment, explaining that Nixon and Kissinger used triangular diplomacy successfully to push forward Soviet-American détente.²⁶⁶ In his encyclopedic work on détente, Raymond Garthoff asserts that, by alienating China, Soviet officials facilitated the emergence of triangular diplomacy, and the Soviet Union was “perforce coopted into it as the weakest side in the triangle.” Garthoff states, “The Soviet role in the formation of triangular diplomacy . . . was essentially reactive.”²⁶⁷ In an attempt to curb Chinese influence and check Sino-American rapprochement, Soviet diplomats complained about China to American diplomats, warning them that the Chinese wanted to start a nuclear war between the superpowers.

Kissinger’s biographers have taken a similar approach to this issue. Alistair Horne contends that, if Nixon formulated an opening to China from a “visionary,” “romantic,” and “messianic” standpoint, focusing on the importance of reintroducing China to “the family of nations,” Kissinger, “true to the Metternichian principles and realpolitik,” believed that “the overriding importance of the ‘China card’ lay in how it could affect relations with Moscow—not in China per se.”²⁶⁸ Jeremi Suri furthers this point, writing, that in Kissinger’s strategic

²⁶⁵ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 617.

²⁶⁶ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 216.

²⁶⁷ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 270-74, and 277.

²⁶⁸ Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*, 66.

endgame, the US would “stand above” the USSR and China as: “*the* central diplomatic player, *the* worldwide mediator. Leaders in Washington would become the only figures with effective networks of influence throughout the major regions and among the major powers. They would be the transcendent statesmen for the indispensable nation.”²⁶⁹ Reflecting these statements, Jussi Hanhimäki explains that Nixon and Kissinger relished “play[ing] the triangular game” with Dobrynin in 1969, vaguely hinting at the possibility of improved Sino-American relations while keeping the Soviet ambassador guessing and reacting to American moves. He emphasizes the leverage that the US obtained by noting a potential opening to China in discussions with Dobrynin.²⁷⁰ In sum, the major authors on triangular diplomacy have focused on Nixon’s vision of a breakthrough with China, Kissinger’s role in engineering the Sino-American rapprochement, and the way in which triangular diplomacy was designed to isolate the USSR and accentuate American power. They characterize the Soviet response as an attempt to weaken the Chinese position by convincing American leaders that the China was a dangerous partner that hoped to provoke a nuclear war between the superpowers.

While the American side may have eventually won the triangular diplomacy contest between the superpowers, Dobrynin was far from “reactive” in his approach, recognizing at an early stage that Sino-American rapprochement represented a real danger and providing recommendations to counter or slow this process. In the first months of the Nixon administration, Dobrynin already tried to persuade American leaders of the dangers of negotiating with the Chinese. As early as March 3—the day after the first border clash

²⁶⁹ Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 184.

²⁷⁰ Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, 65-66.

between the USSR and China at Damansky Island—the issue of the triangular relationship came up, with Kissinger assuring Dobrynin that the “main concern” of the US was developing its relationship with the Soviet Union, not China, since “the two of us are the only real nuclear powers.”²⁷¹ Eight days later, they explored the Sino-Soviet split at greater length, and Kissinger reported that Dobrynin broached the topic, asking for the national security advisor’s opinion and assurances that the US would not take advantage of the USSR’s troubles. Kissinger confirmed that the American side did not intend to get involved, but Dobrynin delivered a “gory account” of Chinese atrocities and a breakdown of the military situation.²⁷² According to Dobrynin, however, Kissinger brought up the issue of the Sino-Soviet split. Dobrynin also wrote that during backchannel talks, “we have been seeking, in an appropriately low-key manner, gradually to reinforce the current mood of caution and wariness that already exists among the Americans themselves with respect to the actions of the Chinese.” Dobrynin hinted that the Chinese attacks near Damansky Island were “but one part of [Beijing]’s foreign policy plan,” a symptom of their “Great Power chauvinism,” an attempt “to instill in their people hatred for their neighbors—and not just their neighbors—and to create at home an atmosphere in which new, more dangerous foreign policy adventures—particularly against countries of Asia—can be justified.”²⁷³ Having heard Nixon’s discussion of opening to China during the campaign, Dobrynin hoped to discourage American overtures to the Chinese by implying the potential for Chinese

²⁷¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 3, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 28-35.

²⁷² “Memorandum from Presidential Advisor Kissinger to President Nixon,” March 11, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 35-36.

²⁷³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 11, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 36-39.

aggression against Taiwan or Japan and dropping hints that Chinese foreign policy did not match up with American interests.

In the first two years of backchannel negotiations, Dobrynin did his best to convince Kissinger that China was a rogue state, while Kissinger assured Dobrynin that American leaders prioritized the Soviet relationship above all else. On April 2, Dobrynin reported on a long conversation in which Kissinger confirmed that he was heading a committee on reevaluating US relations with the PRC. Kissinger stated the administration's belief that, while there were then only two superpowers in the world, China could emerge as a third within twenty to twenty-five years. He also expressed doubts that relations would improve much before Mao's death, instead hoping to lay the foundation for a future rapprochement. He emphasized that some liberals in the Democratic Party believed the US could play off Sino-Soviet differences to improve Sino-American relations and strengthen the American position in international politics.²⁷⁴ Kissinger assured Dobrynin that this was not Nixon's intention, since improving Soviet-American relations was the administration's "No. 1 priority" and "an attempt to play on the disagreements could embroil the United States itself and even further alienate both the USSR and the PRC." In other words, Kissinger attempted to convince Dobrynin that there was no reason for the Soviet government to be concerned about American overtures to China.²⁷⁵ Here, Kissinger played electoral politics, trying to convince Dobrynin that the Democrats pushing for triangular diplomacy, even as he secretly negotiated with the PRC.

When discussing the China situation, Kissinger worked hard to engender trust in

²⁷⁴ Kissinger specifically named Senator Ted Kennedy and Ted Sorensen.

²⁷⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," April 2, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 46-49.

American motives by complimenting Soviet policy and flattering Dobrynin and the Soviet leadership. According to Dobrynin's notes, Kissinger reiterated that while he could not say that American leaders were "greatly distressed by [the Soviet Union's] growing differences with the Chinese," they did not want to take sides since relations with the Soviet Union had a greater impact on American global interests than Sino-American relations. Dobrynin continued: "Moreover, Kissinger added, Mao [Zedong]'s actions cannot be assessed using rational logic. . . . The Soviet Union is a different matter; it is led by political figures who think realistically and who are interested in the welfare of their people and their country. With them specific agreements are possible, in the interests of both countries and others as well."²⁷⁶ Kissinger followed this praise by emphasizing that this relationship rested on progress in Vietnam. Later, when discussing Soviet attempts to restart relations with the Chinese in September and October 1969, Kissinger speculated that the deciding factor was the Chinese leadership's belief that the USSR might launch a preemptive strike against Chinese nuclear centers. When Dobrynin asked for Kissinger's opinion on this situation, he complimented the Soviet Union's violent response to the Prague Spring the previous year. After this "unexpected" action, Kissinger commented, "Washington no longer questions the determination of the Soviet Government [to act] if it believes there is a genuine threat to the supreme national interests of the USSR."²⁷⁷ In this sense, Kissinger commended the pragmatic and even brutal nature of Soviet foreign policy in discussions on China to suggest that American policymakers were more interested in a deal with the USSR, a country that shared its values and had sufficient power to influence American behavior around the world.

²⁷⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," June 12, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 64-70.

²⁷⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," October 9, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 79-81. Brackets are from the original text.

The Soviet ambassador's reports on China demonstrated a shrewd understanding of what Nixon and Kissinger hoped to accomplish in triangular diplomacy. In discussing the April 2 backchannel discussion, Dobrynin argued that Nixon and Kissinger were "looking very carefully at how to find ways to improve relations with [Beijing], without at this time causing undue difficulties in the relations with us, the most powerful socialist country, and without losing sight of future opportunities to somehow use the Soviet-Chinese friction to their own advantage." Dobrynin did not believe Kissinger's assurances that the US would not use Sino-Soviet differences to its advantage. He understood that, if an opening presented itself in Sino-American relations, the US would not hesitate to utilize the Sino-Soviet split to strengthen its own position in global affairs. For the moment, though, Dobrynin underscored that American leaders were uncertain of the potential for Sino-American rapprochement, and since the Soviet Union remained the more powerful country from a military standpoint, improving relations with Moscow remained Nixon's top priority. Indeed, Dobrynin noted Kissinger's emphasis on American "reasonable behavior" in triangular diplomacy, "clearly hoping that this will be duly appreciated in Moscow and taken into account in specific Soviet foreign policy measures." For the time being, Dobrynin suggested, the US would use the potential for an opening to China to gain concessions from Soviet diplomats. With regard to Kissinger's comment about liberal Democrats, Dobrynin interpreted it as a sign that electoral politics already played a role in the conduct of Nixon's foreign policy, as Kissinger promoted the belief that the Nixon administration would be more favorable in negotiations than a liberal Democratic presidency, making the Soviet Union predisposed to take a more conciliatory position in backchannel talks.²⁷⁸ Thus Dobrynin accurately assessed the

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

motivations behind Kissinger's statements about China in 1969.

In addition to understanding American motivations, Dobrynin recommended that Soviet leaders develop a triangular strategy of their own to use the China issue to their advantage. In an urgent telegram to the Foreign Ministry on October 10, Dobrynin proposed that the Soviet leadership not view the reopening of Soviet talks with the Chinese as sufficient reason to freeze relations with the US. He was confident that a Sino-Soviet bloc would reemerge, defeating Kissinger's triangular diplomacy and putting the US at a disadvantage. He contended that, if the Soviet leadership put a stop to Soviet-American progress in order to normalize relations with the Chinese side, and the Chinese leadership eventually backtracked in negotiations, Soviet officials would find themselves at a disadvantage, trying to reestablish contacts with the US in an unfriendly diplomatic climate. This would be especially dangerous, since some American advisors already were "whispering" to Nixon that the Soviet leadership pursued détente only because of "short-term factors" like the Sino-Soviet split. To keep the American side interested, the Soviet ambassador recommended the Soviet leaders respond to American pleas for a start time and venue for strategic arms talks, even if they later had to wait for Soviet-Chinese border talks to begin. Dobrynin expressed the belief that the Soviet Union was in a favorable position in the triangular game, with the American leadership, impressed by Soviet action in Czechoslovakia and China, scrambling to open a "whole series of channels" with China.²⁷⁹

In sum, while Dobrynin's telegrams to the Kremlin confirm some arguments in the historiography, they also suggest that Dobrynin understood triangular diplomacy from the

²⁷⁹ "Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," October 10, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 81-83. For the October 9 telegram, see footnote 3 on page 82.

start of the Nixon administration, that he tried to play his own “China card” in talks with Kissinger, and that he wrote Moscow on several occasions to suggest ways in which the Soviet Union could find itself on the winning side of this game of diplomatic chess.

Dobrynin recognized Kissinger’s maneuvers as attempts to exploit the differences between the Soviet Union and the PRC and create a situation that allowed for the US to pair with one of the communist powers in debates over any international issue. In recommending the start of official US-Soviet talks for SALT, he constructed a plan that he felt would have maximum benefit and minimum risk for the USSR, putting the Soviet Union in the most secure global position possible. The Soviet government followed his advice, extending a proposal to begin official strategic arms limitations talks. While the Soviet Union may have come out on the short end of triangular diplomacy in the end, it was not because Soviet diplomats did not understand the game or did not participate in a proactive way.

1969 in Review

By the end of 1969, the cautious optimism that characterized the initial months of negotiations had faded. The summer of 1969 witnessed a lag in talks, with no backchannel meetings from June 11 to September 27, thanks to a trip by Dobrynin to Moscow for consultations and a frustration with the lack of progress. In late September 1969, Foreign Minister Gromyko visited the US, giving a speech at the UN and meeting with Rogers three times to discuss Soviet-American relations. Gromyko did not, however, travel to Washington to meet with the president, standard procedure for Soviet foreign ministers visiting the US. Kissinger responded to this perceived slight against the president, making Dobrynin wait several days after requesting an appointment until they finally had a brief

meeting on September 27. According to the American record of the conversation, Kissinger expressed regrets that Gromyko did not visit Washington, while Dobrynin suggested that Gromyko never received an invitation. Kissinger lamented the lack of a formal request from the Soviet side, and Dobrynin remarked that “he was not aware that there were such fine questions of protocol.”²⁸⁰ In his memoirs, Kissinger wrote that Dobrynin was trying “to fish for an invitation” for Gromyko to visit the White House,²⁸¹ and Kissinger stuck to his guns, claiming they were so “swamped” that the president was not meeting with foreign ministers in Washington.²⁸²

The substance of the conversation was equally frosty. On November 1, 1968, President Johnson had ceased the bombing campaign in North Vietnam, and Nixon had previously stated that, if negotiators had not made progress by the one-year anniversary of that date, he would take strong action.²⁸³ After a frustrating summer with little evolution in talks with Hanoi, the American side decided to play hardball with Dobrynin. Nixon and Kissinger prearranged for the president to make a phone call to Kissinger in the middle of the backchannel meeting, allowing the national security advisor to pass along an informal message. Kissinger reported, “The President had told me in his call that the train had just left the station and was now headed down the track. Dobrynin responded that he hoped it was an airplane and not a train and would leave some maneuvering room. I said the President chooses his words very carefully and that I was sure he meant train.” When Dobrynin

²⁸⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” September 27, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 77-78.

²⁸¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 304.

²⁸² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” September 27, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 77-78.

²⁸³ Kissinger discusses the ways in which Nixon dropped hints about this deadline in his memoirs. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 303-4.

expressed disappointment and repeated previous promises that the Soviet Union hoped to help with a settlement, Kissinger snapped that the American side “had no illusions about Soviet help in the past.” Dobrynin attempted to shift to other areas of Soviet-American relations, such as trade liberalization, but the national security advisor responded that those issues were secondary and could be addressed once Vietnam was solved, “especially if the Russians took an understanding attitude.” Dobrynin smiled, according to Kissinger, and made a snarky remark about Kissinger’s pursuit of linkage. Earlier in the conversation, Dobrynin tried to bring up other issues, but Kissinger rebuffed him, stating that the lack of a Soviet reply to American formal notes on Vietnam and SALT made it difficult to discuss issues like the Middle East outside of the normal diplomatic channels.²⁸⁴ In short, Kissinger emphasized that progress in other areas was unlikely without a resolution on Vietnam and a formal response to several American proposals. As Kissinger wrote to Nixon, “I believe the Soviets are concerned and now more clearly understand that we mean business on the Vietnam issue.”²⁸⁵

The second meeting between Nixon and Dobrynin, which took place on October 20, is emblematic of the problems facing the backchannel in late 1969. Kissinger informed Nixon of Dobrynin’s attempt at “reverse linking” SALT and Vietnam: “It is particularly important not to encourage the Soviets to believe that they can pacify us with the carrot of SALT while continuing to beat us with the stick of abetting Hanoi’s intransigence.”²⁸⁶ In both records of the conversation, Dobrynin began by suggesting that SALT talks begin on

²⁸⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” September 27, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 77-78.

²⁸⁵ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 77, footnote 1.

²⁸⁶ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” October 18, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 83-85.

November 17 in Helsinki, and while Nixon and Kissinger said that they preferred Vienna, Dobrynin agreed that the Soviet leadership would be flexible.²⁸⁷ Dobrynin then read an Aide Mémoire, which expressed Soviet concerns that, while the US claimed to desire talks on a broad array of issues, it evaded concrete issues. In fact, in some cases, the American side took steps that ran counter to developing better relations. The Aide Mémoire then addressed unanswered Soviet proposals for eliminating military blocs and setting the postwar European map, as well as announcing a readiness to negotiate on the issue of West Berlin. It also highlighted American unwillingness to cooperate on the Middle East, the dismissal of proposals made by the North Vietnam and the Viet Cong to end the Vietnam War, and Nixon's implied threats to escalate military actions to force the North Vietnamese to accept American terms. Following a warning that any attempt to exploit the differences of the USSR and the PRC would lead to "very grave consequences," the Aide Mémoire concludes that Soviet leaders still "attach great significance" to US-Soviet relations.²⁸⁸

Although there are frequently minor disparities between the memorandums of conversation written by Kissinger and Dobrynin, the transcripts of this meeting bear little resemblance to one another. In the American transcript, after Dobrynin read the Aide Mémoire, Nixon "pulled out a yellow pad, handed it to Dobrynin and said, 'you'd better take some notes,' and began to speak almost uninterruptedly for half an hour." Nixon declared that he had been in office for exactly nine months, and "the baby" of better Soviet-American relations "should have been born; instead, there have been several miscarriages." He

²⁸⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," October 20, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 86-87; "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," October 20, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 89-90; and "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," October 20, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 90-97.

²⁸⁸ "Note from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon," undated, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 88-89.

explained why relations had not changed for the better, beginning with Middle East, where he contended that the Soviet leadership had not done enough to bring the Arab states to the table. When Dobrynin tried to challenge Nixon's portrayal of events, Nixon interrupted, claiming that Dobrynin's complaints were "technical issues" that should be discussed with professional diplomats. Touching on European matters, Nixon argued that they could be discussed "at a very high level, if we can make a breakthrough somewhere." When Dobrynin asked for clarification on how to proceed, "the President ignored him and turned to China," repeating that an improvement in Sino-American relations was not targeted against the USSR.

Moving on to Vietnam, Nixon complained that one year after the cessation of bombing, when the Soviet leadership promised to become active in talks, nothing had changed. Nixon suggested that "maybe the Soviet Union did not want to end the war in Vietnam," and that Soviet leaders continued parroting "the same tired old slogans" presented by the North Vietnamese side since the start of the Nixon administration. Nixon repeated the well-worn linkage from previous months, stating: "If the Soviet Union found it possible to do something in Vietnam, and the Vietnam War ended, the US might do something dramatic to improve Soviet-US relations, indeed something more dramatic than they could now imagine. But until then, real progress would be difficult." Nixon concluded that, while he wanted to be remembered for bringing about "a watershed in US-Soviet relations," he refused to "hold still for being 'diddled' to death in Vietnam." Talking on the phone the next day, the Americans seemed pleased with Nixon's performance. They planned the next move, which was to have Kissinger play up Nixon as an "out of control" force who has "made up his mind" that "unless there's some movement" on Vietnam he would just shake his head and

walk out.²⁸⁹ In sum, the American account features an assertive Nixon dominating the conversation and repeatedly cutting off Dobrynin.

While Dobrynin faithfully recorded the substance of Nixon's comments, his characterization of the rest of the conversation differs. Dobrynin noted that, while he was reading the Aide Mémoire, "Nixon became visibly nervous," particularly during the statement on Vietnam, and after handing Dobrynin the pad, "he rambled," at first, "repeating himself and losing his train of thought." Later in the conversation, "he seemed to pull himself together and began speaking more calmly and clearly." After Nixon's statement on the Middle East, when he complained that Israel had made significantly more compromises than the Arab states, Dobrynin reported that he interjected forcefully, arguing that the president's argument contradicted US support for the UN Security Council Resolution 242, which opposed Israel retaining territories captures in the 1967 Six-Day War. The two engaged in a back and forth: Dobrynin repeated the Soviet position, while Nixon stressed that Israel would not accept UN troops. Dobrynin criticized the American unwillingness to discuss Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, while Nixon condemned Soviet inflexibility. Dobrynin declared that he "could not agree with such an arbitrary assessment of the Soviet position," pointing to the "one-sided pro-Israel position" taken by the US during recent consultations. After a general discussion about the potential for a settlement, Dobrynin wrote that, for Nixon, "success in a Middle East settlement depends on the intensity of our efforts to resolve the Vietnam conflict," as the American side was "in no

²⁸⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US), October 20, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 86-87.

hurry” to settle in the Middle East.²⁹⁰ This heated exchange, in which Dobrynin provided strong responses to Nixon’s claims about Soviet policy in the Middle East, contradicts the American report’s suggestion that Nixon “cut off” Dobrynin when the Soviet ambassador initially began to protest.

Dobrynin also offered a differing account of the two men’s discussion of Vietnam. According to Dobrynin, Nixon was “displeased and agitated” with the characterization of Vietnam in the Aide Mémoire, acting “very nervously” and going into “a long-winded monologue” which he “delivered emotionally and without stopping.” Dobrynin strongly criticized Nixon’s implied argument that the Soviet government was the “main problem” in negotiating a settlement, reiterating that it was American troops who were “thousands of miles away from their own country in foreign territory, sowing death, destruction, famine, and illness.” He reemphasized the Soviet Union’s interest in peace, and assured Nixon that the USSR would continue to play a constructive role in ending the conflict. Dobrynin warned Nixon of the dangers of using additional military action to bring the war to an end.²⁹¹

After this tense debate, Dobrynin observed that Nixon “cooled off a bit,” and the two discussed the progress in Soviet-American relations, including the limiting of “personal polemics” in public remarks, before returning to the issue of Vietnam. Nixon again expressed frustration that the Soviet Union had taken a “wait-and-see position,” delaying strong intervention until it was most advantageous for Soviet leaders. Denying this allegation, Dobrynin cited the president’s own words that the continuation of Vietnam impaired breakthroughs in Soviet-American relations, asking Nixon if “no genuine progress”

²⁹⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” October 20, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 90-97.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

on bilateral talks could be made on other issues before the conclusion of the war. Nixon responded that this would have to occur in normal diplomatic channels, not the backchannel, until the war's close, at which point he could take an active role in promoting "dramatic leaps" in US-Soviet relations.

Dobrynin's description is more dynamic than the American report. In Dobrynin's retelling, Nixon declared that the Soviet leadership would remember him as "the most conciliatory US president of the entire postwar period," and as a man who personally "engage[d] in many matters bearing on relations with the USSR instead of delegating them to the diplomatic service." Dobrynin understood this as a threat to the backchannel by pushing Kissinger and Dobrynin's conversations to the side. He responded, "If the US Government is not interested in this at present, we can just as well wait. We have never kowtowed to anyone, and we never will." Dobrynin described Nixon as conciliatory after this comment, replying that he was "personally" interested in improving US-Soviet relations, even if Vietnam served as a "serious obstacle." Dobrynin criticized Nixon's growing obsession with Vietnam. In his words, the conflict had assumed "such an emotional coloration that Nixon is unable to control himself even in a conversation with a foreign ambassador." For his part, the Soviet ambassador reported, he "conversed with Nixon in a calm, business-like tone," taking a "firm stance when our interests were involved" and emphasizing Soviet influence over Hanoi.²⁹²

The opposing interpretations of this meeting can largely be interpreted as a result of their intended audiences. Dobrynin could not give the Kremlin the impression that the president had walked all over him. He needed to demonstrate that he stood his ground,

²⁹² Ibid.

delivered the Soviet interpretation of events, and calmly defended Soviet interests in opposition to the more erratic, emotional president. Similarly, Kissinger composed the memo for Nixon's file understanding the president's own insecurities about these sorts of meetings. Kissinger describes the president as "nervous" about personal diplomacy, finding it "painful" to insist directly on his position and requiring reassurances afterward that he had performed well. For instance, after his first meeting with Dobrynin, Nixon called Kissinger into his office four times to confirm that he did a good job.²⁹³ It is not surprising, then, that the memo portrays Nixon as the domineering force in the conversation. In all likelihood, Nixon may have come off as forceful, but Dobrynin, a diplomat with seven years of experience in direct negotiations with presidents, almost certainly did not simply fold in the face of aggressive tactics. Regardless of the real tone of the meeting, these memos demonstrate how each side tailored its reports to appeal to their respective readers.

The follow-up memos highlight the mutual frustration both parties felt with one another in the aftermath of the meeting. Kissinger speculated to Nixon that Dobrynin's goal was to assess if America seriously intended to go through with its threats to escalate the violence in Vietnam, using SALT, Berlin, and the backchannel as carrots to make it more difficult for Nixon to "play it rough" in Vietnam. He found "nothing new" in Dobrynin's Vietnam proposals, but that Soviet acknowledgement of American hints about potential military action might lead them to press for some concessions from Hanoi. He recognized the implicit danger that Dobrynin presented on China, but suggested to Nixon that this should not alter American policy. Kissinger also expressed pessimism about the Middle East, acknowledging that the Soviet side may have genuinely believed that the US had not exerted

²⁹³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 142-43.

enough pressure on Israel. Highlighting Dobrynin's statement that both sides should continue talking as "a signal that for all their complaints and accusations, they remain interested in normal relations," Kissinger was positive that American policymakers could press the Soviet Union on Vietnam, but leave the door open for future breakthroughs in normalizing relations.²⁹⁴

In contrast, Dobrynin seemed more pessimistic than ever in his follow-up telegram to the Foreign Ministry, even proposing that the Soviet side consider moving primary talks outside of the backchannel. He complained that Nixon displayed an obsessive preoccupation with the Vietnam War and did not introduce anything new on other issues. In evaluating Nixon's "more emotional and excitable" attitudes toward Vietnam, Dobrynin pointed to Nixon's extant anticommunism and the growing influence of anticommunists in the American government, including Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., who led negotiations with North Vietnam in Paris. Dobrynin also revealed his frustration with Kissinger's rigidity on the Vietnam issue, recommending that the Soviet Union turn to Rogers, who was viewed as "more flexible" on Vietnam. He advised that they "gradually increase Rogers' involvement in the confidential exchange of views with us, while continuing our contacts via Kissinger. To enhance Rogers' role in this exchange," he suggested Gromkyo send him letters directly to raise his standing in the administration. Dobrynin believed it advisable to continue reminding Nixon that the Soviet Union valued improving relations with the US, arguing that this, along with additional pressure on Vietnam and other issues, would help steer Nixon and Kissinger to "more realistic positions." Dobrynin reemphasized his previous suggestion for reverse-linkage: "We ought to keep in mind that the Vietnam crisis itself and our role in it

²⁹⁴ "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," October 21, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 97-98.

remain one of the most powerful tools that we have for influencing US policy and President Nixon personally.”²⁹⁵

Later sources fail to shed much light on the real mood of the conversation. At their next meeting, Dobrynin reported that Kissinger used a more conciliatory tone. To him, this suggested the American side regretted the emotionality of Nixon’s statements and hoped to “soften this impression somewhat.”²⁹⁶ Both men also downplayed the passionate nature of this meeting in their memoirs. Instead, Dobrynin focused on the agreement to begin SALT talks and Nixon’s assurances that Sino-American talks were not directed against the Soviet Union, while Kissinger praised Soviet reverse-linkage in agreeing to SALT discussions and recorded Nixon’s promise to “do something dramatic” in Soviet-American relations if the USSR helped bring about the end of the Vietnam War. Kissinger also mentioned that Nixon asked him to inform Dobrynin that the president was “out of control” and willing to embark on a brutal offensive to bring Vietnam to the table, though Kissinger suggests that he did not pass this note to Dobrynin, endeavoring to avoid threats that he considered idle.²⁹⁷

Several conclusions can be drawn about the backchannel in the first year of the Nixon administration. While Nixon and Kissinger contended that the president’s tirade on Vietnam came off as forceful and determined, Dobrynin described Nixon as weak, emotional, and vulnerable. Although Kissinger believed that Dobrynin’s comments on the Middle East indicated real Soviet doubts about the level of pressure the US exerted on Israel, Dobrynin left the meeting convinced that American policymakers were linking progress in the Middle

²⁹⁵ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” October 23, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 98-100.

²⁹⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” November 6, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 100-2.

²⁹⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 202; and Kissinger, *White House Years*, 305-6.

East to Soviet efforts to end the Vietnam War. If Kissinger remarked that the Soviet leadership remained eager for confidential contact with Nixon through the backchannel, Dobrynin was frustrated enough to recommend a turn toward Rogers and away from the White House. By December 1969, the backchannel rarely met, did not produce immediate gains, frequently resulted in repetitive arguments that exasperated its participants, and generated conflicting reports that denote confusion over the other side's positions and motivations. If the first step in attaining an agreement on substance is to reach a consensus on what was actually said at the negotiating table, the backchannel failed in its first year to advance the cause of Soviet-American relations.

Conclusion

As 1969 came to a close, Kissinger and Dobrynin met again for an overview of developments in superpower relations since Nixon entered office. Neither diplomat wanted to leave the impression with his respective superiors that their side was eager for this meeting, and their reports conflict as to who requested the meeting. Kissinger claimed that Dobrynin invited him to dinner at the embassy, while Dobrynin reported that Kissinger suggested meeting for an unofficial "tour d'horizon of the international situation."²⁹⁸ According to Kissinger, Dobrynin started "on a frank and open basis" by declaring that "he had missed the opportunity to talk to me for a long time, and he hoped that our meetings would be more frequent." In his account, Kissinger responded that "it was always a pleasure to talk to him."²⁹⁹ Dobrynin began his telegram, however, by noting that two or three weeks

²⁹⁸ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 103.

²⁹⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation," December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 104-6.

ago Kissinger had “expressed interest in such an informal meeting, citing the usefulness of a periodic ‘frank’ exchange of views between us.”³⁰⁰

Although they both noted the friendlier mood of the meeting in comparison to the October conversation, reports do not suggest much progress. Despite the previous year of negotiations, the role of linkage and the Vietnam War remained unclear. In Kissinger’s account, Dobrynin persisted in asking for clarification as to whether the link between Vietnam and progress in Soviet-American relations precluded progress in bilateral negotiations until the war ended, despite the fact that this was a central question in the October meeting with Nixon. Dobrynin also lectured Kissinger on not using the complexities of American bureaucracy as an excuse to delay progress in negotiations. “Such reports,” he remarked, “Were not believed in Moscow.”³⁰¹ Dobrynin’s notes suggest that he spent a portion of the conversation listing instances in which US actions contradicted American statements in favor of improving superpower relations, including its opposition to a European security conference, its lack of response to a Soviet proposal to meet in bilateral channels in advance of a European security conference, its opposition to the liberalization of trade policy with the USSR, its stepping up of “hostile activities” through Voice of America, and its actions in Vietnam, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.³⁰² Overall, by the end of the year, neither side had managed to resolve the tensions from the October conversation between Nixon and Dobrynin.

³⁰⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 106-10.

³⁰¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 104-6

³⁰² “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 106-10.

Yet there was some reason for optimism. Kissinger wrote in his preparatory notes that the “major purpose” of the meeting was to open a dialogue about a summit to address cooperation in SALT, Europe, China, and the Middle East. He proposed disconnecting Vietnam from Soviet-American relations, emphasizing that the American side would not ask for Soviet aid, but “will always be interested in their view.” “If matters get worse,” Kissinger added, “it will not be directed at them.”³⁰³ Kissinger told Dobrynin that the US “remained interested in good relations with the Soviet Union,” and that “we were the two great powers, and we had to avoid conflict.” If they could not come to agreements on major issues while the Vietnam War continued, they could discuss the major issues, “at least on a hypothetical basis,” in the interests of “exploring what such solutions might look like.” Thus, Kissinger stated that, at the end of the conversation, Dobrynin proposed getting together “at regular intervals,” focusing on one issue at each meeting to determine what sort of solutions might be plausible.³⁰⁴

In contrast, Dobrynin’s memos infer that Nixon recommended that regular backchannel meetings take place so that Kissinger and Dobrynin could explore “only fundamental issues.” Once the two sides agreed to a consensus, orders could be drafted to the normal diplomatic channels to complete the agreement. Dobrynin emphasized that these talks were not designed to replace normal diplomatic channels. Rather, their primary function was to produce agreements “on a fundamental mutual approach at a high level, especially when normal channels are clearly at an impasse or when the situation requires quick, purposeful action.” He speculated, “On the whole, one gets the impression that President

³⁰³ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon,” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 102-3.

³⁰⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation,” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 104-6.

Nixon is currently trying to reestablish some direct contact with the Soviet leadership, which was, for all intents and purposes, broken off following his remarks during a conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in October, when, on instructions from the Soviet Government, he was presented with our critical analysis of his administration's actions on the main foreign policy issues.³⁰⁵ While Dobrynin seems somewhat less optimistic than Kissinger, both diplomats reemphasized that the backchannel could produce tangible results in improving Soviet-American relations.

Thus the backchannel survived its first major test in 1969. Its conceptualization, rooted in Nixon and Kissinger's desire to keep critical issues out of State Department channels, as well as Dobrynin's long history of confidential backchannel talks with previous administrations, was followed by a period of regular meetings and optimism that a breakthrough could be achieved, with SALT negotiations announced in the fall. The circular arguments on Vietnam left Kissinger and Dobrynin in a trap, however, and the American side turned up the heat in an attempt to force a settlement in Southeast Asia. By the end of the year, despite some intense arguments, the participants agreed to meet more regularly, and this created the first step toward breaking the impasse and putting Soviet-American relations on more solid footing.

Recent archival releases paint a much more complex picture of Dobrynin than the one offered by previous historians. While he was bound to follow orders from Moscow, he also made policy recommendations that colored his approach to backchannel diplomacy. He astutely recognized Kissinger's policies of linkage and triangular diplomacy from the start of the Nixon administration, and he made recommendations about global policy to counter these

³⁰⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," December 29, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 112-13.

strategies. His approach of “reverse-linkage” put the Soviet leadership in a position to exploit the connections between American behavior in Vietnam and a summit, and he made suggestions for how to cope with the emerging issue of Sino-American rapprochement, arguing that greater efforts toward Soviet-American relations could help defuse this process. To conclude, Dobrynin was not just as a mouthpiece for the Soviet government, but a shrewd observer of international affairs with insight into how to deal with the new international order imagined by Kissinger.

CHAPTER 3

THE BACKCHANNEL BECOMES OPERATIONAL, 1970-71

Once Kissinger and Dobrynin recommitted themselves to preserving their backchannel, they faced a series of challenges that defined how the backchannel would influence Soviet-American relations during the Nixon presidency. First, Kissinger and Dobrynin initiated a series of attempts to “reboot” the backchannel in order to identify ground suitable for the long-term development of better relations, with each diplomat hoping to satisfy his own nation’s strategic interests. Attempts to reboot the backchannel from the end of 1969 to spring 1971 followed a basic pattern. First, Kissinger and Dobrynin would hold a dramatic “tour d’horizon” meeting. Then, they would follow it up with sessions geared toward engineering a breakthrough on all of the issues confronting the superpowers. Next, both diplomats would promise to let bygone be bygones and to focus on areas of agreement that could yield progress. Eventually due to a lack of progress in talks or outside developments, the backchannel would shut down again until the impetus arose for another attempt. Although an improvement in the relationship did not occur until the summer of 1971, critical steps in this period shaped superpower relations for the remainder of détente.

Second, they confronted the fact that individuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain hoped to usurp the backchannel’s monopoly on negotiating the most sensitive issues in superpower relations. This situation produced an emotional response from both diplomats that has two meanings. On the one hand, these reactions were genuine, reflecting Dobrynin and Kissinger’s frustrations with the lack of progress in the backchannel and mutual fears

that their respective personal positions in the superpower relationship could be circumvented by the actions of the other party. On the other hand, these emotional outbursts represent a negotiating tactic used by both diplomats to warn their partners against skirting the backchannel and to show their bosses the value of the backchannel. Moreover, these situations demonstrate that complex bureaucratic structures on both sides of the Iron Curtain created organizational confusion, and Kissinger and Dobrynin had to identify ways to deal with crises that emerged as a result of this two-tiered bureaucratic construction.

Third, they dealt with the consequences of America's rapprochement with China, which threatened to derail Soviet-American détente. While previous historians have focused on the ways that Sino-American rapprochement sped Soviet moves toward a summit, this chapter suggests that, initially, the announcement of Kissinger's trip to China cooled Dobrynin's enthusiasm for détente. Dobrynin's endorsement of a summit returned only after progress was made in other areas, confirming that the American side remained willing to pursue improved Soviet-American relations.

In general, this chapter explores how, in the aftermath of a rocky first year, Kissinger and Dobrynin activated the backchannel to pursue negotiations on issues that had been stalled for years, ultimately putting the superpower relationship on more solid footing by the summer of 1971. Without this period of gradual improvement in Soviet-American relations, the genuine breakthroughs that took place in 1972 would have been impossible. Dobrynin and Kissinger began to meet regularly in this period, and they came to grips with the backchannel mechanism, formalizing procedures to achieve agreements and identifying paths to improved superpower relations.

Repeatedly Rebooting the Backchannel

The “tour d’horizon” meeting at the end of 1969 represented the first attempt to reboot the backchannel relationship, as Kissinger and Dobrynin worked to smooth over the bilateral relationship after the confrontational discussion between Nixon and Dobrynin in October. Following this meeting, the diplomats communicated their feelings on the nature of the relationship and codified the backchannel operations. On February 18, in discussing the prospects for an ABM treaty, Dobrynin wrote that Kissinger took great pains to explain the difference between “propaganda intended for Congress” and White House policies. Kissinger emphasized that, while statements made by certain politicians and editorials in the US press might say one thing about détente, the “actual state of affairs” could be found only in the backchannel.³⁰⁶ In his report on this conversation, Kissinger told the Soviet ambassador that, in dealing with SALT, “we should have a full discussion,” setting up “two channels—one for the formal negotiations, and one between him and me to deal with general principles.”³⁰⁷ Dobrynin again emphasized the importance of the backchannel in telegrams to the Foreign Ministry. For example, on March 7, Dobrynin stated that he would carry out his instructions to contact the State Department with regard to bilateral talks on a Middle East settlement, but underscored that meeting with Kissinger on this topic was critical. He suggested three advantages to initiating talks through the backchannel. First, it would “tie [Nixon] more closely to these talks than in the past,” effectively giving the White House greater leverage and incentive to pursue a settlement. Second, it would provide additional motivation for the White House to keep on top of the State Department in seeking an

³⁰⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 18, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 127-32.

³⁰⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” February 18, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 125-27.

agreement. Third, it “would then provide the opportunity to once more approach the White House should the talks be deadlocked through the fault of the American side.”³⁰⁸ The Soviet ambassador explained to the Kremlin the advantages of dealing with the backchannel, rather than normal channels, and Dobrynin and Kissinger emerged from the arguments of late 1969 with an increasing commitment to making the backchannel work.

Both sides also demonstrated an active interest in holding a US-Soviet summit during Nixon’s first term, although each pegged the other as the more eager party. Kissinger described Dobrynin as “visibly attentive” when he brought up the possibility of a summit. Dobrynin apparently believed the administration was uninterested, leaving Soviet leaders “put off” by Nixon’s apparent reluctance.³⁰⁹ Dobrynin emphasized Kissinger’s own enthusiasm, writing that the US side proposed having a summit as early as the end of the year.³¹⁰ As in previous reports, both Kissinger and Dobrynin wanted to convince their bosses that they occupied the position of strength in the relationship and that their respective proxy’s negotiating strategies were yielding the desirable results. Regardless of who was most excited about the prospects for a summit, the two sides began outlining the process for coming to an agreement through both official negotiations via State Department and Foreign Ministry representatives negotiating in Vienna and the backchannel in Washington. This set up the framework for SALT negotiations that then accelerated the following year.

Dobrynin and Kissinger laid the foundations for future SALT negotiations in this period. For example, Dobrynin filled the gaps in his knowledge of ABM systems and

³⁰⁸ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 133.

³⁰⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 7, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 141-43.

³¹⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 145-48.

strategic arms. Dobrynin never received any information on the nature of Soviet or American weapons and defense systems from the Kremlin, which closely guarded this data. Therefore, he relied on what he could glean from American publications, contacts with American scientists, information from his negotiating partners in the backchannel, and his own background as an engineer. Although he received instructions from the Politburo and the Foreign Ministry, much of the work in the backchannel occurred through sessions of “thinking out loud.” Dobrynin’s independent research made it possible to take part in this sort of conversation, crucial to the success of the backchannel.³¹¹

The Soviet ambassador displayed his mastery of the technical aspects of strategic arms talks when Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed American plans to build ABM systems to protect ICBMs. On February 18, for example, Kissinger reported that Dobrynin asked for an explanation of the nebulous difference between point defense (an ABM system to protect a missile field or city) and area defense (an ABM system to protect a region or country). In particular, Dobrynin asked how the Safeguard system, designed to protect Minuteman missile bases, could also be used for area defense. Kissinger provided only a “very crude explanation,” as he “did not want to go into missile characteristics” and promised to let one of the White House’s technical experts explain the details in a future meeting.³¹² On March 10, Kissinger and Dobrynin met with this expert, who explained the utility of the Safeguard system, emphasizing that it could not be used to defend against a massive Soviet strike, but could protect against smaller attacks from third countries or accidental launches. Kissinger

³¹¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 193-94.

³¹² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” February 18, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 125-27. Dobrynin reported that Kissinger “was unable to answer” his questions, prompting the meeting with the White House technical expert. *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 127-32.

recorded that Dobrynin did not seem interested in the discussion, only asking “a few perfunctory questions which, incidentally, showed that he had studied the subject very carefully.”³¹³ In spite of these meetings, Dobrynin informed the Politburo that “in accordance with instructions,” he did not “get drawn into a discussion of specific technical issues pertaining to strategic arms.”³¹⁴ Yet Kissinger’s report demonstrates that Dobrynin took a great deal of interest in mastering technical details, which proved important when SALT negotiations accelerated in 1971.

The initial meetings after the New Year did not reveal progress over SALT, Europe, or China. Dobrynin revealed his lack of faith in the backchannel’s ability to solve these fundamental problems in a February 10 memo on the Middle East: “One can say with almost complete certainty that another discussion with Kissinger of the main issues pertaining to a settlement is unlikely to produce any kind of result.” He complained that the American positions seemed to remain the same, and warned of the potential that the American side might attempt to undermine multilateral talks in the Middle East using information from the backchannel. In this sense, the backchannel was not only ineffective; it was a potential liability in Middle East talks. Dobrynin concluded, “At the present time Nixon is interested in basically only one thing: neutralizing, through confidential negotiations, the possibility of more direct involvement by the USSR in events in the Middle East while at the same time publicly maintaining his current ‘hard-line’ position.”³¹⁵ In other words, Dobrynin argued

³¹³ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 132-34.

³¹⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 134-38.

³¹⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 123-125.

that bilateral talks with the US on the Middle East were counterproductive and risky since it appeared that the US primarily hoped to prevent the USSR from playing any role in an international settlement.

To strengthen the Soviet position in the Middle East, Dobrynin proposed that the Soviet government take a position of strength and inform the US about the possibility of Soviet pilots “appearing” in the UAR, for example, to aid in the defense of Egyptian borders. This would force Nixon to “look seriously” at the Middle East and to reevaluate the American position, allowing the Soviet government a greater role in negotiating a settlement. Moreover, while the American leaders could respond by sending US pilots to Israel, this would signal that the US openly supported Israel against the Arab states, and “the Arab world, even the so-called ‘moderate countries,’ would never forgive the current President, and US prestige there would be completely undermined for a long time.”

Dobrynin also argued that this policy could undercut Nixon at home by activating the “silent majority” against his policies and alienating large segments of the American population.” Nixon, he hoped, would recognize the “danger of a “‘new Vietnam’ for the US in the Middle East.” Dobrynin concluded, “We are not proposing, of course, a policy of direct confrontation with the US. We are talking about playing a new political card with a greater degree of pressure: the possibility of sending our personnel to the UAR for defensive purposes only if, taking all circumstances into account, we are capable of doing this now or exploiting this tactic in talks with Americans.”³¹⁶ Dobrynin repeated his support for sending additional military aid to the Middle East a month later, noting in a telegram to the Foreign Ministry that Nixon and Kissinger seemed unnerved about the potential for Soviet personnel

³¹⁶ Ibid.

to be involved in staffing SA-3 missile bases or flying MiG-23 aircraft. “Even if we currently have no plans to deploy our crews with Egypt’s air-defense system,” he wrote, “we should—in the Embassy’s view—make use of this issue for political and diplomatic ends, to put pressure on the Nixon administration now.”³¹⁷ Dobrynin later emphasized that these tactics had paid off, stating that “Kissinger’s persistent questioning about our military personnel in the UAR was noteworthy,” as “it was evident that this issue is now forcing the White House—perhaps for the first time—to take stock of events in the Middle East seriously and with increasing wariness.”³¹⁸

This series of telegrams to the Foreign Ministry provides insights into Dobrynin’s strategic thinking. By negotiating from a position of strength, Dobrynin hoped to push Nixon to the table, allowing the Soviet government a more prominent role in seeking a solution to the Middle East crisis. Dobrynin demonstrated that he was a realist who thought in terms of preserving and expanding Soviet power. He saw the introduction of Soviet military personnel into the Middle East as a chip to use to persuade the American leadership to allow the USSR a greater role in the region, knowing that Kissinger aimed, above all, to prevent this from happening. Moreover, Dobrynin and other Soviet leaders who favored détente faced pressure from Soviet hawks in the Defense Ministry and the army, who felt détente would weaken Soviet power. Thus Dobrynin’s proposal protected his flank from criticism that he, as an “Americanist” who lived and worked in the US for over a decade, had grown soft in his dealings with Kissinger.

Following the uproar that greeted the Nixon administration’s announcement of the

³¹⁷ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 140.

³¹⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 145-48.

incursion of American and South Vietnamese troops into Cambodia, no private meetings of the backchannel took place until June 10 after Dobrynin returned from a trip to Moscow.³¹⁹ At this point, Nixon invited him for a brief meeting at the White House, before Kissinger and Dobrynin left for an evening cruise on the president's yacht, the *Sequoia*. Nixon referenced the October meeting, expressing disappointment in the lack of progress since then. This time, however, instead of offering a sharp critique of Soviet policy, Nixon said that "he was prepared to let bygones be bygones and start afresh," asking that the Soviet ambassador and American national security advisor speak in that spirit. According to the American report, Dobrynin "felt the same way," emphasizing that his desire to "concentrate on the future."³²⁰ Dobrynin's record of this part of the conversation suggests a less relaxed exchange, as he expressed criticism of American actions in Cambodia and responded to Nixon's calls for an "unemotional, businesslike look" at Soviet-American relations by claiming that the US did not negotiate in good faith, instead seeking the unilateral advantage in all fields. Still, Dobrynin's memo confirms that the June 10 meeting remained, at the very least, cordial, and he writes that Nixon understood the Soviet reaction to Cambodia, but still hoped that the Soviet government would "seriously discuss" his comments and introduce a "constructive

³¹⁹ Indeed, in a memo to Moscow, Dobrynin noted that Kissinger called on June 7 and said that "he was getting the impression that the Soviet Ambassador, since his return from Moscow [a month earlier], has been 'avoiding him, or at any rate not giving any indication that he wants to meet with him, the President's assistant.'" See *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 149. On June 5, there is a record of the conversation in which they set up the *Sequoia* trip. Kissinger joked that he hoped to get Dobrynin seasick to put him at a disadvantage. See Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 5, 1970, 10:14 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

³²⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," June 10, 1970, 7:05-7:34 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 148. Kissinger's memo on the meeting on the *Sequoia* restates that Dobrynin seconded Nixon's proposal to "forget about the past and concentrate on the future." See "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," June 10, 1970, 7:30 PM-1 AM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 154-59.

element” to backchannel talks.³²¹

As earlier, Nixon and Dobrynin confirmed the importance of the backchannel in the future of Soviet-American relations. Kissinger recorded the president’s comment that “if serious business was to be done, it was to be done in our channel.”³²² According to Dobrynin’s notes, Nixon twice endorsed Kissinger, emphasizing that Dobrynin “should regard everything Kissinger says as coming personally from me” and that information should not be shared with any American officials except Nixon and Kissinger. Nixon mentioned that American Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jacob Beam and any other top State Department officials should be kept out of the loop. Dobrynin highlighted the unusual nature of this request, “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. Kissinger, who was present during all of this, positively glowed with pleasure and from the acknowledgment of his importance.”³²³ Here, again, Dobrynin describes Kissinger’s ego as one of the national security advisor’s central personality traits, implying that it could be used to the Soviet advantage in negotiations.

The backchannel thus moved beyond the limitations of the previous administrations with which Dobrynin had negotiated, as the American authorities asked him to conspire with them to hold information from the rest of the American government. From the Soviet

³²¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 149-53.

³²² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” June 10, 1970, 7:05-7:34 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 148.

³²³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 149-53.

perspective, this represented a streamlining of the American bureaucracy, reminiscent of when President Roosevelt took charge of Soviet-American affairs during World War II, and it indicated the potential for real breakthroughs. Furthermore, as Dobrynin implied, it provided an additional opportunity for him to use flattery and compliments to feed Kissinger's ego, buttering him up to make concessions during talks. Finally, it represented a new codification of the channel, ensuring that Kissinger and Dobrynin remained the key diplomats in negotiating the parameters of détente.

After the meeting with the president, Kissinger and Dobrynin drove to the *Sequoia*, where they cruised the Potomac River until 1:00 AM. In his preparatory notes, Kissinger wrote to Nixon, "The main purpose of the session will be to convey to the Soviets that they face a fundamental decision about our bilateral dealings. Both sides can engage in constant tactical maneuvering for minor advantages—this process inevitably leads to confrontations, however unintentional. The other choice is to seek sweeping solutions based on a broad-gauged relationship."³²⁴ In the meeting, Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed their respective understandings of "broad" and "limited" agreements, as well as Soviet complaints about the SALT package that was then under discussion by the official channel that met in Vienna. They concluded that they would allow the diplomats in Vienna to continue their work, while they discussed "general principles" in the backchannel and sought for ways to settle Soviet grievances. They then moved on to the main issues preventing an agreement on the Middle East, specifically troop withdrawals, demilitarized zones, and the fate of Sharm-el-Sheik, a port town on the Sinai peninsula where the Israelis hoped to retain a military presence—as well as the future role of the Soviet military in the region and Dobrynin's frustrations with

³²⁴ "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger to President Nixon," June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 153-54.

American negotiators. They also covered Berlin, the potential for a European security conference, and the ongoing war in Vietnam, with no new proposals.³²⁵

Perhaps most surprisingly, the meeting ended with Dobrynin complaining about the state of the backchannel. According to Kissinger, the Soviet ambassador explained that the “period of relative hopefulness” at the start of the Nixon presidency eventually gave way to “a period of stagnation,” and as the situation began to improve in spring 1970, the US invaded Cambodia, spoiling their constructive dialogue.³²⁶ Dobrynin’s record insinuates that he took an even stronger stance. Speaking “from a purely personal perspective,” Dobrynin reportedly told Kissinger “we had failed to reach a single concrete agreement or understanding—even a little one—through this channel of ours.” In Dobrynin’s notes, he conveyed to Kissinger that confidential channels had been utilized “more effectively” under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Dobrynin commented that he left open the hope that the backchannel would play a “useful role” if it focused on concrete issues, but he emphasized his contention that the Soviet government 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 US policy.” Dobrynin observed that these comments “made [Kissinger] somewhat uneasy,” due to the prestige that his role in the backchannel afforded him in the Nixon administration.³²⁷ He remarked that, without progress, the backchannel meant little to Soviet authorities, threatening Kissinger’s position in an attempt

³²⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 154-59, and “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 159-65.

³²⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 154-59.

³²⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 159-65.

to persuade him to move forward in backchannel talks. Despite the harsh nature of this critique, the overall conversation in both accounts seems to have been constructive and even friendly, with the hope that, in spite of the American incursion in Cambodia, progress could be made in bilateral negotiations.

Although Kissinger and Dobrynin met more frequently after the cruise on the *Sequoia*, the relationship did not improve in summer and fall due to American involvement in Cambodia, Soviet naval activity and the apparent attempt to build a Soviet naval base in Cuban waters, and the Syrian invasion of Jordan in September 1970. While they made progress in SALT negotiations, discussing the potential for linking talks on offensive and defensive weapons and setting an agenda for a possible summit, on July 9, Kissinger expressed his frustration with what he perceived as Soviet foot-dragging.³²⁸ According to his notes, he lamented to Dobrynin that “it is early enough in our Administration to have a fundamental departure in our relationships with the Soviet Union,” but as time passed by, any agreements would be made under conditions in which they could not be “effectively implemented.” When Dobrynin complained that the upcoming Congress of the CPSU and the situation in Cambodia “make this a difficult manner for us,” Kissinger shot back that he was “looking at problems from our point of view, and it was up to him to take care of his problems.”³²⁹ In reference to the same conversation, Dobrynin reported back to the Kremlin that “not only has it proven impossible to establish any businesslike dialogue between him and the Soviet leadership during the year and a half he has been in office, but the

³²⁸ For the confirmation of the proposed summit agenda, which included European security, the Middle East, SALT, a potential agreement on provocative attacks by third countries, principles of coexistence, trade, and other topics, see “Telegram from Minister Counselor Vorontsov to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” August 24, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 190.

³²⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” July 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 170-73.

corresponding relations at the highest level are even worse now than they were before, not to mention the fact that we have not achieved any degree of trust.”³³⁰ For his part, Kissinger felt that Dobrynin “appeared to bluster,” claiming in frustration that the Soviet system was “more permanent” than the American system, that they would wait until the end of the Nixon administration, if necessary, to seek progress in superpower relations, and that “it was the consensus of all their senior officials that relations with the United States had never been worse since the Cuban missile crisis.”³³¹ Shortly thereafter, Gromyko wrote to the Kremlin, following a rare meeting with Rogers, to say that “the US does not anticipate any serious agreement on strategic weapons, at least any time soon.”³³²

At the same time, Dobrynin reiterated the strategies that he proposed the previous year. He noted Nixon’s increasing interest in a summit, as the president no longer seemed to view a meeting as contingent upon a prearranged set of agreements, a shift which Dobrynin attributed to electoral concerns, the upcoming Twenty-fourth Congress of the CPSU, the lack of progress in the backchannel, the conflict in the Middle East, and a perceived cooling of Soviet interest in a summit. Dobrynin argued that the Soviet side should use Nixon’s desire for a summit to pressure the president to accept the need for agreements on issues of interest

³³⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” July 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 173-78. In a bizarre twist, Kissinger reported that “the meeting took place in an extremely cordial atmosphere,” and that “Dobrynin’s affability was much more pronounced than at the meeting before we went to San Clemente.” He wrote, “His eagerness to prove Soviet good faith was sometimes overpowering.” “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” July 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 170-73.

³³¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 202-4. Although the Soviet memo of this conversation does not make reference to these comments, the tension surrounding American accusations of Soviet involvement in a violation of the ceasefire in the Suez Canal zone is evident. See “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” October 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 204-8.

³³² “Telegram from Foreign Minister Gromyko to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” October 26, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 212-13.

to the Soviet state. Moreover, Dobrynin stressed that this approach would “make it possible to test the seriousness of Nixon’s own intentions.”³³³ In other words, Dobrynin believed that they could determine Nixon’s willingness to grant concessions to Soviet demands in order to receive a Soviet agreement to a summit. Gromyko later seconded this assessment during his visit to Washington in October 1970, when the foreign minister observed that publicly announcing a summit would help the process of negotiating a treaty with West Germany, organize a European security conference, reduce tensions in the Middle East, increase pressure on Israel, demonstrate the futility of the Chinese strategy of playing the US and USSR off one another, and exert a restraining influence on the Nixon administration’s foreign policy. All of these factors would make it more difficult for the president to pursue policies that could endanger the summit once it became a public issue.³³⁴ Thus, as it had previously, the Soviet Union used the prospect of a summit to press forward its goals in other areas of foreign policy.

Dobrynin also emphasized the importance of proactive triangular diplomacy in his messages to the Kremlin. Although he noted Kissinger’s recent cooling toward negotiations for a bilateral agreement against the use of nuclear weapons by third countries, Dobrynin argued that the Soviet side should press for it in the backchannel for two reasons. First, it would “contribute to the overall vulnerability of the Chinese in their relations with us,” particularly in the Sino-Soviet border conflict, as they “would essentially be faced with a united front (or at least the potential for such a front) of the two main nuclear powers.” Second, such an agreement would remove the basis for American triangular diplomacy, as

³³³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” July 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 173-78.

³³⁴ “Summary of Conversation (USSR),” October 22, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 227-30.

the US could no longer play “on the friction between the USSR and China, making a pretense of wanting ‘equal relations’ both with us and with China, but in essence encouraging China toward conflict with us, giving China to understand that as far as the US is concerned, it will not have to ‘watch its back’ in the event of such a conflict.” While Dobrynin stressed that Kissinger understood the consequences for his “grand, global strategy” that such an agreement would bring, the American diplomat remained open to discussing this issue, even if Kissinger preferred to “await further developments” or at least to “try to get something in return.”³³⁵ Dobrynin did not back away from the tactics of the previous year, using the summit to receive concessions from the US, while trying to ensure that the USSR did not end up on the wrong end of triangular diplomacy.

On December 22, after a two-month interval of relative stagnation, Kissinger and Dobrynin again attempted to reboot the backchannel. In his memo, Kissinger reported that he “made a little speech” on the worsening state of bilateral relations, pointing to various misunderstandings and suggesting that “distrust has begun to set in on both sides and a dangerous momentum and interaction seems to be occurring.” Kissinger warned that these “pinpricks” could build on each other, causing relations to “slide into a serious deterioration,” and “suspicion between us could grow to the point that a minor incident could develop into a major one because of a failure in communication.” Kissinger complained that a stalemate in their confidential talks could have catastrophic consequences. Hoping to push Dobrynin toward concessions with such alarmist prediction, Kissinger declared that they were at a “crossroads” in Soviet-American relations, in which they could adopt a new course toward détente or settle back into the superpower rivalry. He emphasized the need to accept

³³⁵ Ibid.

each other's moves as legitimate, if misunderstood, and to move forward in a constructive manner. Kissinger recorded that Dobrynin "concluded with an eloquent speech on the need to make some progress in our bilateral channel," inviting Kissinger to dinner and stating his preparedness to meet as often as necessary and to review their positions on all issues.³³⁶

In contrast, Dobrynin's record suggests that he, not Kissinger, gave a critical account of Soviet-American relations that blamed the Nixon administration for the lack of progress. Dobrynin states that he did not invite Kissinger to a future meeting, but rather that he reluctantly accepted Kissinger's invitation for the next backchannel discussion. While he agreed to come, he "did not see much point in having such a meeting so soon if he, Kissinger, was going to continue to limit himself to general observations without going into the specific substance of the issues." He concluded sardonically, "The two of us talk a lot, Mr. Kissinger, but to be honest, we're not getting anywhere."³³⁷ Although the two versions of events differed as both parties continued to manipulate their memos to present themselves in a favorable light, they both suggest a mutual dissatisfaction with bilateral relations and the backchannel and a desire to improve the state of affairs.

Following this conversation and a subsequent trip by Dobrynin to Moscow for consultations, another round of enthusiastic follow-up negotiations took place. Dobrynin contacted Kissinger to meet immediately after his return to Moscow. Kissinger described the discussion as "perhaps the most significant I have had with Dobrynin since our conversations began." Kissinger's record states that Dobrynin proposed setting a specific date for the summit, reaffirmed Soviet readiness to discuss Berlin and the Middle East in the

³³⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," December 22, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 241-46.

³³⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," December 22, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 247-48.

backchannel, and confirmed Soviet approval of Kissinger's basic approach to a SALT agreement. In Kissinger's account, Dobrynin remarked that "this could be the most important year in US-Soviet relations." Demonstrating his firm grasp of American politics, Dobrynin noted that since little gets done in election years, "whatever progress was to be made had to be made this year." According to Kissinger, Dobrynin then "smiled and said that he hoped that Indochina would not be an obstacle" to agreement on other issues, and he "implied strongly that in its present framework it would not be." As Dobrynin left the room, he said, "So the future of Soviet-American relations is in our hands, and I want you to know we are going to make a big effort to improve them."³³⁸ Dobrynin's memo does not reveal the same level of euphoria, but suggests that Dobrynin focused on new progress in bilateral relations. He anticipated a rapid development in talks and an expansion of backchannel activities, noting, "Kissinger and I agreed that our meetings must now be held on a more planned and regular basis."³³⁹

As progress on SALT seemed imminent, Dobrynin, speaking off the record, addressed the issue of how Kissinger should handle the Soviet bureaucracy. Dobrynin explained that "no lateral clearances" existed in the Soviet bureaucracy. In other words, bureaucracies did not share information with their various counterparts at equal levels of seniority, meaning that, while the Foreign Ministry was responsible for conducting SALT negotiations, it did not have authority over the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Also, while the Defense Ministry and the army understood the Soviet nuclear program, these groups had no involvement in Soviet foreign policy or the management of the Vienna delegation. To deal

³³⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," January 23, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 265-68.

³³⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," January 23, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 268-73.

with this situation, Dobrynin advised Kissinger to formulate his most recent SALT proposal as an unsigned Note Verbale, which Dobrynin could forward to Moscow for a response.³⁴⁰ This set the parameters for how SALT proposals would be presented through the backchannel, and the first exchange of notes took place in late February and early March, with proposals to begin negotiations on limiting ABMs and strategic arms.³⁴¹ With this new approach to negotiations, Kissinger and Dobrynin began to work toward strategic arms limitations.

The slow nature of progress still led to tensions. In February, Dobrynin summarized the status of the three main topics addressed in the backchannel—SALT, Berlin, and the Middle East—stating that “progress on these issues varies, but, on the whole, we believe it is clearly insufficient, and in some instances progress thus far is virtually nonexistent.” Still, Dobrynin remained optimistic that the summit could encourage additional developments in bilateral relations, as it had already “compelled Nixon to agree to discuss issues, which, under other circumstances, he would hardly elevate to the level of this channel, much less take up personally, leaving them instead to ordinary diplomatic negotiations.” Dobrynin recommended “taking advantage of the President’s interest in a summit meeting” to “enable us to exert additional pressure on the White House and bring about certain progress.”³⁴²

Kissinger showed his own frustration when the Soviet government delayed its response to the proposal for formal ABM and strategic arms negotiations. On March 22,

³⁴⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” January 28, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 273-75.

³⁴¹ See “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” February 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 299-301; “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 301-3; and “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 12, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 306-8.

³⁴² “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” February, 14, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 293-96.

Dobrynin tried to calm Kissinger's nerves, emphasizing that the upcoming Party Congress had consumed much of the Politburo's time and that SALT "represented a very complex decision-making issue for the Soviet Union," as "it involved both the Defense and the Foreign Ministry, and the Soviet government was not used to inter-departmental clearances."³⁴³ By March 25, though, an impatient Kissinger told Dobrynin that "we were at a key point in our relationship" and that the Soviet government continued to drag its feet. He warned ominously that "fundamental decisions" would be made in a few weeks, that "we would not tread water," and that he "would hate to think that the channel between Dobrynin and me was a channel of lost opportunities."³⁴⁴ Again, Kissinger hoped that threatening to pull the plug on the channel might push the Soviet side toward an agreement.

Throughout these discussions, the Middle East remained a thorn in the side of the backchannel negotiators. Dobrynin pushed for using the prospect of a summit to gain concessions: "We should clearly try to exploit the advantages of the direct channel: secure and direct access to the President as well as—and this is now of no small importance—his interest in the summit."³⁴⁵ In his recommendations to Moscow in February 1971, Dobrynin observed that the "central objective of American policy in the Middle East remains the same: to weaken the influence of the Soviet Union in this region of the world and, above all else, to 'eliminate' Soviet military presence there." He offered a series of diplomatic countermeasures, as well as a more aggressive approach: "We are far from proposing now

³⁴³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US), March 22, 1971," in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 313-15. Kissinger, in a phone conversation that evening with Nixon, seemed receptive to this complaint. See *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 314.

³⁴⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," March 25, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 317-19.

³⁴⁵ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 279.

any radical measures on our side in the Middle East—and this is not required—but the skillful and deliberate use of threatening various actions on our side in the military-political realm should be added to our arsenal of active means in the diplomatic fight for a peace settlement in the Middle East.” Dobrynin concluded, “This is a very effective means for influencing the White House. All our experience in relations with this administration testifies to this.”³⁴⁶ Dobrynin understood the benefits that a summit would convey to the Soviet Union, but he also hoped to use it to strengthen the Soviet position.

The role of linkage in Soviet-American relations also continued to cause problems in the backchannel. On April 23, Kissinger asked Dobrynin about the summit prospects, and while Dobrynin repeated the Soviet government’s invitation for a visit by Nixon, the Soviet diplomat also stated that he did not think a visit was likely until after the settlement of the Berlin question. Kissinger wrote that he “reacted very sharply,” considering this a form of linkage. Dobrynin claimed that Kissinger misunderstood him and that “it was a reality that there should be some progress on Berlin, not a condition,” repeating language Kissinger frequently used in negotiations when discussing issues that he felt were linked. Kissinger snapped that he was familiar with this approach and called it “unacceptable” to use it toward the president.³⁴⁷ Dobrynin characterized Kissinger’s demeanor as “very nervous” and “worked up,” describing how “with great excitement” he “began to rummage through his briefcase” for a message from the US ambassador to West Germany, demonstrating Nixon’s clandestine work to encourage a Berlin agreement.³⁴⁸ Kissinger protested Dobrynin’s

³⁴⁶ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 300.

³⁴⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 23, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 326-28.

³⁴⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 23, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 329-31.

attempts at reverse-linkage, essentially using his own tactics against him, demonstrating the ways in which unresolved conflicts involving third countries continued to plague bilateral negotiations.

The Semenov Affair

Owing to the two-tiered nature of SALT negotiations, diplomats in normal channels purposefully or inadvertently attempted to seize the reigns of détente from Kissinger and Dobrynin, testing the backchannel. When this system functioned properly, Kissinger and Dobrynin secretly worked out the contours of a deal in the backchannel. Then the leadership in Washington and Moscow used these agreements to draft orders to the diplomats in normal channels, namely Gerald Smith and V. S. Semenov, who served as the chiefs of the American and Soviet delegations on the reduction of strategic weapons in Vienna. Their initial orders usually did not reflect the agreements reached by Kissinger and Dobrynin—after all, neither side wanted to appear weak in the eyes of their allies and the American press by accepting the first offer from their superpower rivals—but were designed so that official talks eventually would yield the agreement already reached clandestinely by Kissinger and Dobrynin. Smith and Semenov's task was to produce the formal documents necessary to conclude the agreement.

One difficulty in this arrangement was that, as a deputy foreign minister, Semenov frequently had access to information on top-level talks and thus understood that the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel had negotiated the general contours of détente, while Nixon and Kissinger kept Smith in the dark. Unfortunately for the American side, Semenov sometimes dropped hints to Smith about the existence of a backchannel, and this left Smith

confused, Nixon and Kissinger in a fury, and Dobrynin scrambling to keep the backchannel together. For example, on December 22, 1970, Kissinger mentioned that Semenov allegedly told Smith that it would be a “hot, political summer” and that the SALT delegation in Vienna would have to “mark time while the principals were negotiating.” Fuming that Smith now believed that negotiations were happening over his head, Kissinger told Dobrynin that he “really had to be sure Soviet diplomats would not speak to other Americans about the content of our conversations,” as “special care should be taken that our channel would not be played back into any American net.”³⁴⁹

Moreover, Semenov occasionally attempted to circumvent the backchannel, presenting proposals on the kinds of major political issues that Nixon and Kissinger preferred to handle secretly. In July 1970, for example, Semenov casually handed Smith a note at a concert suggesting an alliance between the US and the USSR against any country that had engaged in provocative acts with nuclear weapons. Kissinger emphasized to Dobrynin that, while they could discuss this proposal, “such a politically important matter should not be handled within the context of SALT, but should be handled at a higher level.”³⁵⁰ This situation was made even more difficult for Dobrynin, because as he told Kissinger on April 7, 1970, “Semenov was a Deputy Foreign Minister and it was hard for a mere Ambassador to interject himself.”³⁵¹ The interjection of a high-ranking Soviet official who either did not understand or purposefully flouted the backchannel system exposed just how messy,

³⁴⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” December 22, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 241-46.

³⁵⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” July 9, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 170-73. Kissinger joked with Dobrynin that Semenov’s choice to present his proposal at a concert reminded him of the tactics employed by diplomats at the Congress of Vienna that ended the Napoleonic Wars, the subject of Kissinger’s dissertation and his first book.

³⁵¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 7, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 141-44.

confusing, and vulnerable the backchannel system was for both sides.

This situation came to a head in May 1971. First, on May 4, Semenov presented a proposal to Smith that, after achieving an agreement to limit ABM systems to defending the capitals, the superpowers should freeze new ICBM construction with the aim of achieving an agreement on offensive arms limitations. This closely mirrored a proposal that Nixon and Kissinger had rejected in the backchannel a few weeks earlier. Since Dobrynin had not yet provided them with a response to their counterproposal, they became convinced Semenov's proposal was an attempt by the Soviet government to work around the backchannel, playing the White House and the State Department off one another to secure a better deal. Kissinger was on vacation, so his assistant, General Alexander Haig, delivered a stern warning to Dobrynin, suggesting that "both Dr. Kissinger and the President were beginning to seriously question the value of continuing with this special channel and wondered whether or not it might not be more advantageous to terminate this channel now and return the discussions on the range of issues which had been covered in this channel to their regularly established forums." Dobrynin "reacted somewhat sharply," arguing that Smith's memo indicated that Semenov "merely hinted at the direction in which Soviet thinking was progressing" and that the US side "should be encouraged by this turn of events" because it signaled an acceptance of the US position. Haig reminded Dobrynin of the importance of restricting critical conversations to the backchannel and that the Soviet side should coordinate with Kissinger before bringing new initiatives into official channels. Dobrynin promised to communicate these points to Moscow.³⁵²

Although Dobrynin promised tighter control of information and a backchannel

³⁵² "Memorandum for the Record (US)," May 4, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 339-41.

response to Kissinger's proposal in the near future, the situation in Vienna continued to devolve. On May 6, two of Semenov's aides took aside American diplomat Raymond Garthoff at a Soviet reception to emphasize the importance of reaching a SALT agreement in 1971 and the need to "consider seriously and respond affirmatively" to the "very significant" statement that Semenov presented to Smith two days earlier. Then, on May 9, Semenov and Smith took a cruise on the Wörthersee in Carinthia, Austria, where they had an informal five-hour discussion on the potential for a SALT agreement. During the cruise, Semenov expounded on the ideas that he initially presented earlier, leading Smith to report to the president and the secretaries of state and defense that he believed an ABM agreement could be reached along with a freeze on offensive weapons and limitations on radar and the testing of surface-to-air missiles. Much of this proposal—the freeze on offensive weapons and the ABM agreement—was similar to the agreement that was currently under consideration in the backchannel, but the issues of radar and surface-to-air missiles had not been discussed. Semenov reported to the Foreign Ministry that he did not exceed his orders, only mentioning these ideas informally, but Smith believed that the talks were serious enough to warrant contacting the Washington and requesting a formal reply.³⁵³

Upon receiving the memo from Smith on the morning of May 11, Kissinger called Dobrynin in a fury, declaring that "apparently our channel is not working properly" and asserting that there were only two ways to interpret this situation: either there was confusion in Moscow, which he did not believe, or there was a "deliberate attempt" to bypass the president. Dobrynin retorted: "We are not children. We know who is boss." Kissinger continued that, regardless of their intentions, Soviet actions had imperiled the backchannel.

³⁵³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 11, 1971, 9:10 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Also available in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 342-49.

He groused that it was “a hell of a strange feeling” to see people so low on the bureaucratic chain with apparent knowledge of backchannel activities. “It’s not in the good of our relationship that while you and I are discussing something, subordinates are discussing the same thing,” he said. “It embarrasses the President.” While Dobrynin attempted to calm Kissinger, the American diplomat remained alarmed, emphasizing that violating the rules of the two-tiered system posed a danger to the backchannel and to progress in superpower relations. He argued that, because these talks had entered into normal channels, they would have to conclude an agreement in the backchannel before normal channels took over and sidestepped the work that Dobrynin and Kissinger already completed.³⁵⁴

Kissinger’s emotional response to this situation reflects the tenuousness of Kissinger’s position, as well as his strategy of using emotional manipulation in the backchannel to bolster his position. On the one hand, his anger represents a real emotional response to the perception that the Soviet side could be circumventing his authority over foreign policy. This triggered the insecurity that he expressed in private meetings with Haldeman and Nixon, fearful that he could be displaced in favor of normal channels. On the other hand, it demonstrates the way that Kissinger used emotion to punctuate his messages to Dobrynin. He wanted to ensure that the Soviet government understood the dire consequences of breaking the backchannel, and he broke the friendly tone of their conversations to make sure that Dobrynin understood the seriousness of the situation, from the perspective of the White House.

Dobrynin’s report on this meeting reveals the tenuous nature of the backchannel relationship. In explaining Kissinger’s frustration, Dobrynin pointed to “personal elements,”

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

explaining that Kissinger hoped that successful backchannel negotiations “would elevate him in the President’s eyes” and that Kissinger had become “nervous, fearful both of a failure through the confidential channel and the possible exposure of his behind-the-scenes role” in subverting the State Department’s authority. Moreover, Dobrynin reminded Soviet authorities that Nixon was “a very petty and distrustful man with a huge ego, who carries grudges.” His general paranoia combined with his long history of anticommunism meant that he viewed every Soviet move through “a magnifying glass” to determine if it represented “some sneaky trick here or a wish to ‘deceive or demean’ the President personally,” meaning that “Nixon measures everything by his own yardstick.” Dobrynin warned that this suspiciousness had reached “pathological proportions,” leading him to listen increasingly to members of his inner circle who parroted his fears that Soviet leaders did not intend to improve relations. The ambassador ominously concluded that Nixon’s “hostile frame of mind” was growing, while Soviet-American relations were “deteriorating.”³⁵⁵

Dobrynin’s personal analysis of Nixon and Kissinger’s reactions to the Semenov affair points to the fragility of the backchannel as a method for conducting Soviet-American relations, and it underscores the weakness of Kissinger’s approach of using emotional outbursts to manipulate the backchannel. In some ways, it reflects a genuine emotional reaction to Kissinger’s refusal to believe that Semenov’s actions did not reflect a ruse on the part of the Soviet government to extract concessions. Dobrynin invested significant time and energy into building a friendly personal relationship with Kissinger, and when the American diplomat burst into an angry outburst over a minor blip in secret talks, Dobrynin felt as if it demonstrated the weaknesses inherent in personal diplomacy with an emotionally unstable

³⁵⁵ “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation (USSR),” May 11, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 349-51.

person. In other ways, though, this alarmist message may have been intended to gain the attention of the Soviet leadership, encouraging them to keep a closer eye on Semenov and ensure that it presented all sensitive proposals to Dobrynin, the only Soviet official who could handle Kissinger's ego and Nixon's paranoia in Washington.

Kissinger and Dobrynin worked to finalize the agreement and avoid the bureaucratic chaos feared by the American side. When Kissinger and Dobrynin met again the following day, the Soviet ambassador finally produced a response from Moscow on the American proposal. The Soviet leadership conceded to the American demand that formal letters exchanged between Nixon and the Soviet leadership would not include a provision on limiting ABM construction to defense of their respective capitals, and it accepted simultaneous negotiations for ABM and offensive arms limitations. Kissinger and Dobrynin hammered out the language of the letters and the public statement.³⁵⁶ On May 20, the public text was released;³⁵⁷ a major step had been taken in SALT negotiations. The conversation in the backchannel reflected the hope that this breakthrough could lead to general progress, and Dobrynin reported that Kissinger mentioned the "prospect for a real upturn in relations between the two governments," with a promise for renewed efforts to achieve a Berlin

³⁵⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," May 13, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 356-59. Also see Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversations, May 13, 1971, 1:28, 3:55, and 4:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

³⁵⁷ In particular, the Soviet news agency, TASS, was supposed to publish the English-language version of the public statement as delivered by the White House. Instead, it published its own translation of the Russian text, which suggested that the superpowers were "preparing a treaty," which alarmed Kissinger, who feared that it would prompt Senate involvement. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 20, 1971, 1:48 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Dobrynin released a statement from the embassy correcting the error, and he called back at 4:04 PM with news that TASS had released the correct text in English. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 20, 1971, 4:04 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Working out the details on the private letters took a little longer. Dobrynin received a final copy signed by Kosygin on May 25. Dobrynin proposed that the letters be dated May 20 to match the public announcement, and Kissinger agreed. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 25, 1971, 12:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

agreement and unilateral efforts on the part of the US to improve trade relations.³⁵⁸

Despite this optimism, the private messages from Kissinger and Dobrynin to their respective leaders reveal the shakier foundations of the agreement that came in the wake of the Semenov affair. Kissinger bragged to Nixon, “We got practically everything we asked for.” Nixon asked, “Conciliatory?” Kissinger responded, “Oh yes. I really shook him yesterday.” Nixon replied, “Good.”³⁵⁹ If Kissinger reveled in the way in which he used a crisis to extract concessions from Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador submitted a different report to the Politburo. Dobrynin wrote that Kissinger “commented in a markedly conciliatory tone that yesterday they had apparently ‘gotten somewhat worked up.’” Complaining about the response time from Moscow, Kissinger reportedly remarked that “President Nixon has to work under great stress all the time, he has a host of all kinds of complicated issues to deal with, and now comes the ‘Smith memorandum’ as well, which exacerbated the President’s general irritation even more.” Dobrynin continued:

I told Kissinger that the Soviet leaders had no fewer governmental concerns and responsibilities than the President. They exercise necessary self-control, however, and do not deviate from a businesslike tone, which is the only kind permissible in relations between great powers, although they themselves could present their own list of completely legitimate grievances to the US President, considering the wide gaps between the words and deeds of the White House that continue to exist in a number of instances. I added that the hot temper and lack of self-control, combined with tinges of semi-hysteria, that were present yesterday in Kissinger’s description of the

³⁵⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 13, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 356-59. These vague promises for trade relaxation came on May 24, when Kissinger informed Dobrynin that the Nixon administration authorized the sale of high-capacity British computers for use in the Serpukhov nuclear accelerator, machine tools produced by the Gleason company for truck gears, and a \$200 million Soviet order for metalworking machines. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 24, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 365-66. In his report, Kissinger noted that he called the meeting to inform Dobrynin of these concessions because he learned that they had already made the decision on the British computers and he “at least wanted to get some political credit” from Dobrynin. “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 24, 1971, 5:45-6:30 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 364.

³⁵⁹ Kissinger-Nixon Telephone Conversation, May 12, 1971, 6:14 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

President's feelings had made the most negative impression on me personally. I am sure the impression all this produced in Moscow was no better.

When Kissinger suggested that "these things happen" and that they "forget the whole episode," Dobrynin responded that "such things are not easily forgotten" and that "one must control one's emotions and not allow them to influence serious intergovernmental relations." "Kissinger," Dobrynin concluded, "felt awkward after yesterday's loss of self-control in our conversation. The point, of course, is not what he feels today, but the fact that yesterday's comments are quite revealing in terms of the general psychological state of the President himself."³⁶⁰ For their part, Nixon and Kissinger were convinced that only a potential crisis could accelerate Soviet attention to the backchannel and produce real results, and they remained suspicious of what Semenov's actions meant about Soviet intentions in bilateral relations. In Dobrynin's view, the episode demonstrated the growing hostility of the White House to an agreement, despite what an apparent moment of progress. Although they achieved a workable agreement on negotiating SALT, neither Kissinger nor Dobrynin seemed satisfied with the other side's actions during the Semenov affair and, using emotionally-charged language, both expressed skepticism that the backchannel could survive.

The primary backchannel negotiators continued to disagree on the causes of the Semenov affair years later when penning their memoirs. Kissinger suggested that Gromyko intentionally sought to exploit the two-tiered system of negotiations. Alternately, he argued that perhaps Gromyko wanted give Semenov a role in talks, or that Semenov wanted to show that he could do better than Dobrynin. Either way, Kissinger concluded, "One should not

³⁶⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," May 12, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 353-56.

assume that the Soviet system is more immune to bureaucratic infighting than ours; in all likelihood, it is more virulently prone to it.”³⁶¹ Dobrynin wrote in his memoirs that Semenov learned about the backchannel’s activities from friends in Moscow and decided to act on his own. He contends that Semenov “hoped to give Moscow a pleasant surprise with his improvisation and obtain permission to continue negotiations along those lines.” Instead, Gromyko launched an investigation into the matter and while Semenov remained in charge of the SALT delegation, he did not receive any further information on backchannel activities.³⁶² These accounts support the conclusion that the bureaucratic disarray on both sides—the American two-tiered channel system and the fractured foreign policy apparatus of the Soviet Union—allowed a figure like Semenov to wreak havoc.

Camp David

Following the agreement on the negotiations for SALT, Kissinger invited Dobrynin for a private dinner at Camp David for another “tour d’horizon” meeting that lasted roughly six hours. In preparation for this meeting, Kissinger proposed to Nixon that they give the Soviet government an “ultimatum” for announcing a summit date. Kissinger expressed concerns that the Soviet leaders were playing a “cute game,” trying to gain additional concessions on Berlin, SALT, and trade relations by being coy about their interest in a summit. If Nixon did not press the Soviet leadership for a firm commitment, Kissinger feared that the Soviet side would “harvest everything and we will end up losing,” with no help on Vietnam and no summit. According to their plan, if the Soviet government did not

³⁶¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 817-23.

³⁶² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 214-16.

respond to the ultimatum, Kissinger was to tell Dobrynin that “we have been horsing around for a year, that we would be glad to come to Moscow but will delay” until spring 1972.

When Nixon worried that he did not want it to appear as if “we are begging for the goddamn Summit,” Kissinger assured Nixon that “we have all the cards in our hands,” and that in the event of additional delays, the Americans could turn their attention to a Chinese summit.

Then, Kissinger claimed, the Soviet leaders “won’t scream so much,” making them more willing to wrap up an agreement with the US.³⁶³

As he had promised to Nixon in advance, Kissinger presented Dobrynin an ultimatum at this meeting, stating that, for the summit to take place in September, they would need the Soviet decision by the end of June. Otherwise, they would have to defer the decision with the goal of planning a summit for 1972. According to Kissinger’s report, Dobrynin recommended stalling the summit several times, proposing that they wait for the conclusion of the Berlin negotiations and Brezhnev’s trip to Paris in October. When Kissinger refused to give ground, Dobrynin promised a response in two to three weeks.³⁶⁴

Perhaps influenced by the Semenov affair, Dobrynin and Kissinger also used the meeting to discuss the impediments of bureaucratic structures. According to Kissinger, Dobrynin expressed regret that SALT had become the “test case” of the superpower relationship. Although the Foreign Ministry and Dobrynin personally supported improved relations with the US, SALT was “essentially out of their control because the military played a very important role.” When representatives from the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry met with Brezhnev to discuss SALT, “the Foreign Ministry was precluded from

³⁶³ Kissinger-Nixon Telephone Conversation, May 25, 1971, 8:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

making any comments on military issues. They could only defend their proposals on the grounds that it would help relations with the United States.” Furthermore, “the military were precluded from making any political judgments, but on the other hand, their military judgments were pretty definitive.” The military’s opposition to any restrictions on the arms race, therefore, complicated matters tremendously. Dobrynin concluded that “this separation [between bureaucratic institutions] was being strictly maintained,” limiting the Foreign Ministry’s influence. Kissinger reported Dobrynin’s claim that he had to request clearance for military briefings when visiting Moscow, and that he was only reluctantly granted limited access based on his recent nomination to the Central Committee. Although Dobrynin declared that both he and Gromyko ardently desired advances in Soviet-American relations, he lamented that Soviet bureaucratic structures meant that progress was not entirely in his hands, making SALT a problematic “test case” for détente. Still, Dobrynin expressed optimism for a spring 1972 summit, and according to Kissinger, the Soviet ambassador indicated his general support for the Nixon administration, criticizing the spring protests against the president and suggesting that the Soviet leadership favored Nixon’s reelection in 1972.³⁶⁵ This sort of flattery was designed to soothe Nixon’s ego, especially after the outburst that came at the start of the Semenov affair.

Kissinger’s report covered additional matters, including notes on their discussion of developing world. He informed Dobrynin that the US has made a “final offer” to North Vietnam and assured the Soviet ambassador that “it was not our policy to push the Soviet Union out of the Middle East.” The two men apparently gave particular attention to China and the possible improvement of Sino-American relations. Dobrynin suggested that such a

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

development would provoke a “very strong” Soviet reaction if done “in a manner that was designed to embarrass the Soviet Union or if it were publicly justified on the grounds of encircling the Soviet Union.” Kissinger noted, however, that if a breakthrough in Sino-American relations occurred “on the basis of normal diplomacy” and stayed “within some bounds,” Dobrynin stated, the Soviet reaction would be “different.” The two men even joked about the situation. When Kissinger quipped that Siberia could fall into the Chinese sphere of influence in the future, Dobrynin “laughed grimly” and said that “we are building it up at a very rapid pace and we even told the Chinese we would let them do some investing there.” When Kissinger asked, “What about Chinese immigration?” Dobrynin shot back, “We are not crazy.”³⁶⁶

Dobrynin’s report focused on different matters, even if the general optimism was similar. Dobrynin hardly mentioned their conversation on China, preferring to emphasize the role of Berlin in the discussion, in which Kissinger stated that it would convey Moscow’s perspective in consultations with American and West German diplomats during their visit to Washington. He wrote that “one got the feeling that the White House would like for Moscow, in particular, to know about the ‘good will’ gesture it had now made.” Dobrynin also reiterated the improvements in trade relations in recent months. Unlike the American report, which suggested that Dobrynin gave an unsolicited positive appraisal of the president’s chances for reelection, the Soviet report notes that Kissinger “analyzed in detail” the electoral situation. Stressing that Nixon’s position improved each day, Kissinger speculated that Nixon would most likely face Senator Edward Kennedy or former Vice-President Hubert Humphrey as his Democratic opponent. In Dobrynin’s view, Humphrey

³⁶⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” June 8, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 368-70.

would be “much easier to defeat, although Edward Kennedy,” a “lightweight,” according to Kissinger, “lags far behind his two assassinated brothers . . . in terms of intelligence and overall intellectual development.” Dobrynin concluded, “Although Kissinger was noticeably trying to exaggerate the poor chances the Democrats have for retaking the White House and thereby enhance the status and prospects of Nixon himself in our eyes, one must admit that judging by the Embassy’s observations, at the present time Nixon’s chances really are no worse than those of the Democrats.”

Dobrynin’s description of the summit ultimatum closely resembled Kissinger’s portrayal, although he emphasized that Nixon greatly desired a one-on-one meeting with Brezhnev and that he got the feeling that “the entire ‘tour d’horizon’ of Soviet-American relations that he had conducted up to that point . . . was in preparation for this main point of the discussion—a summit meeting.” In other words, according to Dobrynin, Kissinger (and, by extension, Nixon) came off as rather eager for a summit, and Kissinger complained about bureaucracy, noting that Nixon did not trust anyone from “the State Department bureaucracy, not even their interpreters.”³⁶⁷

Dobrynin telegraphed the Foreign Ministry, taking a strong stance in favor of setting a summit date for the first time. He argued that, while a summit might help Nixon politically, this was not the worst thing in the world, as “there are no great friends of ours” among the Democrats. Dobrynin noted that Nixon could campaign on a pro-détente agenda, an improvement over the anti-Soviet tone of previous campaigns. Also, he emphasized that a summit with substantial agreements could “clear up” several sticking points in Soviet European policy, including a Berlin agreement, the ratification of a treaty with West

³⁶⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 371-75.

Germany, and the beginning of a European security conference. As Dobrynin writes, “It is no secret to Washington that the thrust of this policy (like the specific interests noted above) does not coincide with US interests and that basically Nixon is agreeing to this quite reluctantly, as an unavoidable compromise in exchange for the summit meeting he wants.” The Soviet ambassador also pointed to the further expansion of trade and the conclusion of an ABM agreement and a SALT treaty as potential benefits to agreeing to a summit. Even in situations in which no resolution was in sight, such as the Middle East, Dobrynin argued that “at the meeting we can reach agreement on a mechanism for future discussion of the most important issues.”

As always, Dobrynin remained conscious of the “Chinese angle,” and he maintained that a summit would not hurt the Soviet position in triangular diplomacy. He stated that the Chinese would find it difficult to “launch a propaganda assault” on a Soviet-American summit after “their celebrated ‘ping-pong’ flirtation with the US,” meaning that Soviet prestige in the socialist-leaning states of the developing world would not be in danger if a summit took place. Moreover, if the Chinese did mount this kind of propaganda offensive, it would “inevitably affect the flirtation between [Beijing] and Washington and slow down the normalization of Sino-US relations.”³⁶⁸

In all areas of Soviet-American relations, Dobrynin highlighted the positive aspects of finalizing a summit with Nixon, demonstrating the advances in Soviet-American relations in 1971 and the real potential for breakthrough perceived by both sides in summer 1971. Having downplayed his interest in scheduling the summit in previous telegrams, hoping to prolong the decision and pressure Nixon and Kissinger into concessions in Berlin talks,

³⁶⁸ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” June 10, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 375-76.

Dobrynin now saw an opportunity to present the summit to the Politburo in such a way that even the more hawkish elements in the Defense Ministry and the military would recognize its advantages. In this sense, Dobrynin recommended finalizing the summit, not merely because he felt that the maximum concessions had been extracted from the Nixon administration, but also because he perceived that the Soviet leadership was prepared to receive this development.

On June 15, this optimism was further buttressed by a meeting between Nixon, Kissinger, and Dobrynin, in which Dobrynin presented a Soviet proposal for a five-power conference on nuclear disarmament. Nixon seemed cool to the idea: “The way our two governments can make the most progress is through the talks that you and Kissinger have been having. . . . Apart from the cosmetics of a Five-Power discussion, the real issue is the Two-Power relationship.”³⁶⁹ Still, the overall tone of the meeting remained positive and constructive. Nixon promised to examine the Soviet proposal in a serious fashion. Emphasizing progress on a Berlin settlement and SALT and the “extremely useful role” of the backchannel “in finding compromises,” Nixon claimed that Soviet-American relations were “now entering an important period, a period of tests and opportunities where it is possible, with goodwill on both sides, to move forward in key areas.” Dobrynin concluded: “In contrast to our previous meetings, this time Nixon was less tense and spoke more calmly. One could sense from all his remarks and from their tone that he is still preoccupied with the idea of a possible summit meeting as an important element in our relations and is awaiting

³⁶⁹ “Memorandum for the President’s Files,” June 15, 1971, 2:30 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 380-81.

our response.”³⁷⁰ While Nixon did not directly address the summit, it loomed large over the proceedings, and there was a discernable air of optimism surrounding the backchannel and the future of bilateral relations.

“A Neuralgic Point”

Between the first round of backchannel discussions and the June 1971 meeting at Camp David, China appeared in reports on backchannel meetings only on a few occasions. One such moment took place on November 6, 1969, when, venting about the state of the superpower relationship, Dobrynin stated that he lectured Kissinger about triangular diplomacy. He pointed out that some American officials made public their desire to improve relations with China during the Sino-Soviet border clashes, which seemed to Soviet observers as “unambiguous encouragement of the Chinese.” When Kissinger attempted to excuse this as the unfortunate, if unintentional result of the large American bureaucracy, Dobrynin snapped that “they need to put their own house in order to prevent such ‘absurdities’ and ‘mistakes.’”³⁷¹ China came up in discussions again nearly two months later on January 20, 1970, when American and Chinese diplomats met in Warsaw for the first time in two years. Kissinger reported that Dobrynin fished for information, emphasizing that China was a “neuralgic point” with Soviet leaders. When Kissinger tried to pacify Dobrynin by telling him that China did not pose a military threat to the USSR, that there was no possibility of the US using China to challenge Soviet power, and that Sino-American relations were “so far from normalcy” that discussion of these conditions was pointless,

³⁷⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 15, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 381-85.

³⁷¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” November 6, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 101-2.

Dobrynin noted that, while he “personally agreed,” he wanted to make sure that Kissinger understood “the intensity of feeling in Moscow” on the subject.³⁷² It took nearly six months before the two men returned to the issue of China on June 10, 1970, when Dobrynin wrote that Kissinger tried to exploit Sino-Soviet differences during a conversation about American actions in Cambodia.³⁷³ In turn, Kissinger claimed that Dobrynin brought up the Sino-Soviet divide to complain that “China was clearly in the ascendance in Hanoi,” and was using the Cambodia issue to pressure the Soviet Union into abandoning talks with the US. Dobrynin concluded that a settlement would be much more difficult for the American side to achieve if China controlled Vietnam, and he pressured Kissinger for more information on Sino-American talks later in the conversation.³⁷⁴ While these discussions reflect continuing Soviet concerns about how triangular diplomacy could reflect bilateral issues, the more remarkable fact is how little attention China received in backchannel talks.

By spring 1971, however, as the press began to catch wind of improvements in Sino-American relations, China once again arose as a topic of discussion. On March 16, Dobrynin asked why the State Department had lifted restrictions on Americans traveling to China. When Kissinger described the action as “routine,” Dobrynin questioned why restrictions were lifted toward China but not Cuba. Kissinger responded by poking fun at Dobrynin’s suspicions of triangular diplomacy, saying that the American side hoped to “drive a wedge

³⁷² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” January 20, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 117-18.

³⁷³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 159-165.

³⁷⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 154-59.

between Cuba and China.” In response, Kissinger reported, “Dobrynin smiled sourly.”³⁷⁵

Two weeks later, Dobrynin brought up China once more, stating that “he hoped we were not trying to blackmail the Soviet Union by the moves we were making on China,” because “the reaction in the Soviet Union would be very violent.” Kissinger assured the Soviet ambassador otherwise, stressing that China could not pose a threat to Soviet interests and that improving relations with the Soviet Union was important to President Nixon.³⁷⁶

Dobrynin did not address Sino-American relations in his memos until May 10, when he stated that Kissinger raised the issue, arguing that American press reports that the administration hoped to use improved relations with China in a manner hostile to the USSR did not reflect President Nixon’s actual position. Kissinger pointed out the importance of the future development of a “tripolar system,” but contended that American interest in better relations with China had roots in contemporary issues in Asia, particularly mentioning the Vietnam War and Japan. He emphasized the administration’s understanding that Soviet-American relations took priority over Sino-American relations and that they would proceed with bilateral talks with this fact in mind.³⁷⁷

Finally, on July 15, 1971, the other shoe dropped in triangular diplomacy. Kissinger called Dobrynin at 9:45 PM to inform him that he had met with Chinese leader Zhou Enlai in Beijing from July 9 to 11 and that Nixon had accepted an invitation to visit China before May 1972. The formal note delivered to Dobrynin stated that the announcement was not

³⁷⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 16, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 310.

³⁷⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 27, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 336-37.

³⁷⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 10, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 341-42.

directed at any other nation, including the Soviet Union, and that Nixon hoped the Soviet leadership would join in “furthering and accelerating the positive developments” in bilateral relations that had taken place in recent months. Kissinger suggested that the US government went forward with the China trip only after the Soviet leadership delayed the summit, and that the superpower leaders faced two potential routes: continuing on the course toward improved relations, or an “agonizing reappraisal” of relations. Kissinger emphasized that the American government preferred the former option, declaring it “essential” that the Soviet government “not misread the meaning of this event and that our two countries continue to work cooperatively” in talks. Both Nixon and Kissinger hoped to avoid a panic in the Kremlin, even as they recognized the potential damage this could do to Soviet-American relations.

Roughly a day and a half after reporting the phone call to Moscow, Dobrynin sent a seven-page urgent telegram to the Foreign Ministry, outlining his proposals for responding to the situation with China. The telegram contained harsh words for both the Chinese and American governments, calling the Chinese leadership even “more unprincipled” than Nixon, and describing Chinese policy as a sign of its “aspiration to play a global role, and its obstinate pursuit of its nationalistic objectives above all else—objectives it places much higher than ideological considerations.” Here, Dobrynin outlined how ideological bonds were no longer sufficient to maintain Sino-Soviet solidarity against the US. Also, without irony, he criticized the Chinese government for pursuing the kinds of policies rooted in realism that Dobrynin personally recommended to the Kremlin on a consistent basis. In other words, Dobrynin expressed frustration that the PRC had taken its final steps away from solidarity with the socialist bloc toward a more independent foreign policy. Dobrynin also

complained that Nixon, in an attempt to secure reelection, settle the Vietnam War, and exploit the Sino-Soviet split, had secretly conducted parallel talks with the Chinese leadership for a personal visit while trying to reach an agreement for a summit in Moscow.³⁷⁸

Yet Dobrynin did not despair at the news and, while he acknowledged that Nixon's trip to China was "unquestionably of major international significance," he highlighted ways to defuse its effects. He emphasized that, as soon as the Chinese leadership agreed to a meeting and, most importantly, a public announcement of the details of the meeting, "the President straightaway seized this opportunity." Dobrynin concluded, "There is no doubt he would act the same way if there were a similar turn of events with respect to his Moscow trip." Thus, Dobrynin believed that a summit agreement could be reached quickly with Nixon, minimizing any Chinese gains that came with the announcement of Nixon's trip to Beijing. Furthermore, Dobrynin warned against reading too much into this step. As in 1961, when Kennedy and Khrushchev met in Vienna with great "ballyhoo" to solve the Berlin problem, among others, the two sides might very well clash during top-level talks, leading to ideological conflict and retrenchment instead of a breakthrough. Dramatic summitry could be useful, but it could also easily backfire.³⁷⁹

Moreover, Dobrynin still saw the potential for the Soviet Union to come out on top in triangular diplomacy. He contended that Soviet leaders should continue their work to ensure that the Sino-American rapprochement would not have an anti-Soviet basis. To accomplish this goal, Dobrynin conceded the inability of the Soviet government to influence Chinese behavior, instead suggesting that it should utilize all of its means to prevent the US from

³⁷⁸ "Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," July 17, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 401-4.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

resorting to anti-Soviet behavior in establishing its relationship with China. Therefore, Dobrynin argued that, if the Chinese side of the triangle remained closed to Soviet influence, Soviet authorities should turn their attention to codifying détente and convincing their American partners that the Soviet Union would be a more reliable long-term diplomatic partner than the PRC. Because Soviet and American interests lined up more closely than Chinese and American interests, Dobrynin believed that the Soviet Union could still emerge in a strong position in international politics. This required fast and assertive action on the part of Soviet diplomats to forge a closer Soviet-American partnership.³⁸⁰

To accomplish this feat, Dobrynin made five suggestions. First, he recommended that Soviet diplomats maintain their line that the normalization of relations between the US and the PRC did not concern them, so long as it did not develop an anti-Soviet foundation. He emphasized that the Soviet government should be careful to “give Washington no reason to believe that we fear the possibility of his colluding with [Beijing] and that we might make concessions to the US under the influence of the ‘Chinese factor.’” Rather, Dobrynin stated that they should persuade Nixon that their reaction represented a “calm determination” not to sacrifice Soviet interests in any way. Second, Dobrynin urged the Soviet leadership to continue with its previous approach to talks with the US, with a particular focus on European issues. Third, Dobrynin proposed that the Soviet government make use of Nixon’s interest in a summit to secure his chances in the 1972 election, pushing for greater economic ties and scientific-technical exchanges. Fourth, Dobrynin took a step back from the wholehearted endorsement of a summit that he gave a month earlier, suggesting that they “leave this entire matter up in the air, while not directly ruling out such a possibility.” Instead, he proposed

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

returning to the position of using the potential summit to extract concessions in Europe and to prevent the Sino-American rapprochement from becoming anti-Soviet in nature. Fifth, Dobrynin recommended that Soviet leaders work to “maintain US-Chinese differences and the mutual suspicion and distrust that undoubtedly exist even now in both Washington and [Beijing].” Dobrynin concluded, “In the final analysis presidents—with all their manipulation and swings from one extreme to the other—come and go. But our relations with the US, the leading country of the Western world, will remain of major importance to us.”³⁸¹ Gromyko subsequently instructed Dobrynin to “conduct yourself calmly” in backchannel discussions, tackling the China issue only if Kissinger raised it and avoiding talks about the prospects for a summit until further instructions came through.³⁸²

Dobrynin and Gromyko’s dampened enthusiasm for the summit provides an important caveat to work done by previous historical analysts, who declared that the American opening to China forced the Soviet government’s hand in accepting American conditions for détente talks. Kissinger, for example, wrote that, in addition to working to embarrass China in the developing world, the Soviet Union “sought rapidly to improve its relations with Washington: It was suddenly anxious to create the impression that more serious business could be accomplished in Moscow than in [Beijing].”³⁸³ Historian Vladislav Zubok argues that, after the breakthrough with China, “Gromyko’s procrastination tactics no longer looked prudent,” propelling the Soviet Union to accept Nixon’s conditions for détente.³⁸⁴ Basing his conclusions on Kissinger’s reports, Robert Dallek concludes that the

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years*, 404.

³⁸³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 766-68.

³⁸⁴ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 216.

improvement in Sino-American relations vindicated the administration's hopes and forced the Soviet Union to be more cooperative partners in seeking détente.³⁸⁵ Yet Soviet records point to the ways that Dobrynin and Kremlin leaders initially became increasingly wary of American intentions. Recognizing the consequences of American secret diplomacy, and fearful of the ways that the international scene could change under a so-called "Sino-American condominium," Dobrynin returned to his earlier position of advocating that Soviet leaders wait to see if additional concessions could be achieved before finally committing to a summit meeting.

"Bureaucrats have been foiled"

In the weeks after Kissinger's visit to China, Dobrynin's analyses of the situation grew more serene. On July 22, he sent another urgent memo to the Foreign Ministry, noting that "as the dust settles over the sensation caused here by Nixon's announcement," major aspects of the Sino-American rapprochement remained unresolved, pointing to the lack of a precise date for the visit, the dearth of specific agreements on the table, and the fact that, given the 1972 presidential elections, Nixon would need to ensure that his visit would occur before May 1972, as promised. This, Dobrynin argued, would persuade American policymakers to stay on "good behavior" for at least a year. Dobrynin acknowledged that the agreement represented "indisputable evidence" of major changes on the international stage, but he encouraged the Moscow leadership to continue working quietly to undermine the rapprochement.³⁸⁶ Dobrynin expressed disappointment that Kissinger did not wait a little

³⁸⁵ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 301-3.

³⁸⁶ "Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," July 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 411-14.

longer to receive the Soviet reply on a summit in Moscow, hinting that the Soviet-American summit could have happened first if Kissinger had been more patient.³⁸⁷

A burst of progress toward a summit, fueled both by Soviet interest in détente and triangular diplomacy, followed the initial shock of Sino-American rapprochement. Nixon wrote his first of many letters to Brezhnev on August 5, 1971, emphasizing that his work to improve relations with China and the forthcoming trip to Beijing had “no hidden motives.” Nixon hoped that, as a result of détente, “we of this generation will be able to pass on to our children a better and safer world.”³⁸⁸ While the letter did not directly mention the summit, Kissinger took up this issue with Dobrynin, stating that the president still desired to meet with the Soviet leadership to make key agreements toward improving superpower relations. Moreover, Kissinger expounded on Nixon’s “love for doing things on a grand and global scale” and “his willingness to personally make major, crucial decisions without involving a broad circle of individuals in them.” Dobrynin commented that these observations should be taken seriously: “The occupant of the White House plays a very large, almost dictatorial role in the area of US foreign policy, although they do not forget to praise American ‘democracy.’” Despite this sardonic remark, Dobrynin stressed the need to deal with Nixon, given that he could be in office for another five and a half years and that his desire for improved Soviet-American relations presented an opportunity to achieve Soviet foreign policy goals in SALT, Europe, and global affairs.³⁸⁹ The Soviet leadership sent a letter on

³⁸⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” July 29, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 415-16.

³⁸⁸ “Letter from President Nixon to General Secretary Brezhnev,” August 5, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 423-25.

³⁸⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” August 5, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 425-28.

August 10 recommending that a summit be held in May or June 1972 in Moscow.³⁹⁰

Kissinger responded by proposing the date of May 22 for the summit, with an announcement on September 15 or 16.³⁹¹

Meanwhile, the most important Soviet precondition for a summit—an agreement settling the Berlin question—was fulfilled on September 3, with the signing of the Quadpartite Agreement on Berlin by the four powers that occupied Germany after World War II. The agreement left the exact status of West Berlin—or, as the text of the agreement referred to it, “the relevant area”—unclear. Although West Berlin was not technically governed by West Germany, citizens of West Berlin could hold West German passports and West Germany would represent West Berlin abroad. Citizens gained a legal basis for travel between West Berlin and West Germany, and the agreement eased communication restrictions between East and West Berlin. Historian M. E. Sarotte concludes that the agreement “must be judged a success,” as “it had the desired effect of making Berlin much less of a flashpoint than it had previously been.”³⁹²

The negotiations played a central role in Kissinger’s use of linkage in backchannel talks. Sarotte notes that Kissinger delayed finalizing the Berlin agreement in spring 1971 because he hoped to use it to prevent a violent Soviet reaction to his surprise visit to China, knowing that the Soviet government would not want to risk the resolution of the Berlin issue. Kissinger also felt he could use it as leverage in SALT. Indeed, the Soviet leadership finally

³⁹⁰ “Note from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon,” August 10, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 430-31.

³⁹¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” August 17, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 431-33.

³⁹² M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, & Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 120-23.

agreed to simultaneously negotiate offensive and defensive weaponry in the spring of 1971, as the Berlin talks heated up. With all of the cards on the table when he returned from China, Kissinger permitted the American ambassador to West Germany to make an agreement. As Sarotte put it, “Once Kissinger decided to get personally involved, talks finally began to make substantial progress.”³⁹³

The completion of this agreement occurred with the backchannel bureaucratic confusion that preceded other détente breakthroughs. The settlement was negotiated through a series of backchannels between different groups, with Kissinger, in particular, having secret ties to Dobrynin; German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s top aide, Egon Bahr; and US Ambassador to West Germany Kenneth Rush, who agreed to keep his boss, Secretary of State Rogers, out of the loop. The West German and Soviet governments had secret backchannels of their own, with Bahr communicating privately with Brezhnev and Gromyko. As Sarotte wrote, “Information that Bahr received over, say, the Soviet channel, would then naturally influence how he perceived information from the American channel. Occasionally allies would find out from their ‘enemies,’ via a secret channel, information they did not know about each other.”³⁹⁴

This proved to be problematic, and helps explain both the faults and the utility of the backchannel. On August 18, Kissinger informed Dobrynin of an “internal incident” in the “bureaucratic procedures.” Namely, Rush reported in official channels that the four sides were close to an agreement. Rogers called Rush back to the US for consultations, since the secretary of state was, according to Dobrynin, “decidedly unprepared for the results attained

³⁹³ Ibid., 118-22.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 25-26.

at these meetings (since he is not aware of the exchange of views through the confidential channel).” Kissinger told Dobrynin that this incident resulted from the “purely internal and complicated dual chain of command,” referring to the White House and the State Department, and he assured Dobrynin that “there is no deliberate tactic to drag out the negotiations.” He said that Rush would attempt to convince Rogers that the break in talks was unnecessary, but if he was nonetheless forced to return home, the delay in talks would last no more than one to two weeks. Kissinger promised that everything they had already agreed upon would remain in place.³⁹⁵ By August 19, Kissinger notified Dobrynin that Rush had finished the agreement on his own, lamenting that “State is going crazy because they don’t know why it’s working so fast,” so Rush would probably have to return to the US for a few weeks for consultations. Still, Kissinger reiterated that, in the event of dispute between Rush and Rogers, the White House would side with Rush. As he concluded, “Bureaucrats have been foiled.”³⁹⁶

In the case of the Quadpartite Agreement, the multiple secret channels brought problematic complications to the negotiating process, adding several overlapping voices to the conversation. The need to manage the official bureaucracy in Washington, in particular, proved tricky. At the same time, both sides managed to overcome these difficulties to produce an agreement amenable to all parties. The trust built through friendly personal relations in the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel played a role in making sure these bureaucratic complications did not derail the agreement in its final stages.

³⁹⁵ “Transcript of Telephone Conversation (US),” August 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 438-39; and “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation (USSR),” August 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 439-40.

³⁹⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 19, 1971, 1:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

By the time of Gromyko's visit to Washington in late September 1971, détente seemed to have real momentum, and leaders from both superpowers expressed satisfaction with the backchannel's capacity for resolving the issues they faced.³⁹⁷ In bureaucratic matters, Dobrynin assured Kissinger that, while Gromyko had to meet with Rogers, "the Soviets had pretty much given up on that channel," recognizing that they did not expect much to come of talks with the State Department.³⁹⁸ Gromyko and Kissinger did not make much progress in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, but both sides made preliminary proposals. Most importantly, Kissinger and Gromyko agreed to put a concrete discussion of this issue into the backchannel for the first time. With regard to Vietnam, both parties seemed optimistic about the potential for resolution, and Kissinger even tossed around the idea that communists could serve in a transitional government in South Vietnam. Assuring Gromyko that the breakthrough with China was not directed against the Soviet Union, Kissinger emphasized that "the peace of the world depended on our relationship with the Soviet Union."³⁹⁹

Following the settlement on Berlin and Gromyko's visit, Dobrynin's mood and the tone of the backchannel seemed more positive than ever. At their next meeting, Dobrynin told Kissinger that Gromyko was "the most open he had ever seen him be" in meeting with the national security advisor. Dobrynin emphasized that Gromyko reported to Moscow that

³⁹⁷ Gromyko visited Washington to sign the "Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War," an agreement between the superpowers to improve safeguards against the accidental or unauthorized launch of nuclear weapons, to notify one another in the event of such an occasion, and to notify the other party of missile launches directed at them.

³⁹⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," September 20, 1971, 5:30 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 444-45.

³⁹⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," September 30, 1971, 6-8 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 476-81; and "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," September 30, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 481-85.

Kissinger “was a man well worth doing business with,” and he flattered Kissinger by delivering Gromyko’s positive assessment of the national security advisor as someone who had a “global approach” and a “tendency to see things in the large,” as opposed to Rogers, who “would always talk about specific tactical issues, never about global problems.” In Dobrynin’s assessment, this was “the sort of thing that Kennedy always wanted to do but never quite brought off.” Dobrynin concluded that, while the USSR conducted its foreign affairs “on an objective basis, these sorts of personal impressions carried an enormous amount of weight” in the Kremlin.⁴⁰⁰

Dobrynin also seemed much calmer about the prospects of Sino-American rapprochement after Gromyko’s visit. Kissinger secretly shared information about his upcoming trip to China and repeated assurances that he “would keep his word and make good” on his promise to Gromyko that the Sino-American breakthrough was not directed toward the Soviet Union.⁴⁰¹ Kissinger wrote, “Dobrynin played it very cool and said this was the proper way to proceed.”⁴⁰² When the backchannel met for the first time after Kissinger returned from his trip in late October, the national security advisor reported that Dobrynin was “again unusually affable.” When Kissinger wondered if the Chinese gave opposite messages to the US and the Soviet governments, the Soviet ambassador joked, “They are not talking to us in Moscow *or* in [Beijing].”⁴⁰³ In his memo of the conversation, Dobrynin gave

⁴⁰⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 4, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 485-86.

⁴⁰¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” October 4, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 486-87.

⁴⁰² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 4, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 485-86.

⁴⁰³ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 30, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 504-5.

a detailed rundown of what Kissinger told him about his plans to negotiate with Zhou Enlai. He wrote that the president intended to keep the USSR informed about Sino-American talks, and Dobrynin approvingly argued that this would oblige the president to take a more cautious approach in talks with the Chinese leadership. Thus Dobrynin expressed optimism that the restraining influence of the potential summit was having a “positive effect” on US policy in China.⁴⁰⁴ By the time that Kissinger informed Dobrynin that the president’s trip to China would take place in February, they were already discussing whether the First Lady and members of Congress should be permitted to attend the summit in Moscow.⁴⁰⁵

In Kissinger’s memos, at least, Dobrynin’s attempts to divide the US and China come off as transparent and ill-conceived. During a November 18 dinner conversation, for example, Dobrynin asked what would happen if China began making moves to outstrip the limits that the US and the USSR set in SALT. Kissinger emphasized that, by reaching an agreement on SALT, they would set into motion a joint approach to nuclear arms that would take into account changes in the global balance of power. Later, Dobrynin questioned the motives behind the rapprochement, suggesting that Nixon’s trip to Beijing would provide the Chinese a “status that they could not have achieved through years of effort on their own” in exchange for “a little publicity and the uncertainty of our allies.” Kissinger responded that, given the potential of China easing the American exit from Vietnam and “the rather ungenerous reactions of the Soviet Union to our repeated efforts to bring about a fundamental change in our relationship,” the opening to China gave the US space to maneuver. He added that rapprochement was inevitable, and even if Nixon and Kissinger advanced it by a few

⁴⁰⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” October 31, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 505-8.

⁴⁰⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” November 4, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 515.

years, the potential benefits outweighed the liabilities. Dobrynin highlighted the concern these developments produced in Moscow, particularly with the “major long-term danger” that China posed to the global balance of power.⁴⁰⁶ Despite these ongoing concerns about China, détente moved forward in the aftermath of the Berlin settlement, and it seemed as if Kissinger and Dobrynin’s work to build a personal and professional relationship in the backchannel would bear fruit with a spring summit and a SALT agreement without too many complications.

Conclusion

By June 1971, Kissinger and Dobrynin had overcome many of the lingering suspicions clouding Soviet-American relations, and they had weathered several of the problems caused by a bureaucratic apparatus designed to facilitate simpler relations. The superpowers had agreed on a basic procedure for negotiating SALT, with discussions to limit ABM systems and a temporary freeze on building offensive weapons until an agreement could be hammered out to limit them as well. Vietnam no longer received much attention in backchannel talks or blocked progress on vital points of interest, and while triangular diplomacy riled the nerves of Soviet diplomats, stability seemed increasingly likely as the superpowers came closer to a summit agreement. The backchannel, Kissinger recorded in his memoirs, finally became “operational” in this period, and even if members of the normal bureaucracy found it “demoralizing,” Kissinger concluded that “it worked,” as it successfully attained “that elusive blend of laborious planning and crisp articulation on which successful

⁴⁰⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” November 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 520-23. Unfortunately, Dobrynin’s record of this aspect of the conversation was not printed in a memo. Instead, he promised a full verbal report when he returned to Moscow for consultations. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” November 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 523-28.

policy depends.”⁴⁰⁷ Dobrynin wrote of the May 20 agreement that, while the bureaucrats in normal channels were justifiably aggravated to learn of the work in the backchannel, it was “a more convenient means for both governments to compromise a deadlock and reach a final decision at the crucial moments of negotiation.”⁴⁰⁸ Both diplomats continued to defend the efficacy of their backchannel, even after their careers were long over, and by June 1971, they felt that they had reason to believe that their work would finally bear fruit.

This chapter has employed the reports written by both Kissinger and Dobrynin on the activities of the backchannel from January 1970 through November 1971, focusing on Dobrynin and Kissinger’s efforts to reboot the backchannel, the progress in the spring of 1971, and the handling of Kissinger’s trip to China and Sino-American rapprochement. It also explained the bureaucratic difficulties posed by the backchannel. Nixon and Kissinger created a two-tiered system of negotiations, with the secret backchannel settling all of the major issues while the normal channels were left in the dark until decisions had been made at the top. Kissinger became the main arbiter of information, enforcing a strict regimen of secrecy, even if State Department diplomats eventually had to draft the final agreements. This compounded existing problems in the Soviet bureaucracy, where the lack of lateral clearances meant that Dobrynin entered SALT negotiations with little information from his own government about the nature of Soviet or American weapons and nuclear stockpiles. Moreover, Dobrynin and his colleagues at the Foreign Ministry took charge of negotiations over which they had little authority, as the Defense Ministry and the military controlled nuclear policy.

⁴⁰⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 806.

⁴⁰⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 214.

All of this complicated the already difficult negotiations, since there was little agreement in either government over what kinds of limitations would be equitable or acceptable. The somewhat dysfunctional nature of the backchannel and the superpower relationship in this period, accentuated by the fact that this approach was still new and evolving by the end of 1971, is further highlighted by the fact that Kissinger and Dobrynin frequently submitted contradictory reports to their respective leaders and colleagues, who were expected to assess the state of Soviet-American relations and construct future policies around the information provided by their backchannel representatives. As Kissinger and Dobrynin's positions became stronger in the summer of 1971, with the backchannel increasingly serving as a more permanent and regularized institution for settling diplomatic questions, they faced real challenges in dealing with crises in the developing world, while serving as the primary negotiators of critical agreements.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL DIPLOMACY AND THE PINNACLE OF DÉTENTE, 1971-72

If the tangled bureaucracies, conflicts in the developing world, and mutual suspicions challenged détente, the personal diplomacy between Kissinger and Dobrynin provided its greatest engine. Perhaps no other pair of Cold War diplomats could boast of this kind of relationship, built on friendly banter, common interests, and mutual ambitions. This chapter analyzes Kissinger and Dobrynin's relationship, outlining the ways in which the two diplomats bonded over a sense of what I call conspiratorial togetherness, a shared identity as male diplomats representing the world's only superpowers, and an ability to joke about both professional and personal matters. It picks up the narrative in November 1971 and carries it through the 1972 Soviet-American summit in Moscow, explaining how Kissinger and Dobrynin's personal diplomacy fared in promoting closer superpower relations in specific scenarios. Finally, it explains how Nixon and Brezhnev used this personal diplomacy in a similar way in their own top-level talks.

Until recently, historians have not dealt with this relationship in-depth, limiting their analysis to the friendly rapport that helped to grease the gears of negotiations. For example, Robert Dallek describes the development of personal diplomacy as the “greatest benefit” to Kissinger in the 1970 SALT negotiations, writing that he and Dobrynin quickly became “friendly rivals.”⁴⁰⁹ Zubok suggests that Kissinger used Dobrynin as a “confidant” to grumble about “the ‘Byzantine bureaucracy’ of Washington and Nixon’s ‘idiosyncratic

⁴⁰⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 219.

style,”” inviting the Soviet ambassador to the top-secret Situation Room in the White House on several occasions, as he built a personal relationship to break through superpower deadlock.⁴¹⁰ Jeremi Suri emphasizes Kissinger’s belief that personal diplomacy could overcome the stagnation of previous negotiations.”⁴¹¹ In other words, several historians have explored Kissinger’s view of personal diplomacy as critical to bilateral relations from the start of his diplomatic career. All of these scholars have examined this relationship from Kissinger’s perspective in his negotiations with the Soviet Union or have focused on its impact on Kissinger as a policymaker.

From retirement, both Kissinger and Dobrynin wrote about their relationship in the context of how their informal style improved the day-to-day workings of the backchannel, allowing them to “think out loud” and discuss ways in which they could find common ground to move talks forward. As Dobrynin detailed in his memoirs, “Good personal relations with Kissinger were founded on our mutual desire to listen to and understand each other, and to seek some agreeable solution or compromise to our differences, all of which helped overcome or minimize our difficulties during our official contacts or negotiations.”⁴¹² For his part, Kissinger said, “I respected [Dobrynin’s] human qualities. We both tried to temper our abiding sense of the potentially disastrous consequences of failure by conducting our dialogue in a polite and at times even jocular manner.”⁴¹³ He further sang Dobrynin’s praises: “He was one of the few Soviet diplomats of my acquaintance who could understand the psychology of others. He was suave not just by Soviet standards—which leave ample

⁴¹⁰ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 219.

⁴¹¹ Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 223-24.

⁴¹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 201.

⁴¹³ Henry Kissinger, “Forward,” in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, x.

room for clumsiness—but by any criteria. He knew how to talk to Americans in a way brilliantly attuned to their preconceptions.”⁴¹⁴ In other words, both men understood that a personal connection facilitated the backchannel, providing flexibility in times of conflict and tools for seeking compromise. However, neither man elaborated how this relationship formed and evolved.

Barbara Keys, the only historian to critically examine the Kissinger-Dobrynin relationship, depicts Henry Kissinger as an “emotional statesman.” Keys argues that Kissinger’s feelings and emotional state and, in particular, his relationship with Dobrynin had a profound influence on American foreign policy. She writes, “Kissinger formed a bond of affection, trust, and mutual interest with Dobrynin that profoundly shaped his views and actions in ways that have hitherto been unrecognized.” She states that this friendship reinforced Kissinger’s tendency to view an increasingly multipolar world in a bipolar manner, and she suggests that “the ease and habit of this relationship, and the practical and emotional benefits it brought, reinforced Kissinger’s inclinations to see the US-Soviet relationship as his primary focus in foreign affairs.” Keys draws on the “logic of habit” theory, positing that habit instead of deliberate calculation dictated policy decisions. She notes, for example, that Kissinger repeatedly contacted Dobrynin first to handle pressing issues when more direct routes could have been taken. For example, after the outbreak of the 1973 October War between Israel and the Arab states, she observes that Kissinger called Dobrynin first, not representatives of the warring parties. In sum, Keys contends that Kissinger’s policies cannot be understood without an examination of his emotional states,

⁴¹⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 140.

and his relationship with Dobrynin was central in defining his approach to foreign policy.⁴¹⁵

I analyze how Kissinger and Dobrynin developed their relationship as a mechanism for diplomatic negotiations. While Kissinger and Dobrynin enjoyed and valued their friendship with one another, they also saw it as a diplomatic tool to advance their respective countries' interests. The two men also consciously used their emotions to reflect both genuine frustrations and to manipulate the backchannel relationship. Finally, while Keys and other historians focus on Kissinger, I shed light on Dobrynin's role in the partnership. I demonstrate the need to contextualize Dobrynin's approach to Kissinger within the longer continuum of his work with previous American diplomats such as Averell Harriman, Robert Kennedy, and Dean Rusk. In other words, while Kissinger may have entered office intending to build these kinds of relationships with Soviet officials, Dobrynin had been practicing this art since he first worked at the UN in 1957.

Dobrynin's approach to Kissinger was evident already during their first meeting in February 1969, when he ensured that their discussions carried the same friendly, informal tone that he had built with previous foreign policy representatives. When Kissinger came to the embassy for the reception in honor of Arbatov, Dobrynin, sick with the flu, did not attend the party, but invited Kissinger upstairs to his private apartment. There, he greeted Kissinger in his dressing robe and insisted that they call each other by their first names. Kissinger's memoirs conveys the informal nature of the meeting and his immediate understanding of Dobrynin as a shrewd and capable diplomat: "Dobrynin greeted me with smiling, watchful eyes and the bluff confident manner of one who had taken the measure of his share of senior American officials in his day." Dobrynin reminisced about previous lost opportunities to

⁴¹⁵ Keys, "Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman."

improve Soviet-American relations, especially in the Kennedy years. When Kissinger pointed out incidents of Soviet aggression in that era, “Dobrynin smiled and conceded that not all the mistakes had been on the American side.”⁴¹⁶ In all, Dobrynin ensured that his relationship with Kissinger began in the same friendly manner that characterized his previous diplomatic relationships.

The intimate locations of Kissinger and Dobrynin’s meetings reflect their mutual interest in developing a friendly relationship. They frequently met over lunch or dinner, with drinks to help grease the conversation. Just as Dobrynin invited Kissinger to his private apartment for their first conversation, Kissinger had Dobrynin to his Rock Creek apartment for dinner, where he dismissed his maid early to allow for greater privacy.⁴¹⁷ Kissinger and Dobrynin’s conversations at these meetings expose the depth of this relationship. Kissinger biographer Alistair Horne perhaps best described their back-and-forth as “sometimes . . . more like the gossipy chat of two old college roommates than representatives of potentially hostile states.”⁴¹⁸ When Kissinger hoped to highlight the potential significance of a backchannel meeting, he would pick a showier, more striking venue, such as a late night cruise on Nixon’s personal yacht or a weekend excursion to Camp David. Although Kissinger designed these trips to stroke Dobrynin’s ego and obtain concessions, they highlight the remarkably personal relationship between the negotiators. Never before had a

⁴¹⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 113.

⁴¹⁷ Kissinger’s apartment was notoriously sparse and unkempt. Once in 1972, he invited Dobrynin to his home, joking, “Well, it’s a pretty unlive[d] [in] apartment, so I can’t give you the hospitality you give me.” Dobrynin laughed, “Well, I think we can survive this particular time.” Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 15, 1972, 8:15 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴¹⁸ Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*, 139-40. In commemorating Dobrynin’s death, Horne repeated this simile, this time comparing it with some of Kissinger’s other relationships. For instance, in dealing with British Ambassador to the US Lord Cromer, Kissinger was “formal, cool, and sometimes frosty.” Alistair Horne, “Kissinger’s man from Moscow,” *The Spectator*, April 24, 2010.

Soviet ambassador received this sort of treatment from an administration, and Dobrynin was certainly more effusive in dealing with Kissinger than he had been with representatives from previous administrations.

“You’re a Dirty Old Man”

In many ways, Kissinger and Dobrynin were outsiders in their respective systems. Historian Robert D. Dean has explained how the worldview of American foreign policymakers in the post-World War II era was shaped by their participation in all-male elite institutions: boarding schools, Ivy League fraternities and secret societies, military service, and metropolitan men’s clubs. These institutions, along with the “lavender scare” of the 1950s that sought to purge the State Department of homosexuals, bequeathed a certain brand of masculinity that affected their approach to international relations. In particular, Dean suggests that this “ideology of masculinity” acquired in their formative years shaped their view that victory in Vietnam required escalation and violence. Dean emphasizes that the boarding school experience created a sort of fraternity of foreign policy makers, as they shared a common background and a common worldview.⁴¹⁹

Kissinger’s identity as a German-born Jew, whose family emigrated from Nazi Germany to New York in 1938, set him apart from the white Protestant men who constituted the core postwar American foreign policy elite at that point in time. Kissinger grew up in the Washington Heights neighborhood and attended public school, taking accounting classes at the City College of New York before being drafted in 1943. After World War II, when

⁴¹⁹ Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). Dean is part of a movement of recent diplomatic historians who incorporate gender into their scholarship on international relations. For an overview of the evolution of gender analysis in foreign policy, see Kristin Hoganson, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?: Women and Foreign Relations History," *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 2 (2005).

Harvard opened its doors to foreigner-born and Jewish veterans, Kissinger enrolled.⁴²⁰ He emerged on the public scene as an academic, not a bureaucrat, and the foreign policy elite described by Dean saw him as an outsider. Suri, who has written the most comprehensive study of the impact of Kissinger's identity on his approach to foreign policy, maintains that, despite his wartime service and the broadening of "American identity" during and after World War II, "His obvious German Jewish qualities made him a perpetual outsider. He could never become fully accepted within the American mainstream in the way that an American-born figure like Robert McNamara could. He could never escape the accusation that he really did not understand America."⁴²¹

In Moscow, Dobrynin had key supporters in the Politburo and the Foreign Ministry, including Brezhnev and Gromyko, and his status as a Central Committee member after 1971 conveyed a certain degree of insider status. He still faced questions, however, from critics who viewed him as too "Americanized," having been stationed in New York for two years with the UN and in Washington since 1962 as ambassador. His critics suspected that his extended time in the US corrupted his worldview, making him overly sympathetic to American policymakers and leaving the Soviet government at a disadvantage in talks.⁴²² At the same time, his status as an avowed communist made him the ultimate outsider in the Washington circles that he frequented. Both Kissinger and Dobrynin received criticism from the traditional foreign policy elite in their countries, leading some officials to treat them as outsiders, and thus their prestige depended on the backchannel and the success of détente. Both men understood this aspect of their careers. In fact, Kissinger poked fun at the oddity

⁴²⁰ For a more complete biography of Kissinger, see Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 1-137.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁴²² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 354.

of two Europeans conducting bilateral negotiations in imperfect English: “We spoke in English. I did not make fun of him because he spoke with an accent.”⁴²³

Kissinger attempted to gain insider status by hobnobbing with the Hollywood elite. Kissinger, who divorced his first wife in 1964, dated a variety of Hollywood stars and prominent young women in the first years of the Nixon presidency.⁴²⁴ During nights out with Jill St. John, whom he dated more frequently than any other movie star, Kissinger made sure to publicly promote their romance, holding her hand and running his fingers through her hair “in a display that other diners sometimes found unseemly.”⁴²⁵ The Nixon administration, the press, and even the Soviet government paid attention to Kissinger’s rising star. Arbatov even reported giving Brezhnev a copy of an October 1972 *Harvard Lampoon* centerfold featuring the national security advisor’s face on a nude body sprawled out on a panda skin rug with the caption, “Forbidden fruit of the executive branch.”⁴²⁶ Overall, Kissinger promoted his image as playboy to spread his name and acquire additional power in Washington. Even today, the phrase most widely attributed to him remains, “Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.”⁴²⁷

Isaacson writes, “Since social standing is so dependent on power, a backwash effect occurs:

⁴²³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 113.

⁴²⁴ These women included Shirley MacLaine, Marlo Thomas, Candice Bergen, Karen Lerner, Jill St. John, Samantha Eggar, Lada Edmund, Judy Brown, Jan Golding, Marsha Metrisko, Danielle Hunebelle, and Liv Ullman. He was also photographed with Raquel Welch, Elizabeth Taylor, and Liza Minelli.

⁴²⁵ Biographer Walter Isaacson asserts that Kissinger actually the company of “media-savvy professionals” such as Diane Sawyer and Barbara Hower. Yet, even though Kissinger dated these women, Isaacson emphasizes that he did not encourage physical relationships. In fact, the women interviewed by Isaacson indicate that Kissinger usually just dropped them off at home after dates, never asking women to his apartment or accepting invitations to join them inside. Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, 355-70.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 363-64. Kissinger and Dobrynin joked about the phenomenon of Kissinger always sitting next to the prettiest woman at social events. One time, for example, Dobrynin asked Kissinger about missing a posh dinner in DC. Dobrynin said, “Well it was Barbara Marx you intended to sit next to,” referring to the model and future wife of Frank Sinatra. Kissinger laughed, responding, “No, I wanted to give you a free hand.” Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 26, 1973, 10:27 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴²⁷ “The Sayings of Secretary Henry,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1973.

social visibility becomes a way to enhance the appearance of power. This is important, because power in Washington . . . is largely a game of perceptions. Consequently, the appearance of power is a large component of the reality of power.”⁴²⁸ Similarly, Robert Dallek concludes that Kissinger’s dating exploits made him a “larger-than life celebrity” and someone whose fame would not be confined to the years of the Nixon administration.⁴²⁹ In this sense, Kissinger, an outsider to the Washington elite, entered its ranks through his public romances.⁴³⁰

If Kissinger’s dating conquests helped to raise his public profile, they also provided material for male bonding in the backchannel. For example, on May 25, 1973, Dobrynin called Kissinger regarding Brezhnev’s visit to the US. Dobrynin, in a humorous mood, brought up Kissinger’s infamous love life. After Kissinger stated that he had “been a little tired” the day before, the Soviet ambassador noted that he heard that the national security advisor was “sitting with a very nice girl” whose picture he had “on this Playboy Calendar.” After Kissinger responded, “Oh-h-h-h-h, you’re a dirty old man,” Dobrynin egged him on, “Oh, come on, come on. . . . She’s a real nice girl.” Kissinger interrupted, exclaiming that “she’s very attractive” and “I hope she isn’t a nice girl.” Dobrynin retorted, “You were with her, I wasn’t. So you are an authority, not me.”⁴³¹ Dobrynin flattered Kissinger, knowing

⁴²⁸ Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, 357.

⁴²⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 212.

⁴³⁰ Kissinger’s eventually marriage to Nancy Maginnes in 1974, also seemed at least partially motivated by such calculations. Isaacson quotes a woman from Rockefeller’s staff that for Kissinger, a German immigrant looking for acceptance in America’s highest social circles, the match with Maginnes was a “dream,” giving him access to “the right schools, the right clubs, the right kind of people.” While she was a companion who Kissinger long respected and adored, Maginnes also solidified Kissinger’s long-term status in the American elite. Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, 287-92.

⁴³¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 25, 1973, 12:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

that the national security advisor enjoyed the press he received by going on dates with famous women. Another example comes from April 1973. This time, Kissinger brought up the subject, saying that he heard that the Soviet ambassador made an unkind comment about him to Donald Kendall, CEO of PepsiCo, accusing him of taking a woman to the opening of the Bolshoi ballet. They laughed until Kissinger interrupted, saying, “It’s true but why should you give away my secrets to an outsider?” Dobrynin described how, when Kendall asked him to identify Kissinger’s latest date, he joked, “I really don’t know all the names of Henry’s girls so I’m not so sure whether he knows himself.”⁴³² Here again, joking about Kissinger’s love life permitted the diplomats to connect on a more personal level, while providing Dobrynin with the opportunity to massage the national security advisor’s ego.

At times Kissinger extended invitations to Dobrynin to attend Hollywood parties and meet beautiful women. For example, on June 29, 1971, when Dobrynin informed Kissinger that his wife Irina needed to go to Moscow, Kissinger asked if he wanted to come out to Hollywood alone. Dobrynin replied that he would prefer to come with his wife. Kissinger joked, “If you come alone, we can corrupt you.” Dobrynin said, “I am trying to be uncorruptable,” and Kissinger shot back, “But every man must have a weakness.”⁴³³ Later, Kissinger called Dobrynin from California, telling Dobrynin that he had “all the actresses lined up for you.”⁴³⁴ In March 1973, Kissinger brought up the subject of a Hollywood trip again. When Dobrynin commented on Kissinger’s appearance at *The Godfather* premiere in

⁴³² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 11, 1973, 6:10 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴³³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 29, 1971, 11:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴³⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 19, 1971, 1:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

California, Kissinger promised that, if the Dobrynins came to California, the movie stars would throw them a party. When Dobrynin promised to check his calendar, Kissinger declared, “We will throw you a party beyond socialist realism.”⁴³⁵

Kissinger’s joking banter with Dobrynin about infidelity formed a common theme in their relationship. In a conversation in November, when Dobrynin mentioned that his wife was out of town, Kissinger asked, “You want some of the phone numbers I have?”⁴³⁶ During a long series of phone calls in January 1973, Kissinger joked that Dobrynin’s wife probably thought he was cheating on her, given the amount of time he spent on the phone with Kissinger.⁴³⁷ In July 1973, Kissinger opened a call by saying, “I tried to call you last night but you were probably out with one of your girlfriends.” When Dobrynin explained that he just had a night out with his wife, Kissinger responded, “I see. With probably one of your Democratic senator clients.” Dobrynin laughed and said, “No, no, no, no. It was just two of us, nobody else.”⁴³⁸ Here, Kissinger’s lighthearted accusation is coupled with a joke that carried more serious connotations: that Dobrynin associated with members of the opposition party, even while “dating” Kissinger in the backchannel. Kissinger, anxious not to share the backchannel, needed reassurance of the monogamy of their diplomatic relationship.

Kissinger’s “accusation” of Dobrynin’s political infidelity also shows how the backchannel diplomats occasionally joked that they were a couple. At times, Kissinger and

⁴³⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 17, 1972, 5:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴³⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 30, 1972, 8:00 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴³⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 25, 1973, 6:30 PM and 7:20 PM, January 27, 1973, 10:30 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴³⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, July 11, 1973, 12:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

Dobrynin referred to backchannel meetings as “dates.”⁴³⁹ In the rush of meetings that preceded the 1972 Moscow summit, Kissinger began a phone conversation, “Anatol, how can you and I be separated?”⁴⁴⁰ A year later, he opened a call, “Anatol, you just can’t stay away from me,” to which Dobrynin responded, “Of course not.”⁴⁴¹ In March 1971, Kissinger put it most bluntly: “You and I are going steady. We should exchange telephone numbers.”⁴⁴²

Jokes about sex, women, and fidelity worked to cement their friendship even through Dobrynin appears to have remained faithful to his wife and thus did not actually share Kissinger’s romantic adventures at all. In fact, Dobrynin and his wife were inseparable. KGB General Oleg Kalugin points out that many other ambassadors caused the KGB headaches, behaving in reprehensible and dangerous ways, particularly in sexual relationships, because they knew that their connections in Moscow, solidified by foreign luxury items shipped from the embassy, shielded them from any allegations. Kalugin describes Dobrynin, however, in glowing terms, as “an intelligent, tough, and able professional with owl-like looks and a kindly manner.”⁴⁴³ Dobrynin, cognizant of the dangers posed by Cold War espionage and potential entrapment, avoided these kinds of liaisons. In fact, this may help account for the longevity of his term as ambassador. This also highlights

⁴³⁹ For example, in one conversation, Dobrynin told Kissinger, “I have a date with you Tuesday morning.” Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 9, 1973, 11:27 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 12, 1972, 11:15 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 22, 1973, 9:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 26, 1971, 8:20 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴³ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 114-15; and 254-55.

the extent to which Dobrynin, the consummate family man, stepped outside of his own boundaries in making these jokes about sexual infidelities. Dobrynin bought into the language that Kissinger spoke, utilizing the national security advisor's interest in women and fame to flatter him and gain his trust.

Kissinger and Dobrynin also showed tremendous interest in each other's families, giving gifts to one another and to their spouses and children on birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays.⁴⁴⁴ On one occasion, Dobrynin even sang "Happy Birthday" to Kissinger over the phone, when he knew he would not see his American counterpart for a few weeks.⁴⁴⁵ Kissinger invited the Dobrynins to meet Kissinger's parents.⁴⁴⁶ Dobrynin apparently shared details about his own parents with Kissinger, expressing a desire for Kissinger to meet them.⁴⁴⁷ Kissinger even paid playful compliments to the ambassador's wife, telling Dobrynin that "I got a very pleasant girl answering me" after Irina picked up the phone in the ambassador's office.⁴⁴⁸ On March 8, 1972, when Dobrynin informed Kissinger of his upcoming thirtieth wedding anniversary, Kissinger responded with discernable enthusiasm, "Isn't that terrific; isn't that terrific!" He joked, "That's more than I will ever make in a

⁴⁴⁴ For example, in 1971, Dobrynin gave Kissinger's son David a book on art, and when Kissinger informed the Soviet ambassador that his son liked the gift, Dobrynin requested one of his paintings. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 21, 1971, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴⁵ See, for example, Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 16, 1971, 11:45 AM, and Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 26, 1973, 11:05 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 651. The day after, Dobrynin called to thank Kissinger for the gathering. Kissinger stated that his friends enjoyed meeting the Soviet ambassador, and Dobrynin commented that his wife liked Kissinger's mother a great deal. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 10, 1972, 10:10 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁴⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," March 30, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 633-34.

⁴⁴⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 25, 1972, 10:20 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

marriage.”⁴⁴⁹ The following day, Kissinger brought the Dobrynins a bottle of champagne and the two drank it together while Dobrynin reminisced about meeting his wife as a student at a Moscow institute that was then moved to Alma-Ata, joking, “You see, we were watching the Chinese even then.” Caught up in the moment, Dobrynin added that Americans did not fully comprehend that “Russians were a deeply sentimental people, and that if you did things with them on the basis of friendship, it was always better than doing it from a position of strength.”⁴⁵⁰ While this statement might be read as calculated to influence Kissinger, coming just two months prior to the May 1972 summit in Moscow, it more likely reflects the euphoria of a social evening and three years of hard work together.

In sum, whether the role-playing in their humor involved portraying themselves as boyfriends, confidants, or wingmen, their banter put the backchannel on friendlier footing. It is important to note the manufactured nature of this “common ground,” which represented less a natural overlap of interests (Dobrynin never dated) and more a conscious decision to create a shared, intimate language. Equally important, understanding the vanity of the national security advisor allowed Dobrynin to influence Kissinger to a certain degree. Dobrynin teasingly mentioned his sexual exploits in glowing terms. In this way, two outsiders in Washington found a common language in constructing détente.

“Four More Years!”

Kissinger and Dobrynin also cemented the backchannel relationship through a very

⁴⁴⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 8, 1972, 8:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Ironically, two years later, Kissinger wed Nancy, and their marriage has since eclipsed the thirty-year mark.

⁴⁵⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 605-7.

real shared position of conspirators in secret efforts to negotiate agreements between the superpowers. As part of this, Kissinger and Dobrynin celebrated each other's professional victories. Kissinger went to great lengths to compliment Dobrynin on his career advances. When Dobrynin was elected to the Central Committee in 1971, Kissinger tested the Moscow number that Dobrynin had given him a few weeks earlier, joking that he wanted to determine if "that number you gave me is any good." He then congratulated Dobrynin on his election, noting that "it gives all of us here a feeling of greater confidence in you."⁴⁵¹ When rumors circulated in Washington that Dobrynin might be recalled to take on a major position in the Kremlin, Kissinger told him, "Well, I'm torn, because on the one hand I would like you to have an even wider field of activity. On the other, you are almost irreplaceable here in Washington."⁴⁵²

Dobrynin could be even more effusive in his praise for Kissinger's professional accomplishments. On the morning after Nixon's overwhelming victory in the 1972 election, Kissinger opened a telephone conversation by joking, "We didn't carry Siberia." Dobrynin responded that his impression was to the contrary, as the embassy erupted in chants of "Four more years, four more years" when television news announced the results. Judging by the telegrams he received from Soviet leaders, Dobrynin declared that the same sentiments were shared in the halls of the Kremlin. He continued, "From the deep in my heart I really like this development because I have a nice relationship." Kissinger responded, "I don't know whether one can have a feeling of personal friendship with a Communist diplomat but I have

⁴⁵¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 13, 1971, 7:15 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁵² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 6, 1973, 12:37 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

it.”⁴⁵³ Perhaps with some sense of irony, when they discussed the potential for the congratulations from Soviet leaders reaching the public, Kissinger said, “There’s nothing to hide in our relationship with you, it’s one of the best things we’ve done.”⁴⁵⁴ Later, when Nixon nominated Kissinger to the position of secretary of state in 1973, Kissinger called Dobrynin to share the good news two hours before Nixon made the announcement, joking that Nixon based the decision on Dobrynin’s recommendation. Kissinger also promised, “I won’t insist on protocol, Anatol, if you just call me Excellency we’ll get along fine.”⁴⁵⁵

If Kissinger and Dobrynin celebrated their professional achievements, they also collaborated to create unprecedented access to each another. By 1971, Dobrynin entered the White House through the service gate to avoid public scrutiny. The two men generally met in Kissinger’s West Wing office or in the Map Room, a quiet room on the ground floor of the mansion.⁴⁵⁶ Following the success of the 1972 Moscow summit, Nixon had a private telephone line installed between the embassy and Kissinger’s office in the White House on Dobrynin’s suggestion, creating a “second hot line” that did not require dialing and did not depend on the regular telephone network.⁴⁵⁷ In addition, previous protocol demanded that the Soviet ambassador receive explicit permission from the US Government when traveling

⁴⁵³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 8, 1972, 9:55 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁵⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 9, 1972, 3:05 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁵⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 22, 1973, 10:09 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁵⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 200; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 138.

⁴⁵⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 200, and 250. According to a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Dobrynin in May 1972, Dobrynin initially raised the idea as a joke, only for them both to realize its potential utility. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 13, 1972, 2:40 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. On June 14, Dobrynin called the telephone a “very good positive step” and a timesaver. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 14, 1972, 7:52 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

in the country, providing the plane's identification number, the reserve plane's identification number, the precise list of the crew and passengers, as well as a specific flight plan with approximate times that the plane would fly over certain cities.⁴⁵⁸ In March 1973, Dobrynin rushed back to Washington from Moscow to meet with Kissinger before the start of his vacation. When Dobrynin informed Kissinger that he had to make a stop in London because they could not be sure that they would receive permission from the American authorities, Kissinger responded, "No, no, but you can always assume you will get authority from us. You don't have to check before." Kissinger told Dobrynin to just let him know whenever he needed to fly back to the US and it would be approved immediately.⁴⁵⁹ This sort of goodwill gesture, not offered by previous administrations, highlights the men's unusually close relationship, as Kissinger broke protocol in bypassing this rule without consulting the State Department. Kissinger also knew that this kind of maneuver represented a simple way to curry favor with Dobrynin, making the Soviet ambassador feel as if this administration treated him better than any other.

Kissinger and Dobrynin's conversations frequently touched on the unique and sometimes bizarre nature of their partnership. One especially strange situation unfolded in February 1973, when Dobrynin called Kissinger after the National Prayer Breakfast, an event hosted by the US Congress to celebrate faith. Dobrynin—representing the officially-atheist Soviet Union—attended the event. In contrast, Kissinger acknowledged that he had not attended one after four years in office, leading Dobrynin to make fun of him, "Well, well, well, what are you doing? I was praying very strongly as far back as 7:30. . . . You did not

⁴⁵⁸ For an example of this paperwork, see AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 368, d. 1, ll. 13-15.

⁴⁵⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 6, 1973, 12:24 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

pray. This was my strong impression, and now I have proof. I'm ashamed of you.”⁴⁶⁰ Here, both officials apparently appreciated the irony of the situation.

Adding to this odd partnership, the diplomats practiced a sort of pretend nepotism with one another. For example, on March 26, 1971, when Dobrynin joked that Kissinger should use his academic connections to get him a doctorate, Kissinger promised to do what he could when he returned to academic life.⁴⁶¹ In 1973, when Dobrynin informed Kissinger that he would have to return to Moscow at some point for a Central Committee meeting, Kissinger cracked, “Now, Anatol, you can't elect me to the Central Committee—I hope you realize it. It would look bad in America.” Dobrynin laughed and suggested that since, as a foreign-born national, he could not be elected president in the United States, he should consider candidacy to the Central Committee. Kissinger agreed on the condition that he receive one of the official cars driven by Soviet officials.⁴⁶² Kissinger joked that he would not pose any problems, since, “All I want is the privileges, I don't want any of the responsibility.”⁴⁶³ This pretend nepotism played on the reality of the two diplomats working on the most important questions in superpower relations in complete secrecy and relative obscurity, particularly in the case of the Soviet ambassador.

To a certain extent, Kissinger and Dobrynin's work to keep the State Department and other federal bureaucracies in the dark about the backchannel fueled their sense of

⁴⁶⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, February 1, 1973, 7:00 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 26, 1971, 8:20 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 25, 1973, 9:31 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 26, 1973, 3:00 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

conspiratorial togetherness. This is evident in their reports on backchannel meetings from the first two years of the Nixon administration, and it continued until Kissinger became secretary of state. For example, on February 2, 1972, Secretary of State Rogers suggested to Dobrynin that they meet to review the state of Soviet-American relations, as the State Department had begun to take a more active role in planning the summit scheduled in Moscow that spring. Kissinger caught wind of this and proposed an advance backchannel meeting with Dobrynin on February 3. According to the Soviet report, Kissinger declared that he hoped to bring Dobrynin “up to date, on a strictly confidential basis, about what specifically the Secretary of State knows concerning the state of Soviet-US relations, which have been discussed with me at the White House level . . . since the Secretary of State does not know everything.” Kissinger wanted to make sure that Dobrynin did not discuss issues of which Rogers had no knowledge, in particular the concrete proposals on SALT, the summit agenda, and the extent of backchannel talks on Vietnam and the Middle East. As Dobrynin wrote, “It is a unique situation when the Special Assistant to the President secretly informs a foreign ambassador about what the Secretary of State knows and does not know concerning relations between two states at the level of the President of the US and leaders of the other state—the Soviet Union.” He emphasized that this situation showed “the enormous influence” of Kissinger over foreign affairs in the US.”⁴⁶⁴

If the reports on backchannel talks indicate how Kissinger and Dobrynin schemed to keep the State Department out of the loop, their comments in telephone conversations reveal the extent to which they reveled in the conspiratorial aspect of their relationship, even if it sometimes complicated matters. Kissinger compared his work to the role of a movie

⁴⁶⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” February 4, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 580-81.

director, ensuring that the statesmen shielded information from the American bureaucracy. He declared, "If we can keep all these things straight, we will have achieved a minor triumph of US-Soviet cooperation."⁴⁶⁵ Venting his frustration with the American bureaucracy over how the official channel had leaked private proposals, Kissinger sighed to Dobrynin, "If you lend us Siberia for a couple of years, I have some people to send there."⁴⁶⁶ After Dobrynin met with a junior member of the bureaucracy, Kissinger began a call, "I was afraid you were settling on problems" outside of the channel. Dobrynin cracked, "I left something for us," and Kissinger responded, "I would miss seeing you. . . . I know what he raised. I have every confidence you didn't give him a meaningful answer. I saw no way I could interfere and I was sure you could take good care of yourself." Dobrynin padded Kissinger's ego as he replied, "He doesn't matter."⁴⁶⁷ Having successfully worked together to circumvent the official bureaucracy, Kissinger told Dobrynin, "You understand our government better than the professors at Harvard."⁴⁶⁸ Both men saw themselves as the only legitimate gateway for serious negotiations, and they made fun of potential usurpers of that authority.

In addition, Kissinger and Dobrynin frequently conversed about the problems inherent to the structures of the Soviet government, as Dobrynin often used the complexities of the Soviet government to explain away a delay in getting a response to one of Kissinger's proposals. Kissinger reported that, during an extensive conversation in 1971, Dobrynin

⁴⁶⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 22, 1970, 10:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, December 2, 1970, 4:02 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 28, 1971, 5:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁶⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 27, 1973, 10:30 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

compared the reign of Stalin with the current situation. Dobrynin suggested that Stalin never consulted with the Politburo, calling on them only to occasionally ratify his policies, and did not accept opinions from senior officials that contradicted his own. In contrast, Dobrynin explained, the current Politburo meets every Thursday and requires consensus to pass any resolution. Dobrynin emphasized, “No Politburo member, not even Brezhnev, can take any unilateral decision.”⁴⁶⁹ Kissinger noted this all with interest, undoubtedly fishing for details on how the Soviet government operated.

Dobrynin shared with Kissinger the logistical problems posed by the Soviet bureaucracy and its lack of lateral clearances. Kissinger reported, “Dobrynin said that in the Soviet Union, of course, decisions were taken in a different manner; that is to say, there was no coordination between departments at a lower level. Each department worked independently, and all issues were resolved at the higher level.”⁴⁷⁰ Making matters worse, Dobrynin made clear on several occasions that insufficient coordination at the upper levels of government caused embarrassing situations or confrontations. For example, Soviet naval actions around Cuba were a constant headache for Kissinger and Dobrynin, including an apparent attempt by the Soviet government to establish an informal naval base at Cienfuegos. Kissinger complained in 1971 of a Soviet naval flotilla that arrived a week after the announcement of the planned summit. Dobrynin responded, “The Soviet government suffered very much from the separation in its top ministries,” assuring Kissinger that the

⁴⁶⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 313-15.

⁴⁷⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” February 18, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 125-27.

Foreign Ministry did not even know about this decision.⁴⁷¹ In this sense, Dobrynin demonstrated a remarkable transparency with Kissinger regarding his own government's weaknesses in an attempt to make Kissinger more sympathetic to the challenges of détente for the Soviet government. Additionally, he could use Kissinger's curiosity about the Soviet government to pass the buck, telling Kissinger that his negotiating partners valued détente and did not appreciate the activities of those forces in the Soviet government that caused Kissinger such headaches.

Dobrynin underscored the divide between bureaucracies when it came to negotiating SALT. Kissinger reported that speaking "off the record" in January 1971, Dobrynin noted that "SALT presented the Soviets with tough bureaucratic problems." The Soviet ambassador explained, "It was very hard for them to handle it since they have no lateral clearances in their bureaucracy." He suggested that the US government forward a Note Verbale to Moscow whenever it had a new proposal. Then, the Politburo could address it.⁴⁷² By March, when the Politburo kept the Americans waiting more than a week for a response, Dobrynin reiterated "that SALT represented a very complex decision-making issue for the Soviet Union."⁴⁷³ In May, Dobrynin expressed outright frustration with the process in Moscow. Kissinger quoted him as saying "that the negotiations on SALT with me had been the most difficult in which he had engaged in Washington. They had produced both hope and irritation in Moscow—hope because there was some desire for progress, but irritation

⁴⁷¹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," October 15, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 491-93.

⁴⁷² "Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger for the President's File," January 28, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 273-75.

⁴⁷³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," March 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 313-15.

because it was the first time in his experience that the whole government was actually involved in drafting documents. This was partly due to the fact that more than one department was involved.”⁴⁷⁴ Thus, when meeting with Kissinger, Dobrynin openly acknowledged the bureaucratic problems in Moscow, kvetching about their mutual disdain for bureaucracy and justifying the sluggishness of the Soviet government.

Flattery helped Dobrynin smooth over relations with Kissinger regarding bureaucratic issues. According to Kissinger’s reports, Dobrynin told him “to remember that in the Soviet Union, decisions were not made by one man as in the United States, but by eleven.”⁴⁷⁵ Almost a year later, Dobrynin used with the same line, but hinted that “he had been very much impressed by the existence of an office such as mine [Kissinger’s] in which all the major activities were pulled together and he had been urging Moscow to install the same thing in the Kremlin.”⁴⁷⁶ At another meeting a week later, Kissinger reported that Dobrynin reiterated this argument over brandy and tea: “There was some desultory conversation about the organization of government. It was Dobrynin’s view that the method of having one central focus into which flowed information from the State Department, the Defense Department, and intelligence was something that the Kremlin was lacking, and that they should implement.”⁴⁷⁷ Dobrynin later acknowledged that Brezhnev’s personal assistant for foreign policy matters, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, was the closest equivalent of a

⁴⁷⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 12, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 352.

⁴⁷⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” December 22, 1969, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 104-6.

⁴⁷⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 17, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 208-10.

⁴⁷⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” October 23, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 230-32.

“Kissinger” in the Soviet system, but he did not benefit from the same level of authority as the American national security advisor.⁴⁷⁸ Dobrynin’s proposal for a Kissinger-like position does not appear in declassified Foreign Ministry memos, suggesting the possibility that Dobrynin made these comments solely to flatter Kissinger or, alternatively, that Kissinger created them to bolster the utility of his special role to Nixon. Regardless, these reports provide additional evidence of the frustrations Dobrynin expressed in post-Cold War conferences with the complexities of the Soviet bureaucracy, and they suggest that Dobrynin used these conversations to connect with Kissinger over their mutual disdain for bureaucracy, to flatter the national security advisor, and to explain delays in Soviet responses to American proposals, even if those delays were intentionally designed to extract concessions from the American side.

The two men also voiced a mutual willingness to manipulate or circumvent the press to serve their designs, a position that affected the public’s access to information on negotiations. For example, they discussed timing announcements to serve the political interests of each side. In 1972, when setting a date for the release of a trade agreement, they decided to avoid announcing it during the Democratic National Convention due to take place the following week. As Kissinger put it, he did not want it to “look like a stunt,” and Dobrynin expressed his understanding.⁴⁷⁹ They also discussed how to spin different news reports to suit their mutual political interests. On June 3, 1973, *The Washington Post* published an article by Sanford J. Ungar claiming that the Soviet Embassy had a complete copy of the Pentagon Papers at the same time that the Justice Department was fighting to

⁴⁷⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” January 21, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 558-63.

⁴⁷⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 30, 1972, 3:10 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

prevent the publication of the documents.⁴⁸⁰ That afternoon, Dobrynin called Kissinger, disgusted with the article and seeking advice on how to proceed. Dobrynin suggested that somebody did offer to provide the Soviets with a copy of the Pentagon Papers, but at the UN mission in New York, not the embassy in Washington, and they had refused it. Dobrynin vented about the media, contending that the newspaper released this story on the brink of Brezhnev's visit to the US "just to make more reliable all their complaints they are conducting against White House and now they're trying to involve us." When asked for his advice, Kissinger argued that he should just tell the truth, that they were offered the papers, but refused to take them, as "it would help us and it would not hurt you." Dobrynin promised to consult with Moscow and provide a response to the media.⁴⁸¹

Dobrynin likely also railed against the media as a conscious move to share common ground with Kissinger and the Nixon administration's paranoid fears of press leaks and negative coverage, especially when Nixon increasingly found himself under siege in the press. On May 24, 1973, after Kissinger mentioned the press in an aside, Dobrynin launched into a tirade about the coverage of the Watergate scandal. He stated that reporters "are losing all sense of proportion and national dignity." When Kissinger agreed, Dobrynin interrupted him to say, "Really, it's unbelievable that they do not think a little bit about their own country. It's rather ungrateful." After discussing other issues, including a press allegation that the American government sought a nuclear nonaggression treaty to draw the public eye away from Watergate, Dobrynin ranted about how the British press was "behaving really

⁴⁸⁰ The Pentagon Papers are an official classified Defense Department history of the Vietnam War that was leaked to the press by whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg. The document demonstrated that multiple presidential administrations had misled the American public on their intentions and actions in Southeast Asia. Sanford J. Ungar, "Soviets Here Got 'Papers' in '71," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 1973.

⁴⁸¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 3, 1973, 12:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

lousy” on the Watergate issue and were “rather undermining the President.” The Soviet ambassador expressed relief when Kissinger told him that he believed that the tide in the press would soon turn.⁴⁸²

Dobrynin and Kissinger’s scheming did not focus solely on the American press, but also extended to Soviet interlopers. For example, on July 28, 1971, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that Victor Louis, a Soviet journalist with ties to the KGB who was employed by a Western media outlet, sought a meeting with the national security advisor through an acquaintance. Louis may have been checking in on Dobrynin’s activities in the backchannel, but it is more likely that he either acted independently or under orders from the KGB leadership to establish a second channel that they could control, circumventing the Foreign Ministry. After claiming that the Foreign Ministry had no knowledge of Louis’s presence in the US, Dobrynin declared, “He has no messages and nothing of any importance at all.” Kissinger, understanding that Dobrynin might feel threatened by the potential of a secondary backchannel, reassured the Soviet ambassador that he simply wanted to inform him of Louis’s proposal, and he said, “I am assuming you are the person I deal with.”⁴⁸³ Over three months later, Louis unexpectedly showed up for a thirty-minute meeting with Kissinger, a fact which Kissinger shared with Dobrynin: “I made very clear to him that my dealings are with you. I think that what he would have liked was for me to tell him something that he could bring back. You can rest assured I told him nothing.” Kissinger continued, “I made

⁴⁸² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 24, 1973, 6:40 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. It is difficult to assess the extent to which Dobrynin believed these arguments or just hoped to use them to curry favor with Kissinger. In his memoirs, though, Dobrynin concedes that at this time, “Soviet leaders (and I should confess, our embassy in Washington as well) still did not believe that Watergate was a political crisis of major proportions.” There is likely at least some truth beyond Dobrynin’s complaints about the media coverage of Watergate in mid-1973. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 274-75.

⁴⁸³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, July 28, 1971, 12:23 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

clear to him that I was extremely satisfied with present arrangements” and that a secondary backchannel “would confuse matters.” Dobrynin thanked Kissinger for letting him know.⁴⁸⁴ Both Kissinger and Dobrynin thus understood the other party’s fears of being usurped by a backchannel managed by outsiders and interlopers, and they both made a show of demonstrating support for one another.

Another way that the two bonded over their conspiratorial partnership came in the way they discussed their home country’s relationships with allies and client states. The Vietnam War, one of the major sticking points in Soviet-American relations, often served as a space for humor. For example, on March 16, 1973, Dobrynin made a quick call to Kissinger before the American left to Mexico for vacation and told Kissinger that he hoped nothing would disturb his vacation. Kissinger responded, “Maybe you could make a request through your allies,” the North Vietnamese, “for about ten days to observe the agreement.” Dobrynin playfully suggested, “Your old friend Le Duc Tho,” the North Vietnamese diplomat with whom Kissinger negotiated the end of the Vietnam War, “you should invite him to come to Acapulco.” Kissinger snickered, “It would be an experience.” Dobrynin ended the conversation, “I’m sure it would be quite an experience. And really everything will be under control.”⁴⁸⁵ In this sense, Dobrynin felt comfortable poking fun at the frustration caused to Kissinger by a Soviet ally and on a rather serious matter.

Kissinger and Dobrynin also found room to rail about their supposed friends. In a

⁴⁸⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 14, 1971, 11:30 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Dobrynin addressed Louis directly in his memoirs, “In their own search for political information in the West, Louis and people like him presented themselves as more knowledgeable than Soviet diplomats about the inner secrets of the Kremlin and more suitable for finding ‘compromises’ in our relations. They were trying to establish contacts outside of official channels with some influential people in the administration as well as those in opposition. But they were doing more harm than good by their free and incompetent performance in Washington.” Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 354.

⁴⁸⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 16, 1973, 6:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

1973 discussion of Article I of the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War, Kissinger highlighted the troubles that the American side might have in selling the treaty's stipulations to their allies, who might interpret the document to mean that they could not rely on the American nuclear umbrella for protection from the USSR. When Kissinger remarked, "I know what hell is going to break loose in NATO even with this draft," Dobrynin shot back, "I think you can handle it." Kissinger protested, "No, we cannot handle it easily. We have no support at all."⁴⁸⁶ Later, Kissinger again requested latitude in explaining and selling the provisions of Article I to their allies. Dobrynin sympathized, "You see, with the Allies we have the same problem that you have. . . . After all, a leading country has a right to say something or do something. It is good for them and for their Allies."⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, in 1973, Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed the potential for granting most-favored nation status to the Soviet Union, despite protests from Jewish-American organizations and key politicians.⁴⁸⁸ Kissinger told Dobrynin, "I told the [Israeli] Ambassador that we would take very serious measures if they obstructed then MFN. And between you and me, even going to airplane deliveries." Kissinger asked that Dobrynin keep this information from the public, and the Soviet ambassador agreed.⁴⁸⁹ Here, Kissinger gave Dobrynin information about the pressure he applied in his private negotiations with an ally, impressing upon the Soviet ambassador the seriousness of his attempt to pass MFN status for the USSR.

⁴⁸⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 2, 1973, 6:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁸⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 9, 1973, 11:27 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁸⁸ In particular, Senator Henry Jackson demanded that the USSR permit open Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union before receiving MFN.

⁴⁸⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 22, 1973, 9:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

Even the 1973 October War, which produced the most heated arguments between Dobrynin and Kissinger during the Nixon administration, provided a venue for bonding over the troubles caused by allies. The British government served as a channel to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat during the crisis. Kissinger joked, “Maybe the British are trying to become a world power as a result of this.”⁴⁹⁰ Dobrynin and Kissinger also teased each other about the problems posed by allies in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict later in the war. Dobrynin suggested that limiting the number of participants in consultations to the US, the USSR, the Israelis, and the Arab countries involved in the war would better facilitate peace than including the entire UN Security Council. Kissinger responded, “Why are you so hard on your allies?” When Dobrynin asked for Kissinger to clarify which ally he meant, Kissinger stated, “The only ally you have as a permanent member of the Security Council,” hinting that he was referring to the PRC. Of course, given the recent exacerbation of the Sino-Soviet split and the breakthroughs in Sino-American relations, the Soviet ambassador shot back, “For the sake of conversation, why not drop them?” Kissinger sympathized, “Actually we are no more eager to have your allies there than you are. We are not much more eager to have our own allies there.”⁴⁹¹

Both Kissinger and Dobrynin enjoyed their powerful position enough to poke fun at less powerful, neutral Third World countries, as well as lower-level officials overstepping their authority. On August 18, 1971, Dobrynin informed Kissinger that the American ambassador to Burundi, Thomas Melady, apparently boasted to the country’s Soviet ambassador that he had been “personally invited” by Nixon and Kissinger to join the

⁴⁹⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 13, 1973, 1:40 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁹¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 18, 1973, 8:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

president's trip to China. Kissinger responded: "He is a liar." Dobrynin retorted, "I was impressed, especially after I looked at the map!" Kissinger continued, "If there's a delegation of 2800 . . . he [Melady] will be 2700." Dobrynin joked, "This is the only telegram I have ever gotten from Burundi," to which Kissinger replied, "Burundi! Jesus!"⁴⁹²

In sum, despite their antagonist relationship, the US and USSR shared something in common: superpower status. In this sense, they faced some similar problems, including negotiating with antagonistic states, coping with disgruntled allies, and managing a complex and problematic foreign policy apparatus that stretched around the globe. Kissinger and Dobrynin found common language over these shared difficulties in their conversations. By expressing empathy with the other side's troubles, both diplomats discovered that personal diplomacy could provide opportunities to connect with one another and learn more about the opposite party's system of governance and strategic interests. It also allowed them to manipulate their partners, assuring each other that their motives were pure and that outside forces were at fault for stumbling blocks to breakthroughs in negotiations.

"You Were Easier to Deal with When We Bought Alaska"

Perhaps more remarkably, Kissinger and Dobrynin found common ground over the more antagonistic aspects of the superpower relationship. For example, each joked that the other received all of the concessions in diplomatic negotiations due to his superior diplomatic skills. In the wake of the Semenov affair, when they agreed to work on offensive arms limitations and an antiballistic missile treaty simultaneously, Kissinger told Dobrynin, "My boss is getting mad at me—he thinks you are taking advantage of me." Dobrynin shot back,

⁴⁹² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 18, 1971, 11:09 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

poking fun at Kissinger's role as a foreign-born diplomat: "You are taking advantage of me. It's your native language." Kissinger then flipped sides, pretending to take advantage of Dobrynin: "You see, I want to tell you as a friend, what we want to propose is an arrangement so that we can keep 20 radars and you can keep one—we have to keep some flexibility for that." Kissinger concluded the conversation, "You were easier to deal with when we bought Alaska." Dobrynin responded, "We didn't have Kissinger then," to which Kissinger replied, "We didn't have Dobrynin."⁴⁹³

Faux accusations of taking advantage of each other permeate the backchannel talks throughout the Nixon and Ford years. In 1971, as Dobrynin prepared to go on vacation, Kissinger remarked, "You are tough enough when you are exhausted. Rested you will be impossible."⁴⁹⁴ In 1972, when finalizing a grain deal, Kissinger asked humorously, "Did you ever not get what you want out of my office?" Dobrynin responded, "Well, well, you're going to receive almost a billion dollars, I should say. Does it sound enough?"⁴⁹⁵ In March 1973, during planning for the June summit, Dobrynin remarked that "in a year or so," the Soviet side would dismantle its SS-9 ICBM in exchange for "some other things." Kissinger replied, "No, you dismantle all SS-9s and we will give you good will." Dobrynin joked that it seemed like a "good idea," and Kissinger replied, "I know you're so easy to deal with. . . . You'll agree to that easily."⁴⁹⁶ After completing preliminary negotiations on the 1973

⁴⁹³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 13, 1971, 3:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁹⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 26, 1971, 1:22 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁹⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 30, 1972, 3:10 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁹⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 6, 1973, 12:24 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

summit agreements, as he prepared to meet with Brezhnev to finalize the deals, Kissinger declared, “Now the only other thing I’m going to tell you, Anatol, is that if I arrive in Moscow and I find a stone statue to you in a park I know you’ve taken advantage of me Particularly if it has Article I engraved in the bottom.”⁴⁹⁷

These exchanges also reflect a mocking retort to the general tone of censure from both American and Soviet critics of détente. American historian Richard Pipes emerged as a leading conservative opponent of détente, maintaining that “as now defined and practiced, détente primarily benefits the Soviet Union.”⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, he declared that the backchannel “works greatly to the advantage of the Soviet leadership.” In his words, “The fact that the Soviet ambassador in Washington has virtually free access to the president, and indeed has been known to travel to Moscow on the same plane with the American secretary of state, assures the Politburo that it is reasonably well informed of major American initiatives before they occur.”⁴⁹⁹ Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson, a Democrat from the state of Washington infamous for tying the Soviet Union’s most-favored nation status to Soviet Jewish emigration rights, criticized Kissinger for giving up too much in negotiating SALT I, and accused Nixon of making risky concessions to the Soviet side that actually increased the future costs of the arms race.⁵⁰⁰ Kissinger satirized these critiques of his work in the final conversation he shared with Dobrynin before leaving for the president’s historic trip to China in February 1972. When Dobrynin wished Kissinger a “happy landing,” Kissinger responded, “I

⁴⁹⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 17, 1973, 11:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁴⁹⁸ Richard Pipes, “Detente: Moscow’s View,” in *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed. Erik P. Hoffmann, Jr., and Frederic J. Fieron (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1980), 385.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁵⁰⁰ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 404.

understand some of my colleagues want to leave me there. If you hear something happened to me in a plane crash in Mongolia, don't believe it."⁵⁰¹

The snarky remarks by Kissinger and Dobrynin notwithstanding, public criticism from individuals skeptical of the backchannel or of détente in general represented a serious challenge to their special relationship. Malcolm Toon, who served as US ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1969-71), Yugoslavia (1971-75), Israel (1975-76), and the Soviet Union (1976-79), voiced serious concerns about the backchannel. In a 1984 profile of Dobrynin in *The New York Times Magazine*, Toon commented, "Dobrynin is one of the ablest diplomats of the 20th century, but you shouldn't treat him as a friend at court. He's a representative of a government, a system, a philosophy that is hostile to everything we stand for."⁵⁰² Noticing the chummy relationship between the two men, Toon believed that Dobrynin used his charm to gain an advantage over American diplomats in negotiations.⁵⁰³

Toon's critique is typical of American diplomats who served at the American Embassy in Moscow and in the State Department, and it is reflective of their frustration with the backchannel, which left them with little influence over foreign affairs. Warren Zimmermann, who twice served at the American Embassy in Moscow in the 1970s and 80s,

⁵⁰¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, February 17, 1972, 8:25 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵⁰² Kalb, "The Dobrynin Factor." In a 1989 interview, Toon described Dobrynin as "a very effective guy" and noting that he "snookered so many Presidents and Secretaries of State down through the years. Later in the interview, Toon expressed disappointment in the president's decision to conduct SALT II negotiations through Dobrynin rather than through him. Interview with Malcolm Toon, 9 June 1989, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004too01>.

⁵⁰³ Some American diplomats from the period suggest that Toon's critiques of Dobrynin largely came as a result of jealousy over Dobrynin's access. For instance, Joe Sisco wrote: "Mac Toon, who served well as our ambassador in Moscow, used to just be so unhappy simply because Dobrynin had all the access, and poor Mac Toon couldn't even get through the front door to see Mr. Gromyko more than once every three months or so." See Interview with Joseph J. Sisco, 19 March 1999, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004sis02>.

later stated, “In the embassy we did not share the view that Dobrynin was the liberal or in the reforming wing of the Soviet communist party, that he was a reliable interlocutor.”

Zimmermann concluded that Dobrynin “was an opportunist, he would tell his bosses what they wanted to hear.” Zimmermann also acknowledged rather frankly, “We resented the fact that Dobrynin had terrific access in Washington whereas our Ambassador had very little access in Moscow.”⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Mark Palmer, who served in Moscow from 1969 to 1971 and in the State Department for his entire career, noted, “Those of us who are sort of old Soviet hands used to get very pissed off because Dobrynin had this direct channel in to [Kissinger]. Literally, he had a phone on his desk that Dobrynin picked up on his desk on 16th Street and it rang on Henry's desk.” While Palmer decides in retrospect that Kissinger “was working in a constructive fashion with [the Soviets] on a lot of very serious issues,”⁵⁰⁵ the anger of former State Department officials, left out of the most important negotiations during détente, remained palpable, even after the end of the Cold War.

Even one of Kissinger’s closest assistants, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, criticized the national security advisor’s dominance over policy and the American approach to the USSR. Acknowledging his “undoubted personal disappointment” that Kissinger excluded him from many sensitive details, Sonnenfeldt warned Kissinger of the dangers of “lone-wolf diplomacy,” and he contended that one person could not bear the burden of the historic and critically important task of conducting superpower relations. Sonnenfeldt also critiqued Dobrynin’s role in the backchannel, writing, “Over the years Soviet representatives, notably the current, much-admired one here, have developed the psychological knack to heighten the

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with Warren Zimmermann, 10 December 1996, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004zim02>.

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Mark Palmer, 30 October 1997, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004pal02>.

sense of expectancy as well as the sense of obligation of their American interlocutors.” In other words, because Dobrynin was such a skilled diplomat, Kissinger should know better than to deal with him without a broader support network to help him examine the situation logically and without the emotional impact of direct negotiations, especially during an election year, when American negotiators were prone to making dangerous concessions.⁵⁰⁶

Most importantly, Sonnenfeldt articulated reservations about the foundation of Kissinger’s vision. Sonnenfeldt doubted that the USSR could be brought into a “rational system of world order.” In his view, “For all the stultification of ideology, the Soviet state remains a revolutionary one committed to the destruction, or at any rate the prevention of any type of order that you and I would consider even remotely harmonious and viable.” Furthermore, Sonnenfeldt described the Soviet system as “fundamentally unstable,” due to the nationality problem, the role of the Party in global affairs, and the inability of the regime to provide for orderly succession. Sonnenfeldt even attacked linkage, Kissinger’s foundational negotiating strategy, as a method that “reinforces the rigidity (i.e., essential instability) of the Soviet system because it becomes a substitute for reform.” In sum, Sonnenfeldt declared, “I question that this or the next generation of Russian rulers either wants to participate, or is capable of participating, in an ordered structure of international relations.”⁵⁰⁷ Sonnenfeldt cast doubts on Kissinger’s ability to build a stable international system around the Soviet-American relationship, suggesting that Kissinger’s vision for the

⁵⁰⁶ More broadly, Sonnenfeldt questioned the premise of SALT negotiations, stating that “prospects were never that good” due to “the essential incompatibility of interests and positions in the world.” Fear of nuclear annihilation and cooperation on rudimentary issues of international conduct, he contended, were insufficient to bridge those gaps. Memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 7 January 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76, Volume XIII: Soviet Union, October 1970-October 1971* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 264-69.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

future of international relations had cracks in its foundation. In this sense, critiques of détente and the backchannel emerged even among Kissinger's closest advisors.

Dobrynin also faced criticism from his home front. In his memoirs, Dobrynin discussed rumors in the Central Committee, the KGB, and the Foreign Ministry that he had become “Americanized” by his long stay in the United States. Also, while most Soviet ambassadors “preferred to stay within the walls of their embassies,” Dobrynin and his wife had “a wide circle of friends and acquaintances in the United States” and took regular trips around the country. Dobrynin emphasized that this forced him to remain “cautious” and to rely on his Party credentials and good connection in the Politburo, Foreign Ministry, and various bureaucracies, including the KGB, to keep in good standing.⁵⁰⁸

Former KGB Chief Kalugin pointed to criticism of Dobrynin in the Kremlin from those who opposed détente. He writes, “At times, as he defended the official Soviet line, he may have seemed like a hard-liner, but Dobrynin was a comparatively progressive man who came under attack from orthodox Communists in Moscow for being too soft on America.” Unlike these Moscow elites, Dobrynin “knew the United States well and scoffed at the idea of an American cabal—composed of Jews, the military-industrial complex, and evil capitalists—determined to bury the Soviet Union.” Kalugin also identifies an unexpected “enemy” of Dobrynin, Foreign Minister Gromyko, “who saw the ambassador as a rival and tried to diminish his achievements and stature in Washington.”⁵⁰⁹ In this regard, Kissinger and Dobrynin's banter about one side taking advantage of the other reflected the real critiques that they faced every day from domestic critics.

⁵⁰⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 354.

⁵⁰⁹ Kalugin, *Spymaster*, 114-15.

Further, Kissinger and Dobrynin joked about mutual surveillance and espionage, frequently hinting that one knew where the other had been the previous night and teasing about the secret files kept by the other side on their lives. In 1971, Dobrynin brought up Kissinger's exploits on the West Coast, saying that he had been "reading with pleasure about your adventures." Kissinger begged that perhaps "once we get to know each other better," Dobrynin would share the file on him.⁵¹⁰ Later that year, Dobrynin complimented Kissinger, saying that he "always was thinking and deeply believed you were a very efficient man." Kissinger countered, "You also think that I am easily flattered." When Dobrynin protested, Kissinger replied, "When we are both out of government service, which will be a lot later for you than me, I hope you will let me read the reports you send in on me."⁵¹¹ The following year, Kissinger complained, "You've read a lot of my cables; I've never seen one of yours." Dobrynin promised to show him some in Moscow the next time they were both in town. Kissinger commented that his analyses of the American scene were probably "outstanding." Dobrynin retorted that, while the wording might be a little different, Kissinger "could guess what I think" based on their discussions.⁵¹²

While officially promising that the Soviet Embassy did not spy on Kissinger, Dobrynin played along with Kissinger's jokes about espionage. A few months later, Dobrynin told Kissinger, "I hope you arrived on time at your office last night," with Kissinger responding, "You should know with your intelligence network." When Dobrynin

⁵¹⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 6, 1971, 12:35 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 25, 1971, 7:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, September 6, 1972, 5:07 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

told him that some reports said he went back to his office and others claimed he went elsewhere, Kissinger instructed him to “keep only the agents who said I went to my office.” Dobrynin said that Kissinger’s other potential activities sounded “official,” as well, and Kissinger promised, “I’ll let you know when I am doing something unofficial.”⁵¹³ Dobrynin opened one conversation by saying, “Welcome back,” with Kissinger thanking him and asking, “Where was I?” Dobrynin mysteriously said, “I think that you were somewhere about 230 miles to the north,” indicating that he had visited New York City. Kissinger stated, “That’s right. Did you have me wired for sound?”⁵¹⁴ In 1973, Dobrynin commented enigmatically, “I heard you were quite a hit yesterday.” When Kissinger noted, “Oh, you had your man there,” Dobrynin replied, “Of course I have to watch you.” Underlining the extent to which they poked fun at the Cold War standard of spying on officials, Kissinger told Dobrynin that at the event, he delivered a parody of an intelligence report.⁵¹⁵

At times, Kissinger and Dobrynin combined the themes of spying and Kissinger’s dating habits. In May 1973, after Dobrynin sang Kissinger an abbreviated version of “happy birthday,” Kissinger asked, “Now Anatol do you mind not letting KGB guys run loose in the streets in Washington?” Kissinger informed a confused Dobrynin that one night near the embassy, he had “just brought a girl home” when recognized five body guards from the staff of General Sergei Antonov, a KGB officer who had been responsible for Nixon and Kissinger’s security detail when he visited Moscow in 1972. Kissinger said, “They were so

⁵¹³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 23, 1971, 5:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 15, 1972, 12:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 14, 1973, 1:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

nice to me when I was there, so I stopped and said hello.” The two men laughed about the coincidence.

Jokes about Kissinger spying on Dobrynin occurred less frequently. When Dobrynin did not come to work on his thirtieth wedding anniversary, Kissinger joked, “I was thinking of getting the FBI to look for you.”⁵¹⁶ Later, a minor scandal erupted when Brezhnev, aggravated by some last-minute changes to the SALT agreement, declined an offer to visit Nixon’s residence in San Clemente during the 1973 summit. Brezhnev covered his real reasoning by claiming that health concerns led his doctors to advise against too much air travel.⁵¹⁷ Kissinger requested that Dobrynin ask Brezhnev to reconsider, since Nixon “was a little bit offended” and reporters inevitably would discover the cancellation, leading to further embarrassment for Nixon in the press. In trying to identify Brezhnev’s reason for cancelling, Kissinger asked, “Do you think you are being wiretapped out there? You’re not on my staff, why should we wiretap you?” Dobrynin laughed, “Exactly,” and Kissinger reiterated, referencing the Watergate scandal, “That’s only for staff members.”⁵¹⁸ Dobrynin, convinced that the informal atmosphere of Nixon’s residence would be a good place for informal talks and developing a closer personal relationship between the leaders, persuaded Brezhnev to go ahead with the trip. Brezhnev declared that he would “defy his doctors’ advice” to make it happen.⁵¹⁹ Here, Kissinger not only joked about the potential that the CIA would spy on Soviet officials while in the US, but also about the Watergate scandal and the

⁵¹⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 8, 1972, 8:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 275.

⁵¹⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 10, 1973, 10:50 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵¹⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 275.

media accusations of Kissinger's role in wiretapping White House officials.⁵²⁰

Additionally, Kissinger and Dobrynin bonded over their shared love of history. Both diplomats published dissertations on diplomatic history, Kissinger on Metternich and the Congress of Vienna, and Dobrynin on President Theodore Roosevelt's work to settle the Russo-Japanese War.⁵²¹ Stalin was a frequent subject of conversation. On July 20, 1970, Dobrynin maintained that Stalin was "the only individual who really counted in World War II in the Soviet Union." Dobrynin noted the general secretary's "iron nerves" and "unbelievable powers of concentration," citing one instance in which he sat alone in a train car in silence for three straight days preparing for the Tehran Conference, resulting in "an absolutely masterly performance" from the Soviet perspective.⁵²² During another conversation just before the 1972 summit, Dobrynin expressed stronger criticism of the deceased dictator, including his initial handling of World War II and his "absolute brutality in pursuing" the war. Based on his own experience in the Foreign Ministry in the early 1950s, Dobrynin concluded that "Stalin generally never raised his voice in meetings and, indeed, one could never tell whether he was agreeing or disagreeing, but he would take violent action on the sly behind people's backs."⁵²³ Records do not exist as to what Kissinger thought about Dobrynin's assessment of Stalin, but it suggested Dobrynin's willingness to address sensitive matters with a trusted negotiating partner. These comments

⁵²⁰ In mid-May 1973, Kissinger began facing questions from the press about his role in wiretapping White House officials. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 481-83.

⁵²¹ Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957); Dobrov, *Dal'nevostochnaia politika SShA v period russko-iaponskoi voiny*; and *In Confidence*, 19.

⁵²² "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," July 20, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 179-81.

⁵²³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 15, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 820-21.

also played to Dobrynin's cultural assumption that Kissinger, an American, would be critical of Stalin's domestic policies and would appreciate the feeling that he was negotiating with a different type of Soviet, who understood the problems associated with Stalin's rule. Plenty of Soviet officials were critical of Stalin's domestic policies, but raising these complaints in conversations at the top level in the 1970s reflects a level of intimacy unusual among superpower diplomats.

When Khrushchev's memoirs were released in the West, Kissinger asked Dobrynin to evaluate their authenticity. Dobrynin explained that Khrushchev never personally wrote anything during his time in the Kremlin, but concluded that that the book was most likely "dictated in some form" and "therefore quite authentic." Kissinger then asked Dobrynin about a specific passage in the memoirs, which cited a message from Dobrynin during the Cuban Missile Crisis suggesting that Robert F. Kennedy feared a military coup in the US. Dobrynin reminded Kissinger that the former first secretary did not have the precise telegrams in front of him when writing the memoir, and he confirmed that Kennedy said to him, "If things continued much longer, the military dominance would become so great that there would be no choice except to invade Cuba. But he obviously never said anything about a coup."⁵²⁴ Here, Kissinger raised the issue of history not simply out of personal interest, but also with the aim better understanding the Soviet state's previous ruler and Dobrynin's history of reporting to the Soviet leadership.

Kissinger also took an interest in Dobrynin's opinions on previous American diplomats. For example, in one 1970 conversation, Dobrynin evaluated several previous secretaries of state, calling Dulles "the most impressive" and Rusk "the most reliable."

⁵²⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," December 22, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 241-46.

Regarding Robert F. Kennedy, Kissinger recorded Dobrynin's assessment that "underneath his liberal façade," Kennedy "was an extremely tough man." Dobrynin told Kissinger that if elected president, after a year or so, Kennedy "would have been the most intransigent cold warrior that had ever been in the Presidency."⁵²⁵ Dobrynin may have been playing down his assessment of Kennedy to appeal to Kissinger's ego, as Kennedy had been a rival to Nixon for the presidency in 1968. Similarly, Kissinger may have distorted Dobrynin's views for the purpose of priming Nixon's ego. Still, Dobrynin was critical of Kennedy's foreign policy skills in his memoirs, suggesting that Kissinger's report may contain some truth.⁵²⁶

Kissinger and Dobrynin found common interests outside of government. On May 7, 1972, Kissinger mentioned that he had tickets to watch game 4 of the Stanley Cup Final that evening, but had to stay in to work on problems in Vietnam. When Dobrynin revealed that he also enjoyed ice hockey, Kissinger claimed that he liked the Soviet national team. Dobrynin argued that the Soviet team was beginning to "learn to play rough," Kissinger responded, "I have no doubt . . . No one will ever doubt the Russia ability to be tough."⁵²⁷ The pair also shared a mutual love of film, with Dobrynin inviting Kissinger to watch films shown by the embassy and asking Kissinger for his opinion of American movies like *Patton*

⁵²⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," June 10, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 154-59.

⁵²⁶ In his memoirs, Dobrynin writes, "He was a complex and contradictory person who often lost his temper; at such moments he behaved rudely and was unpleasant to deal with. Having met with a rebuff, however, he usually took hold of himself but could easily wind himself up again. That is why a conversation with him tended to be uneven and broken. He did not know the foreign policy questions in detail, but apparently thought himself to be an expert in them. This at times complicated the dialogue, particularly when he spoke on behalf of the president." Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 61.

⁵²⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, May 7, 1972, 5:50 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

and *The Godfather*.⁵²⁸ In fact, when Dobrynin and his wife visited Hollywood with Kissinger in summer 1972, the national security advisor arranged meetings with Alfred Hitchcock and Bob Hope.⁵²⁹ To a certain extent, then, Kissinger and Dobrynin appeared to simply enjoy each other's company, relishing the rare evenings that they could spend together in purely social situations.

Friendship or Fraud?

For all of their kind words face-to-face, the relationship between Dobrynin and Kissinger cannot be characterized as entirely sincere. In private conversations and in their reports, both Dobrynin and Kissinger could be extremely critical of the other party. In their first meeting after Kissinger's trip to China, Kissinger wrote, "Dobrynin was at his oily best and, for the first time in my experience with him, totally insecure."⁵³⁰ In phone conversations with Nixon, Kissinger readily complained about Dobrynin's actions. On March 11, 1971, he called Nixon and advised that Dobrynin was trying to put proposals in both the backchannel and the official channel to attain concessions, calling him a "son-of-a-bitch."⁵³¹ He later referred to Dobrynin as "slobbering" and "pleading," attempting to highlight his own dominance of the conversation and quell Nixon's fears that the Soviet

⁵²⁸ For example, on April 7, 1970, Dobrynin showed Kissinger films on the Bolshoi ballet and Siberia. "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 7, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 141-43. On July 20, 1970, Dobrynin asked for movie recommendations and compared *Patton* to the Soviet film, *Battle of Kursk*. "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," July 20, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 179-81.

⁵²⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 259-60.

⁵³⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," July 19, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 404-5.

⁵³¹ Conversation among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), March 11, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXXII: SALT, 1969-1972*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), 424-25.

diplomat took advantage of him.⁵³²

In his memos to Moscow, Dobrynin also could be harsh when describing his counterpart, painting him as a vain person whose ego could be used to the Soviet advantage in negotiations. In July 1970, Dobrynin described Kissinger as “a very ambitious individual” who “highly values the fact that some issues are handled only through him.” He noted that Washington circles referred to Kissinger as “the President’s ‘Grey Cardinal,’” suggesting that the national security advisor controlled policy behind the scenes. Dobrynin proposed “occasionally us[ing] this in our own interests,” effectively playing on Kissinger’s ego to attain concessions.⁵³³ As late as March 1972, after Kissinger voiced concerns that the Jewish Defense League might physically attack him for his participation in Middle East talks, Dobrynin commented, “It can be noted in passing, based on my long observations of his behavior, that he himself, it must be said, is not notable for great personal courage.”⁵³⁴

Both of these sets of descriptions underscore that the backchannel participants recognized and hoped to exploit the weaknesses of their negotiating partners. Kissinger understood the limitations of Dobrynin’s negotiating position, particularly after the success of the Nixon administration’s China initiative, and openly mocked him to Nixon. Placed in such a situation, Kissinger felt that Dobrynin had little choice but to smile and swallow American demands, if he hoped to conclude a SALT agreement or plan a summit. Dobrynin recognized that Kissinger’s greatest flaw was his own ego, and he counseled that

⁵³² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 15, 1972, 10:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁵³³ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” July 20, 1970, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 181-82.

⁵³⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 622-27.

backchannel flattery could be used to persuade the American diplomat to compromise on Soviet demands and secure Soviet strategic interests. Neither of the backchannel diplomats paints a flattering picture of his negotiating partner in these documents, demonstrating the extent to which the backchannel friendship was a construction that both diplomats hoped to use to their advantage.

This is not to say that that the relationship was entirely fraudulent. For one, Dobrynin and Kissinger had plenty of reasons to downplay the friendly nature of their backchannel to their superiors in the White House and the Kremlin, given the nature of the criticisms they faced at home. Seeming too cozy or too approving of the other party could give way to accusations of granting too many concessions. Also, all evidence in the memoir literature and the telephone conversations themselves indicates that Kissinger and Dobrynin genuinely enjoyed the back-and-forth of their conversations. The point, then, is that Kissinger and Dobrynin built a language of diplomacy around friendship that permitted the smooth flow of negotiations. Neither diplomat forgot that he represented a competing power, but both understood that friendlier personal relations could facilitate talks. This relationship, and the mutual desire to achieve progress in relations and preserve their own positions, gave them a strong incentive to compromise and find success in establishing *détente*. Perhaps more importantly, it provided them with the means to make these compromises happen, as they could use their personal relationship as leverage in a critical discussion. Above all, Kissinger and Dobrynin believed in the potential for the backchannel, fueled by their relationship, to achieve breakthroughs in superpower relations. As Kissinger told Dobrynin while working out the final wrinkles in an agreement for the 1973 summit, “If we had put it in the regular bureaucracy, maybe ten years from now half of it would have been achieved.” Dobrynin

wholeheartedly agreed.⁵³⁵

“A Watershed in Our Relationship”

In 1971, conflict between India and Pakistan nearly destroyed the bonds forged over three years of personal diplomacy. Since independence, Pakistan had been split into two noncontiguous territories under one government: West Pakistan, or the current state of Pakistan, and East Pakistan, or the present-day state of Bangladesh. Tensions between the Punjabis, who dominated the West Pakistani government, and the Bengalis in the east had long simmered, finally exploding in November 1970, when a deadly cyclone hit East Pakistan, and West Pakistan provided what many perceived to be insufficient relief efforts. Moreover, the East Pakistani military government, led by Yahya Khan, refused to acknowledge election results that favored Bengalis, prompting calls for independence and riots in Dhaka, the eastern capital. All told, after the cyclone and the failed uprising, 500,000 people lay dead, with millions of refugees fleeing to India. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi responded by calling for East Pakistani independence.

Recent changes in the international scene complicated this situation. The US brokered its rapprochement with China through Pakistan, a Chinese ally that the US had long supplied with arms, and on August 9, the Soviet Union and India announced a friendship treaty promising that, if one party was attacked, mutual consultations would be held to discuss how to remove the threat. According to historian William Bundy, Kissinger “gave the darkest possible interpretation” to this development, viewing these vague promises as an assurance that the USSR would support India in a war against Pakistan. More generally,

⁵³⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 22, 1973, 12:23 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

Nixon and Kissinger understood the commitments of the Soviet Union and China to their respective allies in South Asia to be far tighter than they were in reality. Bundy explains this through both men's "strong tendency to see great-power ties as the key to regional situations."⁵³⁶

The backchannel diplomats barely discussed the subcontinent before the war. On August 17, in the first conversation on South Asia after the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty, Dobrynin noted the "ironic development" that the Soviet government supported the "pillar of democracy" while the US backed China. Kissinger countered that the US was "not lined up with anybody," hoping instead to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. When Kissinger proposed working on the refugee and relief problems first, then focusing on a political solution, Dobrynin "basically agreed."⁵³⁷ The Soviet record of this conversation suggests that Kissinger went a step further in promising an American commitment to prevent war, informing Dobrynin that the US had practically cut off Pakistani military and economic assistance. Kissinger also stated that the US had not consulted with the Chinese government about supporting Pakistan against India.⁵³⁸ Throughout October and November, both men emphasized restraint to prevent the outbreak of a war.⁵³⁹ Dobrynin explained this in a telegram to the Foreign Ministry, writing that Nixon primarily feared "the political

⁵³⁶ Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 269-73; and Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 335-38.

⁵³⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," August 17, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 431-33.

⁵³⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," August 17, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 433-35.

⁵³⁹ For example, see "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," October 15, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 491-93; "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," October 15, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 494-99; "Transcript of Haig-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation (US)," October 19, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 500; and "Note from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon," October 22, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 503

consequences that a direct military conflict between India and Pakistan could have on relations inside the Big Triangle—the USSR, the US, and China.”⁵⁴⁰ Still, while India and Pakistan came up in many conversations, the focus remained on other issues.

By the time war broke out on December 3, Dobrynin was in Moscow for consultations, leaving the backchannel in the hands of Chargé d'Affaires Yuli Vorontsov. An able diplomat, Vorontsov did not have the personal relationship and experience with Kissinger that afforded Dobrynin greater success in defusing crises.⁵⁴¹ After the USSR vetoed a UN Security Council resolution for a ceasefire and a UN General Assembly debate failed to produce a consensus, Kissinger met with Vorontsov daily to discuss what he described as a “watershed” in superpower relations. When Vorontsov expressed his hope that the US and USSR were still at a “good point” in their relationship, Kissinger responded that “we were developing severe doubts.” Without the ceasefire that the US demanded, Kissinger felt (or at least wanted Vorontsov to think) that the future of bilateral relations was in question. For instance, in discussing the Soviet invitation for him to visit Moscow before the summit, Kissinger told Vorontsov, “There are major bureaucratic obstacles, but now there are major substantive ones as well.” Vorontsov declared, “In a week the whole matter will be over,” and Kissinger shot back, “In a week it will not be over, depending on how it ended,” implying that this conflict could inflict major damage to détente.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” October 19, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 500-1.

⁵⁴¹ Vorontsov eventually served as ambassador to Afghanistan, the UN, and the US.

⁵⁴² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” December 5, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 529-30. For other uses of the term “watershed” by Kissinger, see Kissinger-Vorontsov Telephone Conversation, December 5, 1971, 4:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts; “Telegram from Minister Counselor Vorontsov to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” December 5, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years*, 530-32; It was also referenced by the Soviet leadership, criticizing Nixon and Kissinger’s heightening of the conflict, in “Note from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon,” December 6, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 533. In response, Haig called

On December 9, Nixon and Kissinger took a harder line. Nixon met with the Soviet agriculture minister, someone with no authority to discuss foreign policy, telling him, “What I want to suggest is that you ask whether India’s gains—which are certain—are worth jeopardizing your relations with the United States. I don’t say this in a threatening way. Let the US and the USSR find a way to work together.”⁵⁴³ That day, Nixon also ordered a carrier group from Vietnam to the Bay of Bengal, and the following day, Kissinger traveled to New York secretly to meet with two Chinese UN representatives, informing them on the substance of his conversations with Vorontsov and explaining his conviction that it was critical to intimidate the Soviet and Indian leadership in order to prevent India from destroying Pakistan’s armed forces and annexing Kashmir, as it would mean the end of Pakistan.

The height of the crisis came on December 12 when the Chinese side demanded a face-to-face meeting in New York. At this point, Nixon and Kissinger believed that the Chinese leadership planned to attack India. If this was the case, they could not call off the Chinese strike, as the Chinese government would view them as weak and not serious about their overtures of Sino-American unity. Such a move would end the Nixon administration’s China initiative and its position of strength in triangular diplomacy, as its leverage over the Soviet Union would evaporate. Most dangerously, the Soviet Union might attack China, in response. Nixon asked Kissinger, “So what do we do if the Soviets move against them? Start lobbing nuclear weapons in, is that what you mean?” Kissinger responded, “If the Soviets move against them . . . and succeed, that will be the final showdown. . . . We will be

Vorontsov to underscore the importance of the wording, saying that Kissinger “wanted it understood that the ‘watershed’ term which he used was very, very pertinent, and he considers it a carefully thought-out and valid assessment on his part.” *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 533.

⁵⁴³ “Memorandum from Presidential Assistant Kissinger for the President’s File,” December 9, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 536-37.

finished. We'll be through.” The Americans assured themselves that the Soviet leadership would not take that step.⁵⁴⁴ Still, this chilling conversation reflects the tenuous nature of détente in December 1971.

No sooner did it begin than the most dangerous phase of the conflict ended. The Soviet government forwarded a message through Vorontsov that India did not intend to attack West Pakistan and that it had started cease-fire negotiations. In their subsequent phone conversation, Vorontsov told Kissinger that they were now “on the same track” and must continue cooperation.⁵⁴⁵ Haig reported back from New York that the Chinese representatives called the face-to-face meeting not to announce military action, but to inform the American leadership that the Chinese government now viewed an independent East Pakistan as inevitable, announcing their intention to support an American UN proposal for a ceasefire with troop withdrawals and the beginning of talks. India agreed to a ceasefire in the West and went on to conquer the rest of East Pakistan, paving the way for the declaration of an independent Bangladesh.⁵⁴⁶

The drama on the American side took a little longer to subside. On December 14, Kissinger announced at a press backgrounder that, if Soviet conduct continued on its present course, failing to deliver a ceasefire, the Americans would reconsider holding the May summit, leading to a flurry of press activity designed to reassure the Soviet leadership that Kissinger misspoke.⁵⁴⁷ Two days later, Kissinger and Nixon talked on the phone about what

⁵⁴⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-76, Volume XI, South Asia Crisis, 1971* (Washington: GPO, 2005), 779-83; and Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 346-47.

⁵⁴⁵ “Transcript of Telephone Conversation (US),” December 12, 1971, 11:45 AM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 541-42.

⁵⁴⁶ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 348.

⁵⁴⁷ Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 281.

would happen if the work to conclude a ceasefire failed. Nixon responded with a laundry list of steps designed to put the breaks on détente: “Cut off the Middle East talks, pour arms into Israel, discontinue our talks on SALT. . . . We have to stop our talks on trade, don’t let Smith have any further things on the Middle East and stop seeing Dobrynin under any circumstances.” Kissinger chimed in, “That is right. Break the White House channel.”⁵⁴⁸ Even after the war was essentially settled, Nixon and Kissinger were remarkably prepared to end the backchannel and put the brakes on détente at the first sign of trouble.

Bundy describes the Indo-Pakistani War as a “fundamental error” of Nixon and Kissinger’s policies, arguing that the Americans flirted with the idea of abandoning the notion of triangular diplomacy for an American-Chinese-Pakistani alliance in South Asia to counter an Indo-Soviet alliance, or “balance-of-power diplomacy at its most naked and extreme.” This measure failed, Bundy contends, partially because it did not properly weigh the interest of the other parties and did not fulfill American values or strategic interests. As Bundy writes, Nixon and Kissinger’s policies were “replete with error, misjudgment, emotionalism, and unnecessary risk taking.”⁵⁴⁹ Zubok states that Nixon and Kissinger viewed the war “almost hysterically,” believing it to be “a Soviet plot to undermine the entire edifice of American triangular diplomacy, specifically American attempts to build up China (and its ally Pakistan) as a counterweight to the Soviet Union.”⁵⁵⁰ This emotional response stems from Nixon and Kissinger’s own paranoid world view, as they saw a vague Indo-Soviet friendship accord as an iron-clad alliance and quickly assumed the worse about the situation.

⁵⁴⁸ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 554.

⁵⁴⁹ Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 288-89.

⁵⁵⁰ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 217.

In contrast, Soviet policy appeared reserved in its attempt to restrain India while preserving the superpower relationship. Zubok contends that the Soviet leadership viewed the friendship treaty with India as a geopolitical maneuver to counterbalance the Sino-American rapprochement, but Nixon and Kissinger's aggressive behavior horrified the Soviet leadership during the war. He asserts, "Brezhnev, puzzled at first, was soon enraged," even considering helping India produce nuclear weapons, and years later, when Aleksandrov-Agentov brought up this message, Brezhnev "still reacted angrily and spoke spitefully of American behavior."⁵⁵¹ Even if no formal superpower agreements had been reached by this point, the Soviet leadership viewed this episode as a violation of détente. It seemed to confirm their worst fears of the new American relationship with China and reflected the challenges that détente faced in the Third World.

This episode reflects the importance of the Kissinger-Dobrynin relationship to the backchannel. Kissinger did not share the same relationship with Vorontsov that he had with the Soviet ambassador, and their conversations lacked the personal touch that typified the backchannel conversations. In his memoirs Kissinger remained suspicious of the Soviet government's intentions in keeping Dobrynin in consultations, as he believed that this maneuver was designed to buy time for the Indian government to achieve its objectives. Kissinger bitterly complained that Dobrynin seemed to be recalled in advance of "most crises."⁵⁵² Still, Dobrynin informed Kissinger well before the war started of his travel plans, making it unlikely that this was a deliberate ploy to speed the Indian advance.⁵⁵³ Moreover,

⁵⁵¹ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 218-20, 242; Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 217.

⁵⁵² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 899-900.

⁵⁵³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 16, 1971, 11:45 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

international crises later erupted when Dobrynin remained in Washington, and in those situations, the backchannel participants employed their personal relationship to ameliorate the situation. Here, though, Vorontsov, a junior diplomat with little personal history with Kissinger, was ill-equipped to smooth the rough seas of the superpower relationship in the midst of the Indo-Pakistani War.

Back to Business

When Dobrynin returned to Washington a month later, it seemed on the surface that all transgressions incurred during the Indo-Pakistani War were forgiven. In their first telephone conversation upon his return in mid-January, Kissinger joked, “I have now formulated a basic rule. When you leave town you are up to mischief. . . . If you were here during these situations, it would have been better.” Dobrynin promised details, and they went back to their witty banter. Kissinger teased Dobrynin that he saw him applaud during the State of the Union address when Nixon announced higher defense spending. They agreed to meet at Dobrynin’s place for dinner, where, as Kissinger said, they would be “a little more comfortable” than in the White House.⁵⁵⁴ At this meeting, the two men acted as if the war had not happened. Kissinger noted that the meeting “lasted nearly four hours and was conducted in an atmosphere of effusive cordiality, buttressed by slugs of vodka and cans of caviar.” Kissinger emphasized that “if the Vietnam issue were removed, all other areas in our relations would make quick progress.” In reference to Vietnam, Kissinger complained that “whatever the convoluted maneuvers of inter-Communist politics,” if the Soviet leadership had taken a stronger stance for peace, it would have happened resulted in a quick

⁵⁵⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, January 20, 1972, 5:04 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

end to the war.

Dobrynin and Kissinger discussed the Indo-Pakistan War at this meeting, but the memos they composed suggest that they did not agree on the direction of the conversation. Kissinger reported his comments that the bulk of the blame for the crisis fell on the shoulders of the Soviet leadership. Dobrynin asserted that the USSR “had exerted maximum counsels of restraint” and that until Kissinger’s inadvertent comment about potentially canceling the summit, the Soviet government did not realize that the gains in Soviet-American relations were even at stake. Rather, he urged Kissinger to understand that the Politburo debate on the war did not carry an anti-American character, and if any other country was considered in the debate, it was China. Dobrynin remarked that American actions during the war only confirmed suspicions among some elements in the Soviet leadership of American ties to China, and stated that “anytime we made a move that looked pro-Chinese, the anti-US people in the Politburo got the upper hand again.” Kissinger retorted, “The danger now was that the more intransigent the Soviet Union was, the more we would respond by compensating moves towards Communist China.”⁵⁵⁵ In this sense, Dobrynin and Kissinger both related the Indo-Pakistani War to triangular diplomacy. Dobrynin suggested that the pro-Chinese leanings in US foreign policy empowered anti-détente voices in the Soviet government, while Kissinger contended that perceptions of Soviet aggression in the Third World only pushed the US

⁵⁵⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” January 21, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 558-63. Dobrynin’s record of their conversation on the Indo-Pakistani War was brief, merely noting that while Kissinger defended American actions, “he in effect admitted the correctness and success of our position.” Dobrynin also commented that he “admitted their having taken a number of steps that were not thoroughly thought out,” a reference to Kissinger’s suggestion that the conflict could cause them to cancel the summit. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” January 21, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 563-68. Kissinger’s conversations with Nixon indicate that he was not so conciliatory about the war with figures other than Dobrynin. Before the meeting with Dobrynin, regarding Soviet actions during the war, he told Nixon, “They are guilty and they know it. They are a bunch of thugs.” *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 558.

closer to China. They agreed, however, that improved Soviet-American relations represented the best way to prevent future crises. Thus, the Indo-Pakistani War, as interpreted in the backchannel, served as yet another reason for the formalization of détente.

Additional complications emerged in January, when Nixon announced that Kissinger had been secretly conducting talks with North Vietnamese representatives in Paris the previous three years, leading the Soviet leadership to fear that the American administration hoped to play the USSR and China off one another to achieve its goals in Vietnam. The day after Nixon's speech, Dobrynin wrote to the Foreign Ministry to express concern that the US was "unquestioningly counting on China" to solve the Vietnam crisis, perhaps concluding an agreement during Nixon's visit. Pointing to American "diplomatic gamesmanship," Dobrynin stated that the US would "play its main trump card," exchanging a total withdrawal of American troops for "unspoken assistance" in achieving a Vietnam settlement "with honor" and thus avoiding scandal during the 1972 elections. Dobrynin recommended a new tactical approach: three-way negotiations between the USSR, China, and North Vietnam. Overall, Dobrynin stressed that they should prevent Nixon from organizing a settlement with the Chinese leaders, and that Soviet representatives should continue to press Nixon and Kissinger on the necessity of Soviet involvement in any settlement, aiming to build a deal that served the interests of both North Vietnam and the USSR.⁵⁵⁶

Two days later, in a backchannel meeting with Kissinger, Dobrynin continued to emphasize the divides in the Kremlin, implying that getting too cozy with the Chinese leadership would enable hawks in the Politburo to seize the initiative, throwing a wrench into détente. Kissinger argued that the Vietnam War "distorted" the Sino-American relationship,

⁵⁵⁶ "Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry," January 26, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 571-72.

and once it was settled, “everything would fall in its proper perspective.” He implied that Soviet aid in settling Vietnam would resolve their concerns about Sino-American relations.⁵⁵⁷ Dobrynin’s more expansive memo of this conversation details Nixon’s itinerary in China and the plans for official banquets. Kissinger apparently also told Dobrynin that the Chinese and American negotiators were close to finalizing a joint statement to be signed on Nixon’s final day in China. He informed the Soviet ambassador that it did not currently have language about Vietnam, though they would certainly discuss this subject, and it would provide the visit with tangible results.⁵⁵⁸

Following Nixon’s visit to China, Dobrynin and Kissinger met immediately, and as usual, the accounts differ as to who brought up the topic of China. Kissinger wrote that Dobrynin was “extremely jovial” and “clearly under instructions not to ask any questions or show any excessive interest.” Kissinger noted sardonically, “He violated these instructions consistently,” pretending that although the Soviet government remained uninterested, “it would help him if I volunteered certain information.”⁵⁵⁹ Dobrynin stated that he “deliberately did not broach the subject of their trip to China.” During the conversation, Dobrynin argued, it was “clearly evident” that Kissinger hoped to discuss the trip, and after he “could not restrain himself any longer,” he brought it up on his own accord. Dobrynin’s memo provides Kissinger’s account of the meetings in Beijing, in which Kissinger asserted that the American relationship with the Soviet Union continued to supersede the Sino-

⁵⁵⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” January 28, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 572-74.

⁵⁵⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” January 28, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 574-79.

⁵⁵⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 1, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 595-97.

American rapprochement for a variety of reasons. China remained weak militarily relative to the Soviet Union, and the volume of American trade with China remained negligible for the foreseeable future. Kissinger further stated that the US could hardly be of assistance in China's ideological dispute with the Soviet Union. In fact, meeting with Nixon most likely would damage China's accusations that the Soviet leaders were sell-outs and revisionists. Kissinger concluded that, even if the US supported China in every way against the USSR over the next five years, the "collusion" and its effects would be "extremely limited."⁵⁶⁰

The following day, Dobrynin telegraphed the Foreign Ministry with his proposals for dealing with the international situation after Nixon's visit to China. Dobrynin observed "a serious shift" in relations between the two states, from confrontation to normalization and even discussion of "parallel courses" on issues such as the conflict between India and Pakistan. American and Chinese representatives began working on, but could not solve, problems involving Taiwan, Vietnam, and trade relations. Dobrynin noted a "psychological shift" in public opinion, with more sympathetic descriptions of China in the press, and observed that the most critical result would be a "new strategic alignment of forces" in Asia. Several figures in Washington policy circles told Dobrynin, "It's a whole new ballgame." Nonetheless, Dobrynin expressed doubts in Washington about the longevity of the rapprochement, as changes in the American and Chinese leadership circles could significantly alter the situation. He explained that Washington elites still viewed the Soviet-American relationship as more important than the Sino-American rapprochement. Progress in Soviet-American talks would put the Chinese on guard. Dobrynin advised continuing their focus on the summit and shifting the public conversation from the "[Beijing] motif" to a

⁵⁶⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," March 1, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 597-602.

“Moscow motif.” He concluded that a “well-prepared and productive US-Soviet meeting in Moscow” could benefit the Soviet Union’s position in this evolving triangular diplomacy.⁵⁶¹

In sum, even after the debacle of the Indo-Pakistani War and Nixon’s visit to China, Dobrynin viewed the problem of triangular diplomacy as manageable, especially if the Soviet government committed itself to a productive summit.

During this period, the Middle East provided an additional area of discord, as Kissinger and Dobrynin struggled to find common ground in addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War. Although their conversations covered issues from demilitarized zones to retaining the ceasefire, the primary disagreement occurred over whether or not the Soviet Union should have a significant role in the region. Kissinger and Nixon hoped to get Soviet troops out of the Middle East, giving the US the power to engineer a settlement directly with Israel and the Arab states and without Soviet interference. As Kissinger said to Nixon in a phone conversation, “We have got to get the Soviets out of the Middle East.” Nixon responded later: “That is one area we want to take charge of the policy and run it our own way. State is looking at it in terms of just the Middle East. We are looking at it in terms of the Soviets.”⁵⁶² Yet Dobrynin sought to ensure a Soviet role in the future of Middle Eastern affairs. In late January, he made recommendations on the Middle East to the Kremlin, noting that White House had “a certain calm” in dealing with the Middle East crisis based on the confidence that Israel was in a superior position. He recommended pushing matters by stirring things up, perhaps by announcing the construction of a Soviet naval base in Egypt: “It appears to us that letting the White House know in some way about

⁵⁶¹ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” March 8, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 602-5.

⁵⁶² *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 627.

our possible intentions along these lines would be a useful additional incentive at the present time for it to accelerate the already agreed-upon serious confidential negotiations with us on a Middle East settlement.”⁵⁶³ According to American records, during talks in March, Dobrynin followed the threat in this proposal, telling Kissinger that the Soviet side already had made huge concessions by promising to remove troops and bases from Arab countries, and that if no deal was forthcoming, they might answer requests from several Arab states to provide air support and weapons. He concluded ominously: “The Soviet Union would stay there until the local people were in a position to defeat the Israelis militarily.”⁵⁶⁴

Despite these signs of tension, real progress toward a SALT agreement was made in this period. In his letter to Brezhnev on February 15, Nixon used the term “détente” for the first time in a message to the Kremlin, and the Soviet leadership responded in kind by joining him in using an alternate version of the term.⁵⁶⁵ On March 16, both sides gave press releases announcing that Nixon’s visit to Moscow would start on May 22.⁵⁶⁶ One day later, Nixon assured the Soviet ambassador that the Moscow summit would be for “serious business” and informed him that “Kissinger was in complete charge of the summit,” as he was to instruct Dobrynin on what members of the bureaucracy should be responsible for individual aspects

⁵⁶³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” January 28, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 574-79.

⁵⁶⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 615-17.

⁵⁶⁵ “Letter from President Nixon to General Secretary Brezhnev,” February 15, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 593-94. The Soviet letter uses the phrase “reduction of international tensions,” or “umen’shenie mezhdunarodnoi napriazhennosti, as opposed to the more literal translation of “détente” that would grow more typical after the Moscow summit, “razriadka napriazhennosti.” “Poslanie sovetского rukovodstva Prezidentu SShA R. Niksonu,” February 23, 1972, in *Sovetsko-amerikanskije otnosheniia: Gody razriadki, 1969-1976, t. 1, k. 2, Ianvar’-mai 1972* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2007), 53-54. The American memo, though, translated it as “relaxation of tensions,” a direct translation of “détente.” “Note from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon,” February 23, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 594-95.

⁵⁶⁶ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 613.

of negotiations.⁵⁶⁷ This followed a March 10 discussion in which Kissinger reported that he gave Dobrynin a list of departments to contact about specific problems, attempting to prevent a “State Department monopoly” on critical talks with the USSR.⁵⁶⁸ In practical terms, they discussed the outlines of what would become the “Basic Principles of Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” putting in formal terms the goals and nature of the new relationship that Soviet and American leaders hoped to build.⁵⁶⁹ After Kissinger threatened to follow through with a program for American submarine modernization, concrete discussions were held on limiting the numbers of nuclear submarines, something the Soviet side had previously resisted.⁵⁷⁰ They also came closer to agreeing on the number of ABM systems that each side would be permitted, though debate remained about whether each side could choose what to protect or if they would be required to protect the capital and one ICBM base.⁵⁷¹

Furthermore, Kissinger and Dobrynin began finalizing arrangements for the summit. For example, Kissinger broached the idea of the president visiting Poland in a meeting with Dobrynin on March 30, assuring the Soviet ambassador that they would not go to “embarrass

⁵⁶⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 615-17.

⁵⁶⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 10, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 611-12.

⁵⁶⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” January 28, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 574-79.

⁵⁷⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 617-22.

⁵⁷¹ In this conversation, Kissinger also explained the limits of ABM systems, suggesting that they could successfully protect against accidental ICBM launches or Chinese missile threats, and they could be used as the basis for conducting further research in ABM technology. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 622-27. Kissinger reported on March 28 that this proposal was put into formal channels in Helsinki. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 28, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 628-29.

the Soviet Union.” Dobrynin told Kissinger that he was “very moved” that Kissinger thought to ask, since the US did not have to coordinate its movements in Eastern Europe with the Soviet leadership. He expressed certainty that the Kremlin would not object, and noted that it would make a good impression if they wanted to announce the decision until they received a formal reply.⁵⁷² Dobrynin advised Moscow to approve the trip, stating that, while Nixon hoped the trip would bolster his election odds, it would be “useful” for the Polish and Soviet leadership, denoting implicit American acceptance of the Polish borders and taking away Romania’s “special status” as the only East European socialist state to receive a visit from the US president.⁵⁷³ Finally, in discussing American accommodations in Moscow, Dobrynin encouraged Kissinger to accept the Soviet offer to stay in the Kremlin, even if the entire American delegation could not be housed there. As he said, it was “really an unusual honor and one which was above all designed to symbolize to the Soviet people that we were serious about establishing mutual ties.” For overflow, Dobrynin suggested, they would use the Rossiia Hotel, located across Red Square.⁵⁷⁴ Thus, in the first few months of 1972, planning was well underway for the Moscow summit, as the trouble caused by the Indo-Pakistani War and Nixon’s visit to China did not substantially interrupt the progress started the previous year.

⁵⁷² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 30, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 633-34.

⁵⁷³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” March 30, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 634-38.

⁵⁷⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 30, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 633-34.

Vietnam Redux

From the end of 1969 until July 1971, Kissinger and Dobrynin rarely discussed Vietnam, but as the relationship improved in the summer of 1971, Kissinger again sought Soviet aid in ending the war. On July 29, he reported that, while for the previous year and a half he “accepted the proposition” that the Soviet Union had little influence over Vietnam, he now “thought there was a useful moment for intervention.”⁵⁷⁵ Dobrynin seemed to agree to help Kissinger work on a resolution of the two remaining problems: the schedule for withdrawing American troops and the Thieu government in South Vietnam. Dobrynin speculated that Nixon brought up this topic in the channel for the first time in years to show that “he does not want to seek a solution to the Vietnam issue behind our back” and that it could not be solved with Chinese aid alone, as there were divisions between the Chinese and Vietnamese positions that made it a messy process to orchestrate it through Chinese channels.⁵⁷⁶

Although Dobrynin reentered the conversation on Vietnam, Soviet involvement did not lead to immediate results. The war escalated at the end of March 1972 with a North Vietnamese offensive into South Vietnam for the first time since 1968. Informing Dobrynin of growing numbers of North Vietnamese troops across the border, Kissinger made another peace offer, in which the US would remove all military personnel from South Vietnam that year and end military aid to South Vietnam so long as the USSR stopped giving military aid

⁵⁷⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” July 29, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 415-16.

⁵⁷⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” July 29, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 417-20.

to North Vietnam.⁵⁷⁷ The North Vietnamese Easter Offensive began shortly thereafter in earnest, throwing a crisis into the backchannel just as the superpowers were attempting to conclude the agreements to sign in Moscow in May.

Kissinger's notes on meetings in this period often make it seem as if the backchannel partners spent the majority of their time together fighting about the Soviet role in the Vietnamese offensive. In a phone conversation with Nixon on April 3, Kissinger reported, "I told [Dobrynin] what you said and he said, 'Isn't it amazing what a little country can do to wreck well-laid plans.'"⁵⁷⁸ At their next meeting, Dobrynin told him he was being too dramatic by declaring that the offensive was an "all-out attack." Kissinger responded that he "hoped so for their [the Soviets'] sake." Dobrynin then asked Kissinger if he really thought that Soviet leaders had a hand in planning the offensive. Kissinger wrote, "I said there are only two possibilities, either they planned it or their negligence made it possible. In either event, it was an unpleasant eventuality."⁵⁷⁹ On April 12, Kissinger stated that, when Dobrynin assured him that the Soviet leadership was uninterested in seeing the conflict worsen, he responded: "Let's be realistic. You are responsible for this conflict." He asked what the Kremlin expected after signing two supplementary arms agreements with the North Vietnamese, giving them the wherewithal to launch an offensive.⁵⁸⁰

Dobrynin's notes on these conversations paint a different picture. On April 3, he recorded Kissinger's complaint that "Hanoi's actions are unquestionably aimed at

⁵⁷⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," March 30, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 634-38.

⁵⁷⁸ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 641.

⁵⁷⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 6, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 641-42.

⁵⁸⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 655-56.

complicating the situation on the eve of the Soviet-US summit. That is the only possible conclusion.” Yet Dobrynin’s comments to Moscow made it seem as if Kissinger’s approach was extremely conciliatory: “The President realizes that North Vietnam is an ally of the Soviet Union.” He also suggested Nixon did not blame the Kremlin for the offensive.⁵⁸¹ He observed that Nixon hoped that an American military response in this matter “will not negatively impact Soviet-US relations in other fields and in other parts of the world.” Dobrynin wrote that Kissinger also expressed regrets that far-flung developments threatened to derail détente.⁵⁸² At the April 6 meeting, Dobrynin suggested that Kissinger’s argument remained the same, asking the Soviet leadership to exert a restraining influence over Hanoi and to not allow events in Vietnam to affect the summit meeting. Dobrynin’s reports contain information unmentioned by Kissinger that the Soviet ambassador “bluntly delivered serious warnings against the bombing of [North Vietnam].”⁵⁸³ In general, it appears that, like Kissinger, Dobrynin attempted to smooth over this issue at home to ensure that the summit would go on, as planned.

Dobrynin’s telegram to the Foreign Ministry the following day reflects the diplomatic tightrope he tried to walk between appearing tough on American aggression in Vietnam and encouraging the Kremlin to go forward with summit talks. He observed that developments in Vietnam were “aggravating the overall international situation and our relations with the US, and will further aggravate them in advance of the Moscow meeting.” Although he cited the

⁵⁸¹ Later memos confirm Dobrynin’s suggestion that while Kissinger criticized the Soviet Union for increasing arms shipments over the last few months, it was not at fault for the offensive, with Hanoi acting on its own. “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 651-53.

⁵⁸² “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 3, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 638-41.

⁵⁸³ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 6, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 642-49.

value of Soviet arms shipments to North Vietnamese successes in the war, he expressed the hope that “the Soviet Union’s political stature and prestige could . . . play an important role of its own in preventing the events in Vietnam from escalating into a major international crisis.” He proposed an initiative to end the fighting and perhaps even chart a path to peace, releasing a statement about the need to end the bombing and resume talks. In doing so, he used the most recent American proposals as a basis for convincing the North Vietnamese that, given their recent military success, the time was ripe to seek a political solution. This would give the USSR a stronger position at the summit to solve Vietnam and other international problems, while preventing US public opinion from producing a very negative reaction. In other words, Dobrynin hoped to have his cake and eat it, too, keeping the Chinese government out of the picture, forcing the US to rely on Soviet support for peace initiatives, and bringing about a successful summit with agreements that would gain approval from the US Senate.⁵⁸⁴

The differences between Kissinger’s and Dobrynin’s respective reports on these conversations are stark. On April 9, Kissinger noted that Dobrynin declared the April 24 meeting to be “extremely crucial” in developing a resolution to the war, as the Soviet government had contacted Hanoi to ensure that the meeting would take place. He asked Kissinger if the US side was prepared to “talk and fight at the same time,” and the national security advisor gave a negative response, stating that “it would not be acceptable to us any more to talk while the fighting was going on.”⁵⁸⁵ Dobrynin observed that, while it would be difficult to resume official talks in Paris before fighting stopped, the American side

⁵⁸⁴ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” April 7, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 649-51.

⁵⁸⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 651.

“evidently would not object to getting a reaffirmation of the [North Vietnam]’s intent to have the planned secret meeting with Kissinger in Paris” or in Moscow.⁵⁸⁶ Moreover, during the April 12 conversation, Kissinger wrote that, after his lecture to Dobrynin about the Soviet role in Vietnam, the Soviet ambassador attempted to bring up other topics. Kissinger shot him down, telling Dobrynin that he was “not authorized to discuss any of the other subjects with him.”⁵⁸⁷ Dobrynin’s memo, however, suggested that they had a brief discussion of various issues, including the ratio of defensive systems permitted under the ABM treaty, submarine limitations, the Middle East, the *draft communiqué* that would end the summit, and the president’s upcoming visit to Poland, where he turned down a meeting with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński to avoid an unfavorable reaction from the Polish leadership.⁵⁸⁸

The most prominent topic about which Kissinger and Dobrynin’s reports differed is the organization of Kissinger’s pre-summit visit to Moscow. On November 18, Dobrynin surveyed Kissinger’s interest in visiting Moscow before the summit, stating that the matter was made more urgent since Rogers had asked twice to be invited to Moscow. Dobrynin underscored that the Soviet government had little interest in a visit by Rogers, but keen interest in one by Kissinger. By his own account, Kissinger told Dobrynin that he “did not see too much point” in visiting Moscow, since the backchannel was working well and he did not want to give the impression of colluding with the Soviet government.⁵⁸⁹ In contrast, in

⁵⁸⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 651-53.

⁵⁸⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 655-56.

⁵⁸⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 656-57.

⁵⁸⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” November 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 520-23.

Dobrynin's report, Kissinger "intimated that he would very much like to visit Moscow" before the summit, indicating that late January might work best. Kissinger asked that Soviet officials keep quiet about this suggestion.⁵⁹⁰ On December 1, in the midst of the Indo-Pakistani conflict, the Soviet side proposed that Kissinger visit in January, but Kissinger implied that the barriers seemed too great at the moment to go forward with this plan.⁵⁹¹

Following the conclusion of the Indo-Pakistani War, the backchannel picked up on the theme of a pre-summit visit once again. According to the Soviet memo of the January 21 conversation, Kissinger thanked Dobrynin for the earlier invitation and suggested that it could take place in the second half of March.⁵⁹² Kissinger's memo contained no mention of this.⁵⁹³ By March 9, Dobrynin reported Kissinger's claim that he most likely would not be able to make a pre-summit trip to Moscow because he "would not want to pour oil on the fire" of the bureaucratic rivalries in Washington by visiting Moscow,⁵⁹⁴ yet Kissinger's memo demonstrated no sign of this conversation.⁵⁹⁵ A week later, Dobrynin asked Nixon, "Our friend Henry is very modest. Is he or is he not coming to Moscow?" The American record of conversation records Nixon's response that such a visit was "impossible," as it would "break too much china in the bureaucracy." Besides, the sole reason Kissinger had

⁵⁹⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," November 18, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 523-28.

⁵⁹¹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," December 5, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 529-30.

⁵⁹² "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," January 21, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 563-68.

⁵⁹³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," January 21, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 558-63.

⁵⁹⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," March 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 607-11.

⁵⁹⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," March 9, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 605-7.

visited Beijing was that “there was no Chinese Dobrynin in Washington,” making face-to-face negotiations a critical aspect of the Sino-American rapprochement.⁵⁹⁶

Despite Nixon’s statement on the impossibility of the visit, by mid-April, both Dobrynin and Kissinger sent recommendations for a pre-summit trip to their respective leaders. During their April 12 discussion, Kissinger noted Dobrynin’s recommendation that “a visit to Moscow was more urgent than ever.” The Soviet ambassador stated that Kissinger could use the opportunity to discuss Vietnam and “accelerate preparations for the summit.”⁵⁹⁷ After a phone conversation confirming Nixon’s approval and the confirmed details of the trip, Dobrynin wrote back to Moscow giving credit to the American side for requesting the meeting. Dobrynin suggested accepting this formulation, as it would provide a basis for solving some of the problems facing the superpowers in advance of the summit. Kissinger requested completely secrecy, and they finalized the details.⁵⁹⁸

The explanation for the disparity in these transcripts lies in the differences in attitudes about détente between the participants in the backchannel and the leadership in the center.

Nixon felt that they should take a tougher line on the Soviet leaders, threatening the future of

⁵⁹⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” March 17, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 615-17.

⁵⁹⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 655-56.

⁵⁹⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 12, 1972, 3:15 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts; “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 657-58; and “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 13, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 660-62. Barbara Keys has written about the planning of Kissinger’s visit, arguing that it is an example of collusion between Kissinger and Dobrynin behind Nixon’s back. Keys, “Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman,” 601-2. While it seems likely that Kissinger wanted to visit Moscow and put on airs when telling Nixon on January 20, “I don’t want to do it,” the March 9 report by Dobrynin noting that Kissinger would not be able to make it to Moscow before the summit would suggest that Kissinger was not planning it all along. Rather, he likely hoped to make the trip, but saw that given Nixon’s wariness of Kissinger’s increasing public image, it would be a mistake to push the issue. As events worsened in April 1972, Kissinger found new justification for the trip, and sold Nixon on its necessity.

the summit as long as the North Vietnamese offensive continued, while Kissinger felt strongly that the summit should take place. As a result, Kissinger tailored his memos to fit Nixon's worldview, acting as if he had been much tougher on Dobrynin about Vietnam than the Soviet memos indicate. Similarly, Dobrynin tailored his memos to a divided Politburo, with some members—particularly Minister of Defense Marshal Andrei Grechko—actively opposing a summit or a SALT agreement during the Vietnam War. Therefore, Dobrynin needed to seem as if he had taken a tougher line with Kissinger and assure the Kremlin that, regardless of what happened in Vietnam, the American side would remain on board with the summit.

Remarkably, as a result of backchannel diplomacy, the 1972 North Vietnamese offensive failed to overwhelm plans for the summit. As Robert Dallek wrote, “The striking feature of Kissinger’s conversations with Dobrynin in early April was not Henry’s harping on the dangers to Soviet-American relations from North Vietnam’s offensive, despite Nixon’s wishes, but the extent to which they continued to find common ground for a Summit and improved relations.”⁵⁹⁹ Indeed, in their telephone conversations in April and May, Kissinger and Dobrynin rarely discussed Vietnam, and when it did, they used humor to defuse any potential tensions.⁶⁰⁰ On April 16, for example, they faced logistical problems in arranging for the delivery of a Soviet note on Vietnam to Nixon. After finally getting everything arranged, Kissinger joked, “The problem Anatol is I’m not used to dealing with you in crises.” Dobrynin laughed, “Well I think we will handle it after all,” and Kissinger

⁵⁹⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 373.

⁶⁰⁰ Haig-Dobrynin Telephone Conversations, April 14, 1972, 11:10 AM, 11:30 AM, and 12:00 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

responded, “We certainly should. We’ve got too much we ought to do together.”⁶⁰¹ Here, the personal relationship maintained by Dobrynin and Kissinger provided a useful tool to move on with summit talks in a period of great tension.

Of course, these personal relationships also could be used to manipulate the opposing party. At a ceremony for the signing of the Biological Weapons Convention, Nixon passed on a request from the First Lady, Pat Nixon, to meet with Dobrynin’s wife Irina for tea, and Nixon mentioned that she hoped to discuss “women’s aspects” of the trip.⁶⁰² When Kissinger called to finalize the arrangements for the affair, both he and Dobrynin sounded thankful for the meeting.⁶⁰³ On April 11, Nixon called Kissinger to tell him that, after conversation about gifts for the summit, Mrs. Nixon brought up Vietnam. According to the president, she said, “I just hope it won’t hurt the visit, and Mrs. Dobrynin squeezed her hand and said with almost tears in her eyes, ‘I hope not, I hope not.’” Nixon responded with deep, devious laughter: “So we got that message across.” Surprised, Kissinger asked, “She mentioned Vietnam?” Nixon retorted, “Oh, hell yes, that’s what she talked about! . . . You know how she’d do it, right on the nose.”⁶⁰⁴

In May, following Kissinger’s pre-summit visit to Moscow, tensions over Vietnam brought the summit to the brink of collapse, as the US began a bombing campaign over Hanoi and Haiphong on May 1 and dropped aerial mines into North Vietnamese harbors on

⁶⁰¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 16, 1972, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁰² “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” April 10, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 653-54.

⁶⁰³ Kissinger called to confirm the date and time on April 10. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 10, 1972, 1:51 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁰⁴ Nixon-Kissinger Telephone Conversation, April 11, 1972, 7:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. These quotes come from the audio recording, as the conversation was inaccurately transcribed for file.

May 8. Tensions rose on May 9 and 10 when American bombers struck Soviet merchant vessels.⁶⁰⁵ Nixon remained steadfast about the need for the summit in conversations with Kissinger.⁶⁰⁶ On May 6, when Kissinger mentioned he had been talking to Dobrynin about SALT, Nixon lectured, “I just don’t want you to do it too much right now Henry. . . . I think you have been gracious to them and everything but you understand what I mean. I don’t give a damn about SALT. I just couldn’t care less about it and I just think right now we better get all of our troops together and pull ourselves together.”⁶⁰⁷ After a May 11 backchannel meeting, Nixon and Kissinger debated the chances of the Soviet leadership canceling the summit; Kissinger rated it at less than fifty-fifty. If they scrap it, Nixon said, “they’re gambling on somebody else winning the election,” as he would “turn on them hard.” Nixon noted that he’s “not all that hot” for the summit because he feels their options are good, either way.⁶⁰⁸ While Nixon may have understood the benefits of retaining the summit, he frequently told Kissinger that he did not care if he visited Moscow or not, so long as Vietnam was finally settled. In this context, Kissinger’s ability to persist in talks with Dobrynin “as if

⁶⁰⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 10, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 806.

⁶⁰⁶ For a conversation in which they discuss their belief that Moscow wanted the summit more than Washington, see Nixon-Kissinger Telephone Conversation, April 15, 1972, 10:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Here, Nixon questioned whether Dobrynin’s claims actually reflected the thought in Moscow, to which Kissinger replied, “Mr. President, there is one thing I am sure of, that Dobrynin, a member of the Central Committee, does not act without instructions. . . . And he must know what they want anyway even if he doesn’t have detailed instructions.”

⁶⁰⁷ *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 798. Dobrynin misread this situation, conflating Kissinger’s willingness to discuss the summit with Nixon’s approach. He wrote in a telegram to the Foreign Ministry, “Based on our current observations, following the discussions with Kissinger in Moscow and as a result of them, Nixon has now begun to ‘sense,’ in practical terms as it were, how useful the Moscow meeting will be in an area that is important to him as he goes into the election—conclusion of a strategic arms limitation agreement. . . . The meeting in Moscow is becoming increasingly valuable to Nixon.” “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” May 5, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 794-95.

⁶⁰⁸ Nixon-Kissinger Telephone Conversation, May 12, 1972, 8:40 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

nothing were happening,” as he put it in a memo, remains a testament to Kissinger and Dobrynin’s will to negotiate in the midst of crisis.

Zubok offers one possible analysis of the difficulty Brezhnev confronted in the Kremlin in garnering support for the summit. Facing opposition from Politburo members such as Podgorny, Shelest, and Grechko, Brezhnev received support from Kosygin and Gromyko, allowing him to move forward with talks. As Zubok argues, “The winning argument was that the North Vietnamese should not be allowed to exercise a veto over Soviet relations with the United States. For the moment, state interests prevailed over ideological passions.” As opposition to the summit mounted, Brezhnev won out in an impassioned speech to the Politburo. He asked Defense Minister Grechko, “If we make no concessions, the nuclear arms race will go further. Can you give me, the Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces, a firm guarantee that in such a situation we will get superiority over the United States and the correlation of forces will become more advantageous to us?” When Grechko muttered a negative reply, Brezhnev shot back, “Then what is wrong? Why should we continue to exhaust our economy, increase military expenses?” Brezhnev called a plenary session of the Central Committee to lend support to his decision to go ahead with the summit, and he received support from Kosygin, Gromyko, Suslov, and Andropov, allowing him to move forward with the plan.⁶⁰⁹ In this sense, both the American and Soviet sides overcame reservations of leading officials to pull off the summit, and some portion of the credit should go to Kissinger and Dobrynin, who kept the backchannel active in this period.

⁶⁰⁹ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 217-21.

“That is Your Secret Weapon”

In 1972, top American officials made two separate trips to the Soviet Union to conclude the agreements negotiated through the backchannel. First, on April 20 to 24, Kissinger made a secret trip to Moscow to meet with Brezhnev, discuss the situation in Vietnam, and iron out most of the wrinkles in the agreements that would be signed a month later. Then, Nixon, Kissinger, and an array of State Department and White House officials arrived in Moscow for a summit that lasted from May 22 to 30. There, Nixon and Brezhnev participated in direct negotiations, and the superpowers signed several agreements, including SALT I and the ABM Treaty. The personal relationships between the superpower leaders shared many of the qualities of the backchannel relationship. Not only did they build a relationship around friendly banter, accentuated by Brezhnev’s propensity for telling long anecdotes, but the topics covered by this small talk tended to mirror the backchannel themes as well.

The preparatory notes developed by each side reflect this development. For example, Dobrynin informed the Foreign Ministry that Kissinger “speaks freely and more candidly in more intimate settings, without a large number of participants.”⁶¹⁰ Most of the meetings in Moscow, then, were smaller gatherings, in which only Brezhnev and Gromyko had a major speaking role. They also plied Kissinger with round after round of baked goods and chocolates during talks, along with offers of alcohol, tea, and water. Conscious of the nature of the backchannel with Dobrynin, Nixon warned Kissinger that “Brezhnev is simple, direct, blunt and brutal,” rendering ineffective “the sophisticated approach we used with the Chinese.” Having read a draft of the planned opening remarks, he advised Kissinger to avoid

⁶¹⁰ “Telegram from Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry,” April 19, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 675-79.

spending too much time on “general philosophy,” the nature of the president, and the “historic opportunity” presented by the summit.⁶¹¹ Both sides saw the parallel to the backchannel in the relationships between top officials, and they sought to take advantage of this situation.

The personal relationships among Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev mirrored the sense of conspiratorial togetherness in the backchannel, including a mutual disdain of the bureaucracy. When Kissinger promised to cut through the American diplomatic bureaucracy, Brezhnev told him, “That is very very good. If you get rid of the State Department then we will get rid of the Foreign Office.” As Gromyko and Brezhnev joked about whether they should burn down the Foreign Ministry building, Kissinger jumped in, “With all respect, Mr. General-Secretary, we have made more progress in abolishing the State Department than you have in abolishing the Foreign Office,” leading to laughter among the Russian delegation.⁶¹² Speaking informally on a balcony overlooking the Moscow River, Brezhnev declared, “You and I can accomplish much together between the two of us. Maybe we should just abolish our Foreign Offices.” Kissinger agreed, “We on our side have already taken steps in that direction. Now we need a reduction of Gromyko,” who often served as the butt of Brezhnev’s jokes on this topic.⁶¹³ Noting their “fruitful talks,” Brezhnev told Kissinger that “if we left it to Gromyko and Rogers, they would be talking for two

⁶¹¹ “Memorandum from President Nixon to Presidential Assistant Kissinger,” April 20, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 679-80.

⁶¹² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97. In this section, I generally cite the American transcripts of conversations, since the Soviet transcribers frequently cut the banter.

⁶¹³ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

months.”⁶¹⁴ In another instance, Kissinger and Gromyko joked that the foreign minister looked so similar to the president that they would try to fool the guards and sneak him into the White House during his next visit to Washington. Brezhnev complained, “If President Nixon will be like Gromyko, I am horror-stricken. It is impossible to talk to Gromyko. It will mean a lot of grief.”⁶¹⁵

When Kissinger reminded Brezhnev of his description of the “Byzantine requirements of our bureaucracy,” Brezhnev launched into an anecdote about one professor who claimed that, in a department of 1,000 employees, “they can do nothing except serve their own needs.” He followed with the punch line, “Therefore I try my best to keep my departments down to 999!” After the laughter subsided, he said more seriously: “You’d certainly be mistaken to show it to lawyers. As soon as you ask the lawyers, then you are finished.” Kissinger promised to keep the finalized agreements private in the White House until they arrived in Moscow and then give the lawyers twenty-four hours to work out the details. Brezhnev responded wryly, “Twenty-four minutes.”⁶¹⁶

This theme continued during Nixon’s trip to Moscow a month later. When Nixon arrived at the Kremlin, Brezhnev pulled him aside for a private conversation in his office that came as a surprise to both the American side and the Soviet side, with Podgorny, Kosygin, and Kissinger livid, waiting outside for the two men and their translator to emerge.⁶¹⁷ They

⁶¹⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 4:05-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 725-27.

⁶¹⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ The most famous account of this meeting comes in the memoirs of the Soviet interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev. Kissinger was so concerned about getting information on the meeting without the State Department discovering its contents that he had his secretary work with Sukhodrev to translate the text overnight. V. M. Sukhodrev, *Iazyk moi--drug moi: Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom TONCHU, 2008), 279-87.

bonded over their mutual disdain for bureaucracy, with Nixon saying, “If we leave all the decisions to the bureaucrats we will never achieve any progress.” Brezhnev agreed, “Then we would simply perish,” with Nixon adding, “They would simply bury us in paper.” They agreed to meet the challenge of bureaucracy by limiting the most important negotiations to their meetings, leaving the less complicated issues to diplomats lower down the chain.⁶¹⁸

Like Kissinger and Dobrynin, Nixon and Brezhnev reveled in their work to outmaneuver the bureaucracies, especially on the American side. Nixon and Brezhnev discussed the importance of the Basic Principles agreement that Kissinger and Brezhnev worked out during the secret trip to Moscow. As if referencing Kissinger’s description of himself as a “movie director” two years earlier, Brezhnev concluded by assuring Nixon, “But now we will follow the script.”⁶¹⁹ Kissinger, of course, grouched about the American bureaucracy while in Moscow, complaining in one meeting with Gromyko that they had to retain one particular phrase in the joint communiqué because it was “the one contribution the State Department has made to this document, literally.”⁶²⁰ Brezhnev not only agreed to participate in Nixon and Kissinger’s subterfuge, but seemed to enjoy it. The jokes they made about this issue

Sukhodrev later addressed the meeting to the Soviet bureaucracy. “SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust,” Conference at Musgrove Plantation, Simons Island, Georgia, May 6-9, 1994. Having interviewed Sukhodrev and Georgy Arbatov, Isaacson wrote about Kissinger’s anger over the situation, declaring “This could be the most important meeting of the summit, and there’s no telling what he’s saying in there.” Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, 425-26. In his memoirs, Kissinger merely notes that “Nixon followed his usual practice of not taking a State Department interpreter—which, now that I too was excluded, I found irksome.” Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1207-8. Dobrynin describes the meeting as successful, opening the way for successful negotiations in Moscow. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 251. Zubok talks about the establishment of personal relations in this meeting as a “pivotal moment” in the superpower relationship. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 221-22.

⁶¹⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 22, 1972, 6-8:10 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 831-36.

⁶¹⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 23, 1972, 7:20-9:55 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 855-61.

⁶²⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 28, 1972, 9:35-11:55 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 984-90.

reflect the spirit evident in Kissinger and Dobrynin's backchannel discussions.

Similar to the backchannel, jokes about nepotism permeated the conversations in Moscow. In his pre-summit meetings, Kissinger joked that Dobrynin read more notes from North Vietnam to the US than the Secretary of State. Brezhnev responded, "Maybe Rogers' post should be abolished," to which Kissinger shot back, "Maybe Dobrynin should be given an official function" in the American government.⁶²¹ During the summit, Kissinger recited the number of concessions he made on the communiqué, saying that when he was "run out of Washington," he wanted a guarantee that he could get an advisory position in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Gromyko gave an affirmative, and Dobrynin laughed, "He can be our American specialist!"⁶²²

The top Soviet officials also enjoyed this sort of back and forth joviality. Brezhnev reminded Nixon that broader trade relations between the US and the USSR could solve American problems with gas, oil, and lumber in a way that served the interests of both parties. Kosygin jumped in, "Not to mention vodka." This devolved into a lively discussion about the relative worth of various American and Russian vodkas. Brezhnev pontificated about life as a venture capitalist in the alcohol business, "If someone in the US were given a monopoly to produce our vodka, he would become a millionaire immediately. Maybe Kissinger and I should take that up. . . . The two of us could split the profits somehow." Nixon cracked, "He earns enough money as it is."⁶²³ Two days later, Kosygin talked about

⁶²¹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 24, 1972, 11:15 AM-1:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 760-67.

⁶²² "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 26, 1972, 11:15 AM-12:25 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 934-37.

⁶²³ "Memorandum of Conversation (USSR)," May 23, 1972, 11 AM-1 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 848-54. Regarding Nixon's comment about his salary, Kissinger joked in his memoirs, "Where he got this erroneous idea I do not know." Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1212.

the ease of life as an Academician in the USSR, where a man gets paid whether or not he works. Nixon jumped in, “That’s why he [Dr. Kissinger] wants to come here.”⁶²⁴ Even though none of it was serious, this conversation reveals the extent to which Soviet and American leaders could relate to each other based on the unique problems posed by the work of governing superpowers.

Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev likewise joked about the growing power of the executive branch, which seemed to the general secretary to control the entirety of US foreign policy. When Kissinger arrived for the pre-summit visit, Brezhnev requested that their aides should be permitted to speak if they wanted to say anything. Kissinger proclaimed, “I don’t run my staff as democratically as you, Mr. General-Secretary.” Brezhnev snickered and said with apparent glee, “I’m a great democrat, a great democrat, a great democrat.”⁶²⁵ While Brezhnev found this hilarious, he displayed less understanding of the complexities they faced in navigating the American political system than Dobrynin in the backchannel. For example, Brezhnev asked Kissinger to have Nixon say a favorable word about the ratification of the West Berlin agreement, which was caught up in the ratification process. When Kissinger said that Nixon could not control the German elections, Brezhnev suggested that Nixon could do something and that if he were the American president, he would force it through. If it worked out, Brezhnev jokingly promised to give the American side credit, but if it failed, he would pin the blame on Kissinger.⁶²⁶ Later, when Kissinger tried to explain that the White

⁶²⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 25, 1972, 2:10-3:50 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 912-20.

⁶²⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97

⁶²⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

House could make some economic decisions, while others fell to the Congress, Brezhnev did not buy it. Hoping for immediate trade concessions, he said, “But you yourselves write the laws. It is for you to change them.”⁶²⁷ The American political system remained a mystery to most Soviet politicians, including Brezhnev. Experienced with situations in which they could move quickly and independently to pursue initiatives, Politburo officials had difficulty understanding why agreements could not proceed more quickly.

The top superpower leaders further connected in their handling of the press and domestic opponents. For example, they made several jokes about student protests in the US. In the first meeting of his pre-summit trip, Kissinger told the general secretary that domestic opposition did not phase the Nixon administration: “upper middle class students are not good revolutionaries,” even if they “make a lot of noise” in America, to which Brezhnev laughed.⁶²⁸ At the end of the summit meetings, Nixon promised Brezhnev that, when he came to visit the US the following year, “the demonstrators will be for you and against me—that’s the way our system works.”⁶²⁹ The media also served as a punch line for the top-level negotiators. Gromyko joked with Kissinger, “We have a more advanced social system. We don’t have problems with the press.” Kissinger, no fan of the press, shot back, “You are

⁶²⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 4:05-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 725-27. During the summit, Kosygin made similar comments, though perhaps showing a greater understanding of American realities. During a conversation of MFN status, he remarked, “Maybe some situation in the US will change, and it will not be Congress but someone else that decides these matters. I am not making any formal proposal. You wouldn’t accept it anyway. . . . Well, both of us have to act within limits on certain things. That applies to both of us.” “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 25, 1972, 2:10-3:50 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 912-25.

⁶²⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶²⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 29, 1972, 12:35-1:40 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 1001-4.

making it more and more attractive.” He did complain, though, that he kept getting clipped out of *Pravda*’s pictures of summit signings.⁶³⁰

Like Dobrynin and Kissinger, both the American and the Soviet primary negotiators complained about third countries that they claimed sought to disrupt the summit, reflecting their shared position as superpower leaders. Kissinger, for example, grumbled that North Vietnam sought to destroy the possibility of summit agreements, telling Brezhnev that “a little country whose heroism derives from a monomaniacal obsession with local problems” intended to send Soviet-American relations “in a direction which neither of us wants.”⁶³¹ Brezhnev even seemed to sympathize with the Americans at times, expressing a restricted understanding of the American need to maintain “prestige.” He said at one point, “We do believe the President really wants to end the war.”⁶³² Brezhnev continued to press Nixon and Kissinger to find a solution to the war, but from the Soviet perspective, even perfunctory expressions of understanding the Nixon administration’s point of view on Vietnam seem shocking, a demonstration that, at least to a certain extent, Brezhnev and Nixon could commiserate over their common roles as superpower leaders.

For the Soviet side, China represented the most pressing danger to the summit, a matter that Brezhnev broached with Nixon after several drinks. Brezhnev “repeatedly referred to himself and the President as Europeans and said it was very difficult for Europeans to really know what was going on in the minds of the Chinese leadership.” He

⁶³⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 28, 1972, 10:45 AM-1PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 968-76.

⁶³¹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶³² “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 29, 1972, 10:20 AM-12:20 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 991-93. For Brezhnev expressing hedged sympathy for the Americans’ concern with “certain prestige considerations,” see “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

also complained about Mao's personality cult and referred with disgust to the "so-called cultural revolution," specifically mentioning public beheadings and "dozens of 'camps' where people were being 're-educated.'"⁶³³ Brezhnev even attempted to combine the China problem with anti-Nixon elements in the US, something he knew would find resonance with Kissinger. He maintained that the American opposition press wrote "in unison" and "in parallel" with the Chinese press, hoping "to prevent, to block the summit between the Soviet Union and the United States." To drive the point home, Brezhnev discussed the various deaths the Chinese had planned for Soviet leaders, ranging from Kosygin, who was to be hanged, to Mikoyan, who was to be boiled alive. Brezhnev feigned relief in finding out that he was to be shot, which he wryly described as "an honorable death."⁶³⁴ In the descriptions of the Soviet leadership at the summit, the Chinese regime was barbaric and distinctly "eastern," disconnected from the values of European civilization that tied the US and the USSR together. There is little evidence that Nixon and Kissinger accepted this argument, but it represents a Soviet attempt to emerge victorious in the game of triangular diplomacy by driving a wedge between the US and China. These comments also distinguish Brezhnev's perspective from the backchannel conversations, as Dobrynin did not display the overt racism expressed by the general secretary.

Allies could pose as much of a problem for superpower leaders as enemies, and here Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev found greater room for common ground. For instance, when discussing the European Security Conference, Nixon emphasized that "smaller nations are very sensitive" about superpower relations, since they "object to having their fate decided by

⁶³³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 26, 1972, 7:30-9:30 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 951-53.

⁶³⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (US), April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

larger ones.” Brezhnev shot back, “It should not offend them.” Nixon again advised caution, “We must be careful not to irritate our friends—all our friends, we consider all Europe our friends. For example, we wouldn’t want to anger Albania.” The other officials laughed about this, and Rogers cracked, “We don’t want to make Luxembourg mad,” referencing a previous comment by Brezhnev, who described Luxembourg’s forces as “90 policemen.” Earlier in the conversation, Kosygin lamented the influence of alliances, asking Nixon, “Do you think the time will come when there are no allies on your part or on ours, that we are common allies?” Nixon, taken aback, answered: “Surely, It will take time.”⁶³⁵ If Nixon did not find the Albania comment funny, as he had hoped to use the desires of their respective allies to slow down progress in talks for a European Security Conference, the others in the room, including Rogers, certainly did.

Negotiations between Kissinger and Gromyko on the Middle East further demonstrate this point. The two men discussed the status of Sharm el-Sheikh, a coastal city at the southernmost tip of the Sinai Peninsula that Israel hoped to retain as a base in any deal ceding the land back to Egypt. Gromyko and Kissinger debated the possibility of temporarily stationing UN personnel in the city, with Gromyko emphasizing, “Temporary, not until the Second Coming of the Christ!” Kissinger laughed, “An interesting formulation to put to the Jews and the Arabs.” Later, they joked about the way that they negotiated these details without the participation of the regional leaders. Gromyko asked, “Can you imagine if we showed this now to the Syrians, what would they do?” Kissinger responded, “Both of

⁶³⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 24, 1972, 11:40 AM-1:30 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 872-80.

us are terrified of what our allies would do. This is the best guarantee of secrecy.”⁶³⁶ At the tail end of the summit, Nixon acknowledged that both sides would consult with their allies about the results of the meetings, but assured Brezhnev that the American side would be “extremely circumspect in our consultations and will maintain confidentiality in all matters concerning our bilateral relations,” with Brezhnev agreeing to do the same.⁶³⁷ Again, the sense of conspiratorial togetherness, secretly planning agreements that would shape the future of millions of people, created a certain thrill for the top leadership in the US and the USSR, giving them a sense of a common position in the world, even if their negotiating stances were different.

Perhaps the most shocking example of the American and Soviet leaderships bonding over their mutual status as superpowers came during Kissinger’s pre-summit visit to Moscow, when he repeated a compliment he made to Dobrynin in 1969 on the Soviet handling of the Prague Spring. This time, he mentioned this fact in the context of Vietnam. Telling Brezhnev that “bombing is very painful for us,” Kissinger nonetheless maintained that “when a leader has necessities and a country has necessities, he must take painful steps which he doesn’t like to do.” Then, he implicitly compared this decision to Soviet action in the Prague Spring, telling the general secretary that “when you have acted, I have been impressed that you have done so massively, without looking back.” Brezhnev responded that Kissinger proved himself an “astute lecturer” by “hinting at Czechoslovakia,” and Kissinger

⁶³⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 28, 1972, 9:35 AM-11:55 AM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 983-90.

⁶³⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 29, 1972, 12:35-1:40 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 1001-4. According to the American record of this conversation, Kosygin asked if Rogers would be disbanding NATO during his upcoming trip to the alliance’s meeting. Nixon responded, “maybe in about ten years.” “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 29, 1972, 12:55 PM, *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 998-1001.

assured Brezhnev that he made this comment to Dobrynin “in a spirit of understanding, in a complimentary way, not critically.”⁶³⁸ Kissinger thereby prodded Brezhnev to empathize with the American plight in Vietnam, demonstrating that the superpowers faced similar challenges and needed to use similar methods, no matter how unfortunate they might seem, in managing their respective empires.

The top leadership followed the backchannel representatives’ precedent of coming together through humor about the antagonistic relationship between the US and the USSR in the Cold War. Kissinger’s birthday took place during the Moscow summit, and he joked, “I received more presents from the Soviet Foreign Ministry for my birthday than from the US State Department.” Gromyko made a pun about the typical Soviet request that the US not interfere in its internal affairs, “I will say nothing on the US Foreign Office because non-interference is one of our principles.”⁶³⁹ At a later point in discussions, Brezhnev, picking up on Cold War themes of espionage and intelligence, told Nixon that Kissinger “should be kept under constant surveillance. . . . Nobody knows where he really spends his time.” When Gromyko tried to defend Kissinger, saying that he has kept good watch over the national security advisor, Brezhnev protested, “You and Kissinger have had a long and dubious record of contacts,” suggesting that perhaps they were in on the mischief together.⁶⁴⁰ In another conversation in St. Catherine’s Hall in the Kremlin, Kissinger raised the Russian tradition of spycraft, joking that Ivan the Terrible probably invented the secret camera in the

⁶³⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶³⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 28, 1972, 1-2:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 977-83.

⁶⁴⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 26, 1972, 3:10-5:40 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 940-46.

chandelier. Complaining about the hall's temperature, Gromyko fired back, "No, Ivan the Terrible invented the air conditioning in this room!"⁶⁴¹

Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev also carried on the long tradition of the backchannel participants mockingly suggesting that one diplomat was taking advantage of the other. In the first meeting of Kissinger's pre-summit visit, Brezhnev already picked up on this tactic. When Kissinger mentioned that he was aware of the fact that Brezhnev favored his visit to Moscow, Brezhnev responded, "You haven't told me anything and I am giving away all my secrets. I'm losing all of my advantages now because I am so kind."⁶⁴² Later, when conceding to a Soviet position on the number of acceptable nuclear submarines, Kissinger told Brezhnev, "I will show you what a bad diplomat I am. Gromyko wouldn't do this." Brezhnev responded that this demonstrated he was a "strong diplomat," claiming that the Foreign Ministry would not do this because of "how bad it is." Gromyko defended himself, saying that he "would have waited at least three minutes" before making the concession.⁶⁴³ When Nixon arrived in Moscow, he got in on the act, joking with Brezhnev about Kissinger's supposed proclivity for making concessions: "The trouble was that he gave everything away to the General Secretary [on his previous trip to Moscow] and now I will have to take it back again."⁶⁴⁴ Reflecting the real criticism of hawkish Americans and Soviet

⁶⁴¹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 27, 2:10-4:10 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 953-58.

⁶⁴² "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶⁴³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

⁶⁴⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 23, 1972, 7:20-9:55 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 855-61.

defense officials, these jokes brought together Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev through their mutual plights.

As in the backchannel, top Soviet and American diplomats rooted their discussions in historical topics. At their first pre-summit meeting, Kissinger announced, “Our intention is to recapture the spirit of the Roosevelt period,” when the US and USSR established official relations and defeated the Axis powers in World War II. Brezhnev agreed, but he added a caveat on the ways that the war divided the superpowers, “I am sure, God forbid, if your people had had to suffer anything like the Russian people did, the post-war American foreign policy would have been different.”⁶⁴⁵ This theme would return during the summit, with Nixon using the experience of the war to highlight the importance of top-level personal relationships.⁶⁴⁶ Brezhnev also told Nixon, “I believe if the US had suffered the way the Soviet people had, then perhaps you would look at matters about Vietnam differently than at present, but of course God forbid that you ever have to suffer what the Soviet people suffered in World War II.”⁶⁴⁷ This demonstrates the ways in which the Soviet historical experience affected Brezhnev’s evaluation of the US, as he understood the Vietnam War through the prism of the Soviet experience in World War II. Occasionally, more recent history came to the fore, including the Kitchen Debate between Nixon and Khrushchev. Brezhnev promised Kissinger that he had “no intention of arguing with Nixon about whose kitchen is better.”⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶⁴⁶ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 22, 1972, 6-8:10 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 831-36.

⁶⁴⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 24, 1972, 7:50-11 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 886-95.

⁶⁴⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

If history did not have the same intrinsic interest for Brezhnev and Nixon as it did for Kissinger and Dobrynin, it still allowed them to root their present summit in previous encounters.

Even Kissinger's sexual exploits and the entirely male composition of the diplomatic cohort served as the basis for bonding among the superpower elite. On Kissinger's birthday, Antonov, the KGB general in charge of security, surprised the national security advisor by interrupting negotiations by having a woman bring in a cake. Antonov declared, "And on behalf of our girls, for the American delegation, she will kiss you." The woman kissed Kissinger and blushed, with Antonov exclaiming, "And not on orders!"⁶⁴⁹ SALT negotiations between Kissinger and Soviet representatives paused on the evening of May 25 to take in a performance of *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theater as part of the summit pageantry. As they reconvened at 11:30, Kissinger was late returning to the negotiating table, and when Gromyko asked him where he had been, Kissinger responded that he was "looking for the ballerina," lamenting that there was not sufficient time to spend with her.⁶⁵⁰ Brezhnev also got in on the action, making fun of Kissinger's supposed sexual prowess. In the pre-summit meetings, Kissinger informed Brezhnev that he could stay through Monday, if necessary, but "if I don't get home by Monday night, they will all think I have a new girl friend." Brezhnev joked that this was not so bad, and, in fact, "if that were happen to me I would get a medal." He took this anecdote one step further, stating that "after 65, one gets the 'order of the badge of honor' for one's ability," referring to one's sexual life as a senior

⁶⁴⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 27, 1972, 2:10-4:10 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 953-58.

⁶⁵⁰ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 25, 1972, 5:20-6:35 PM, 11:30 PM-12:32 AM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 925-31.

citizen. Kissinger quickly changed the subject.⁶⁵¹ Having learned of Kissinger's reputation with women, the Soviet side attempted to stroke his ego at every turn, buttering him up for the next round of talks.

Finally, like Dobrynin and Kissinger, the top leadership could simply enjoy one another's company in a lighthearted manner. Kissinger asked for Brezhnev to say something on the limitation of nuclear submarines, and Brezhnev responded, "Nothing." When Kissinger asked for clarification, Brezhnev joked: "Be patient. What can I say about them? They travel under water, we can't see them, they're silent." Delighted, Gromyko clumsily called out in English, "Puzzle! Puzzle!"⁶⁵² A rich banter also developed around the plentiful foodstuffs available in Soviet negotiations. When Brezhnev offered Kissinger plums dipped in chocolate, Kissinger responded, "I just started a diet before I came here, which has already been destroyed in 12 hours in Moscow." Later, Brezhnev offered the Americans pie, and when Kissinger seemed to be slowing down, he said, "Please eat up. You will certainly have to report back to the President."⁶⁵³ In a later conversation, Kissinger would joke, "That is your secret weapon." Brezhnev agreed, and Gromyko chimed in, "A conventional weapon."⁶⁵⁴

The banter between Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev mirrored the jokes in the backchannel. Of course, no one could mimic Brezhnev's bombastic, "quintessentially

⁶⁵¹ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶⁵² "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

⁶⁵³ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 21, 1972, noon-4:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 681-97.

⁶⁵⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," April 22, 1972, 11 AM-4:05 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 709-24.

Russian” negotiating style, in Kissinger’s words, as the general secretary could exhibit “crudeness and warmth” at one moment, and be “brutal and engaging, cunning and disarming” at the next, with a seemingly endless array of odd and funny anecdotes that could easily beguile an opponent in talks.⁶⁵⁵ Still, many of the themes remained parallel to those present in the backchannel, and the attempt to build personal diplomacy through common interests saw success in Moscow as it did in the backchannel. Similar to the backchannel, the banter between top leaders did not reflect an honest friendship, but rather the purposeful construction of a personal relationship that both leaders understood could be useful in future talks.

Conclusion

In his memoirs, Kissinger addressed Dobrynin’s role in the pre-summit visit to Moscow, frequently checking in on the American to make sure that everything was progressing as planned. He wrote, “Dobrynin was, I am convinced, sincerely dedicated to the improvement of US-Soviet relations; he was eager that nothing unforeseen should derail the product of his devoted labors.”⁶⁵⁶ Yet Dobrynin’s practical role in the pre-summit visit and the summit itself was fairly limited. He sat in on meetings between Nixon, Kissinger, Brezhnev, and Gromyko, sometimes asking questions, making points about previous negotiating positions, or cracking jokes at Kissinger’s expense. Once in a while, Dobrynin would substitute as a translator or attend to the American representatives during their visit.

⁶⁵⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1141.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1137.

Generally speaking, though, Dobrynin receded to the background and allowed his bosses in Moscow and his partners in Washington to conclude the negotiations.

However, Dobrynin's imprint on these talks was indelible. Those who point to Kissinger's role in setting the tone in these conversations are not mistaken, but it should be stressed that it was an ill Dobrynin who invited Kissinger to his living quarters for their first meeting. It was Dobrynin who insisted that they refer to each other by their first names in talks, and Dobrynin who proposed the private telephone line connecting their offices.

Dobrynin spent time reading celebrity gossip rags to provide the material for his jokes about Kissinger's sex life. Dobrynin reported to Moscow on Kissinger's personality type. In short, although Kissinger may have come to office with the goal of using personal diplomacy with his principle partners, Dobrynin implemented this technique, having already refined it over the previous seven years working with other diplomats. That Kissinger proved more receptive to Dobrynin's advances, willing to return his gestures in kind, speaks to the unique relationship they had in the context of Cold War diplomacy.

Kissinger and Dobrynin bonded over a number of issues, all of which were tied to their status as male diplomats representing the only two superpowers in a secret backchannel. As a result, they had plenty of things in common, ranging from difficult allies to Cold War-era espionage to sex. As Kissinger told Dobrynin after the 1972 elections, "I don't know whether one can have a feeling of personal friendship with a Communist diplomat but I have it."⁶⁵⁷ Still, the power of this personal diplomacy to overcome conflict between the superpowers had its limits, as they would discover in subsequent years. Neither Dobrynin nor Kissinger forgot that they represented the two most powerful countries in the world, and

⁶⁵⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 8, 1972, 9:55 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

both understood that their relationship—no matter how much they actually enjoyed the banter—was primarily a tool to conduct diplomacy, smoothing things over when conflict erupted and advancing negotiations when the time was ripe. Thus, the inscription that Dobrynin penned in the copy of his memoirs that he sent to Kissinger makes for an apt explanation of the complexities of their relationship: “To Henry, opponent, partner, friend.”⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁸ Henry Kissinger, “Forward,” in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, x.

CHAPTER 5

THE COLLAPSE OF THE BACKCHANNEL

Optimism among foreign policy leaders remained high in the wake of the Moscow summit. On July 12, 1972, while on a business trip at the Soviet consulate in San Francisco, Dobrynin stayed at the Nixon's home in San Clemente. In California, "The president himself was at ease," and "he spoke freely, joked, and was prepared to share his personal views on foreign policy with unusual candor" as the two looked forward to planning a summit in the United States in 1973. Dobrynin recounts how:

Business apart, Kissinger and I arranged for a short vacation of a day and a half. We lay on the beach and even managed to get a couple of hours sleep right on the sand under the warm California sun. The sight would have shocked the Washington diplomatic corps, to say nothing of Nixon's right-wing political opponents: the president's assistant for national security and the Soviet Ambassador, wearing nothing but bathing trunks, sleeping side by side, with a security guard keeping a watchful eye on their papers and personal effects.

Kissinger also introduced him to margaritas at a neighborhood Mexican restaurant.⁶⁵⁹ This moment symbolizes the level of trust that developed between the negotiators following the successful summit. The reservations that each side felt about détente on the eve of the conference, each unsure of the other's commitment to improving relations, melted away as the negotiators grew confident that they could work with their respective partners.

Yet within a few years, this optimism faded in the wake of a series of domestic and international crises that led to the collapse of détente and a period of retrenchment that some

⁶⁵⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 257-60.

have called the “second Cold War.” Both Kissinger and Dobrynin have offered explanations in their memoirs for their view that détente was doomed to fail. Kissinger blames his domestic critics for restraining the Nixon and Ford administrations’ range of action. He also cites “the collapse of our executive authority as a result of Watergate, the erosion of the leadership structure even in the Congress, the isolationism born of the frustrations of Vietnam, and an emerging pattern of geopolitical abdication.” As a result, Kissinger argues, the American government “ended up achieving the worst of all results” due to what he awkwardly referred to as the “constant pinpricks of the Soviet bear.”⁶⁶⁰ In his memoirs, Dobrynin similarly acknowledges the worsening atmosphere in Washington for détente, but contends that, above all, détente fell because of the existence of “contradictory concepts of détente” in each of the capitals. In particular, the Soviet side understood détente through an ideological prism, seeking to facilitate socialism’s triumph over capitalism in the developing world while simultaneously avoiding nuclear Armageddon. The American side, in contrast, viewed détente as a means of managing the Soviet Union’s rise on the world stage and as an alternate form of containment. Neither side engaged in a philosophical discussion about the meaning of détente with the other, and consequently, neither understood the other’s motivations for setting policy.⁶⁶¹

At the time, hawkish critics in the US cheered the demise of détente, criticizing American officials for engaging in it in the first place and Soviet leaders for trying to exploit the naïve American willingness to negotiate by increasing arms stockpiles and embarking on a revolutionary crusade in the developing world. Meanwhile, doves in the American foreign

⁶⁶⁰ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1143-44.

⁶⁶¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 467-69.

policy establishment blamed the hawks for spoiling the otherwise prudent policy of rapprochement with the USSR. The hawks, they argued, used scare tactics to push the American public away from détente, persuading Ford to ban the word from his administration's public statements and describing any pursuit of détente by Carter as a sign of weakness. Soviet commentators in the same period contended that American policymakers had abandoned détente because they refused to accept strategic parity and the equality of the USSR on the world stage. Instead, they felt that the US pursued a course of confrontation and military buildup in a desperate attempt to stave off decline.

Historians, focusing on the American perspective, have continued this discussion of why détente failed. In 1984, Harry Gelman helped open the historiography on the collapse of détente by claiming that the Brezhnev Politburo continuously sought “incremental gains” in the international arena “within the scope of available opportunities and the limits of prudent risk.” The Politburo based its decisions on a belief in the incompatibility of US and Soviet interests as well as a pervasive sense of vulnerability, both in the Soviet international position and in the Brezhnev Politburo's domestic legitimacy. In this sense, the Politburo, increasingly dominated by hawkish voices, was at fault for the collapse of détente, although Gelman openly criticizes inconsistencies in American policy.⁶⁶²

More recent scholars have shifted the blame elsewhere. Betty Glad, the foremost expert on the Carter administration, has suggested that Carter bears considerable responsibility as he accommodated hawks in the American foreign policy community by pursuing a more aggressive Soviet policy.⁶⁶³ Vladislav Zubok acknowledges that domestic

⁶⁶² Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente*, 16.

⁶⁶³ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 236.

politics, ideology, and bureaucratic structures impacted the collapse of détente, but concludes that Soviet and American leaders' personalities was the most important factor. Mirroring his argument that the personalities of Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev served as the driving engines of détente, he suggests that "had Brezhnev still been willing to make a determined effort to maintain a political partnership with the American leadership," détente would have persisted.⁶⁶⁴

Raymond Garthoff provides the most complex and comprehensive explanation for the collapse of détente. Similar to Dobrynin, he states that the most important reason for the failure of détente was the "fatal difference in the conception of its basic rule by the two sides." While both parties recognized the need for improving relations, the Americans hoped to manage Soviet influence in the international arena, whereas the Soviet side aimed to ensure stability while socialism gradually overtook capitalism. In identifying the reasons for the collapse of détente, Garthoff also points to the superpowers' failure to collaborate to ensure collective security, to build a common code of conduct on the world stage, to accurately perceive each other's motivations, to control the arms race, and to comprehend the relationship between domestic and foreign policies. Garthoff emphasizes that there was never just "détente" or "confrontation," but rather a mix that continued to exist through the 1980s.⁶⁶⁵

Building on Garthoff's work, this chapter examines several of the crises that derailed détente. I argue that the Soviet Embassy's failure to handle myriad domestic and international problems proved to be one of the major contributing factors in the collapse of

⁶⁶⁴ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 230, 257.

⁶⁶⁵ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1125-46.

détente. The complexities of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus impeded the embassy's efforts to ameliorate the crises, as the officers on the ground who best understood the American political context were kept ignorant of Soviet actions in the developing world until they saw them in the headlines of American papers. Therefore, they could not advise the center about how conflicts in the developing world would be received by the American leadership, and they had difficulties explaining the importance of places such as Angola and Afghanistan to the Kremlin, whose leaders did not understand that American policymakers viewed Soviet actions in the developing world as a serious affront to bilateral détente. Moreover, Soviet policymakers could not grasp how issues such as Watergate or Jewish emigration from the USSR could hamstring a presidential administration's actions, especially after years of being told by Nixon and Kissinger that they held the keys to any policy initiatives in Washington. With the embassy, the most effective tool for improving bilateral relations, sidelined by developments in American and Soviet domestic and foreign policies, détente withered from 1973 until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when it finally ceased to function.

The source base for this period in the backchannel's history is more limited than for earlier years. The transcripts of Kissinger-Dobrynin telephone conversations exist only up until the end of the Ford administration in January 1977. The full set of Dobrynin's messages to the Politburo has not been released beyond the May 1972 summit, although some critically important individual memos have been declassified. Consequently, this chapter will draw on the available files, as well as memoir accounts to explain how the backchannel changed from the first Moscow summit to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

1973 Summit and Vietnam

During the period from June 1972 to the spring of 1973, Nixon turned his gaze to winning the 1972 presidential election, and Kissinger focused on resolving the Vietnam War. As Robert Dallek has argued, these processes were not always complementary. On the one hand, Kissinger wanted to end the war for both strategic and electoral reasons, believing that there would never be a better time to end the conflict. In his view, the trifecta of the opening to China, the Moscow summit, and an end to the Vietnam War would guarantee Nixon victory. On the other hand, Nixon feared that hawks would accuse him of abandoning South Vietnam to communism or that his opponent, Senator George McGovern, would receive an invitation from the North Vietnamese government to visit Hanoi, where they might reveal a plan to turn over American POWs, weakening Nixon's position in the election. Moreover, Nixon had grown increasingly jealous of Kissinger's expanding profile since his initial trip to China. Every time Kissinger spoke to the press about progress in talks with North Vietnam, Nixon worried that this would take public attention away from his own work.⁶⁶⁶

Despite Nixon's reservations, Kissinger continued to meet with North Vietnamese diplomat Le Duc Tho in Paris in an attempt to secure a settlement. Following their September 15 meeting, Kissinger reported that they were close to concluding negotiations and that a settlement should be completed within a month. Nixon attempted to slow the progress of talks by reiterating to Kissinger several times that they could not abandon South Vietnamese President Thieu. When Kissinger returned to Paris for additional talks in October, he settled all negotiating decisions without seeking Nixon's direct approval, frustrated by possibility that even if he concluded negotiations, the president might "louse it

⁶⁶⁶ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 418-31.

up.” Sure of an agreement, Kissinger returned to Washington on October 12 and proudly declared, “Well, you’ve got three for three, Mr. President,” referring to the opening to China, the Moscow summit, and Vietnam. By October 26, Kissinger boldly told the press, “We believe peace is at hand.” Yet Nixon remained pessimistic, showing no interest in the details of the agreement. When Kissinger returned to Paris and reported that the details were nearly worked out, Nixon cautioned him that the deal still had to receive approval in Saigon, where Kissinger was told that he could not force the agreement on Thieu. The South Vietnamese president, enraged by a stipulation that left North Vietnamese troops on South Vietnamese soil, rejected the plan in any form. On October 24 and 25, the North and South Vietnamese leaderships released the details of the talks. Kissinger told the press on October 26 that “we believe that peace is at hand,” but as Dallek concludes, Kissinger “found himself waging a two-front political war for peace against Saigon and the White House.”⁶⁶⁷

Following Nixon’s victory in the November 7 elections, the president recommitted himself to ending the conflict before the start of his second term, but Thieu resisted Nixon and Kissinger’s efforts to push him toward the settlement, and the North Vietnamese leadership proved unwilling to make concessions that satisfied Saigon’s concerns. To try to force the North Vietnamese leadership to give ground and persuade the South Vietnamese officials that the US would continue supporting Saigon, even after extracting its forces, Nixon ordered a massive bombing campaign on Hanoi and Haiphong to begin on December 18, when Congress was in recess, so he did not have to face questions from House and Senate leaders. The campaign, described by *The Washington Post* as “the most savage and senseless act of war ever visited, over a scant ten days, by one sovereign people over

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

another,” brought North Vietnam back to the negotiating table, but failed to reassure Thieu of American intentions. In early January, Kissinger returned to Paris under instructions to end the war at any cost, and he hammered out an agreement with Tho under less-than-friendly conditions. Meanwhile, Nixon persuaded Thieu to accept the terms, making clear that he would sign the agreement regardless of Saigon’s concerns. On January 23, Nixon announced to the American public that finally he had secured “peace with honor.” The Paris Peace Accords were signed four days later, ending the war. Privately, Kissinger doubted the agreement would hold water for very long, but at least the Nixon administration could claim that America’s long national nightmare was finally over.⁶⁶⁸

During this period, the Vietnam War officially remained a thorn in the side of Soviet-American relations. On May 17, the same day that *Pravda* confirmed President Nixon’s upcoming visit to Moscow for a summit with Brezhnev, Soviet newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta* printed a series of poems by Evgenii Evtushenko, the famous Soviet poet, *America-72*. The first of these poems, “A Vietnamese Man in Disneyland,” uses a theme park as a metaphor for the United States, where people of all different nationalities, portrayed as children, play “in an attraction that some call ‘the kind uncle,’” a reference to Uncle Sam, or the US government. Although the ‘children’ could potentially wield power, Evtushenko, muses, “this kind uncle plays deceitful games with the tiny children. The skillful swindler of children’s innocent peace would like to use a special device on the young ones: ‘Close your eyes to peace!’” In Evtushenko's words, the US government hides all of the terrible things happening in the world from its people, particularly when the US is involved, telling them instead to close their eyes and have fun in the park. Before he closes the poem by having

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 435-55.

Mickey Mouse remove his mask and drowsily request a double-shot of whiskey, Evtushenko writes:

The America of Lincoln, of Whitman and of Disney, of children, of students, of squirrels and of spaceships, I love you with all of my heart, but my heart aches: the Vietnamese man from the cartoon is a stone grown heavy. No, the world is not so rosy, where someone's children are under the death penalty, where the little countries are somebody's merry shooting gallery. Stand up, youngsters of Vietnam, Russia, and America, do not give the right to bomb to the killers, but give peace."⁶⁶⁹

This critique of American politics and culture paints an image of the American government as the wicked purveyor of a Vanity Fair, using fun and games to blind an otherwise decent people to the painful realities of the world. Equally important, it appeared in a major national newspaper for millions of Soviet citizens to read.

Behind the scenes, though, the superpower relationship in the final months of the Vietnam War seemed fairly constructive, as the Soviet side worked to help remove this thorn from the side of détente. The development of Nixon and Brezhnev's personal relationship at the summit helped the negotiating parties deal with the war in a relatively friendly manner. Noting that he "certainly support[ed] President Nixon's idea of ending the war," Brezhnev stated, "Of course, it was not President Nixon who started the war. But of course it's up to the United States to extricate itself somehow from it."⁶⁷⁰ In this way, Brezhnev separated his criticism of the war from his feelings about Nixon. While he needed to support his Vietnamese ally, Brezhnev could not alienate his negotiating partners in the United States, so he did his best to encourage negotiations between the US and North Vietnam without offending Kissinger.

⁶⁶⁹ Evg. Evtushenko, "V'etnamets v Disneilende," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 17, 1972, 9, 15.

⁶⁷⁰ "Kissinger-Brezhnev Conversation, April 22, 1972, 11:00 AM-4:05 PM," <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB60/abm34.pdf>.

The backchannel successfully ensured that the US would cease bombing in Hanoi and Haiphong and reduce US air traffic over North Vietnam in June 1972, while Podgorny visited with North Vietnamese leaders, presented the American position, and tried to identify a point of compromise. The trip did not accomplish much, other than giving the North Vietnamese the opportunity to tell Podgorny that Tho would return to the negotiating table shortly, but it displays the extent to which the Soviet leadership sought to demonstrate its commitment to détente to Nixon and Kissinger in the months after the summit. Hoping to encourage future Soviet aid in Vietnam, Nixon thanked the Soviet side for its efforts, and in backchannel talks, Kissinger attributed Tho's more cordial approach in Paris to Soviet intervention.⁶⁷¹ In his memoirs, Dobrynin suggests that the American decision to end the Christmas bombing and return to the negotiating table followed a backchannel meeting in which the Soviet ambassador lectured Kissinger on the ineffectiveness of bombing in conducting peace talks. A few hours later, Kissinger called Dobrynin to say that he informed the president of the Soviet position and that the American side accepted a North Vietnamese proposal to meet again in Paris and would cease bombing North Vietnam tomorrow.⁶⁷²

While Soviet leaders tried to push Hanoi toward a settlement, Kissinger frequently shared his notes on meetings in Paris with Dobrynin, and in turn, Dobrynin provided Kissinger with whatever memos the North Vietnamese leadership sent to Moscow.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 257, 260; Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 13, 1972, 4:53 PM; and Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 14, 1972, 8:20 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. After the meeting, Dobrynin promised Haig that the North Vietnamese side was prepared for "business-like" talks. Haig-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 22, 1972, 3:20 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 263.

⁶⁷³ For example, see Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 7, 1972, 6:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts. Dobrynin informed Kissinger of the contents of the telegram, and when Kissinger asked to trade the American transcript of the conversation for whatever the North

Dobrynin complained in his memoirs that the American side informed Soviet representatives “far more fully and confidentially” than the North Vietnamese side, much to the chagrin of Hanoi.⁶⁷⁴ This reflects Kissinger and Dobrynin’s capacity for bonding over their mutual status as superpower diplomats, along with all of the headaches of dealing with small powers in the developing world.

Moreover, Dobrynin proved to be an important confidant for Kissinger to vent about the conduct of all parties. For example, on June 30, Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed how best to phrase a transmission from the Soviet leadership to the North Vietnamese leadership, impressing upon them the need to take talks seriously, keep points of discussion confidential, and move beyond propaganda and talking points to find a mutually-acceptable solution. When Kissinger grumbled that the North Vietnamese leaked information on talks to sway American public opinion and pressure Nixon to make concessions, Dobrynin sympathized with Kissinger’s position: “I mean, if they are really going to tell everything to all the people who come to them having nothing to do with the Administration and just give out publicly, then there is no sense to negotiate.”⁶⁷⁵ On October 7, Dobrynin told Kissinger that, based on a recent transmission from Hanoi, he felt confident that they were ready to settle. They discussed Kissinger’s strategy for presenting American conditions for the schedule to end the war. Dobrynin recommended that he wait until the next meeting to reveal his position, to which Kissinger agreed, noting that he planned to hint about the sorts of concessions Tho

Vietnamese government sent the Soviet leadership, Dobrynin suggested that this would be fine, though a summary of the North Vietnamese transmission would most likely be sufficient.

⁶⁷⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 261.

⁶⁷⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, June 30, 1972, 12:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

could attain if he yielded on the points most important to the American side.⁶⁷⁶ By November, Kissinger, who had grown tired of going between Saigon and Hanoi to identify common ground, kvetched to Dobrynin that he did not want to meet with either North or South Vietnam's leadership again "without having the other one under control."⁶⁷⁷ On December 15, Dobrynin told Kissinger that Tho had just arrived in Moscow. Kissinger cracked, "Just crying on your shoulders, huh?" and they laughed."⁶⁷⁸ In fact, they made fun of both North and South Vietnamese officials. Dobrynin proved especially eager to joke with Kissinger about Tho and the North Vietnamese leadership, which gave Kissinger space to vent his frustrations to his Soviet counterpart.

Kissinger and Dobrynin even commiserated over the behavior of the American side. On August 21, for example, Dobrynin wrapped up the conversation by reviewing the questions he would ask the Soviet leadership in preparation for their next meeting. The Soviet ambassador asked, "What else do I owe you?" and Kissinger shot back, "A settlement of the Vietnam War." When Dobrynin promised that they could settle this issue over coffee the following day, they laughed, and Dobrynin brought up the fact that Secretary of State Rogers and his wife appeared with the Nixons on vacation in Miami Beach, leaving the impression that the war was settled. Kissinger joked that Dobrynin was "cruel" for bringing up Rogers, a person whom they both found irritating. Dobrynin pointed out that Kissinger did all of the heavy lifting, and suggested that, even if the American side did not recognize

⁶⁷⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 7, 1972, 6:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁷⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 8, 1972, 9:55 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁷⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, December 15, 1972, 5:41 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

his efforts, he would be sure to secure a signed certificate to Kissinger from the Politburo that the American diplomat did his best. They laughed and concluded their plans to meet the following day, though Kissinger jokingly threatened that because he brought up Rogers, Dobrynin would not be given caviar.⁶⁷⁹ In sum, while the embassy could provide only limited support in bringing the Vietnam War to an end, the backchannel conversations show how the Kissinger-Dobrynin relationship remained central to détente, even during a break in SALT negotiations, as it remained a useful conduit for gauging the behavior of allies and solidifying détente.

This atmosphere of optimism and a belief in the potential for negotiations to improve Soviet-American relations characterized backchannel talks in advance of the US summit, when Brezhnev visited the United States from June 17 to June 25, 1973. Negotiations for a new round of agreements began only after the conclusion of the Paris Peace Accords. Brezhnev wrote to Nixon on January 28, the day the ceasefire began, that peace in Vietnam, “will in many ways facilitate the healthening of the entire world situation.”⁶⁸⁰ Exchanging several messages in this period, Brezhnev and Nixon set the agenda for talks, with Brezhnev pushing for an agreement on the non-use of nuclear weapons by the US and USSR against one another.⁶⁸¹ He initially proposed this to Kissinger at their pre-summit meeting in Moscow in April 1972 and followed up with an official draft proposal submitted through the

⁶⁷⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 21, 1972, 3:42 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁸⁰ NARA, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 495, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 15.

⁶⁸¹ Message from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 258-61.

backchannel in May.⁶⁸² Brezhnev also raised a joint settlement on the Middle East. With superpower encouragement, once Israel withdrew the territories it took in the 1967 war, Brezhnev felt that other issues could be resolved quickly, including the “security and independent existence of Israel” and Arab countries, the establishment of demilitarized zones, guaranteed freedom for Israeli ships in regional waters, and the Palestinian question.⁶⁸³ Brezhnev wrote again a month later, recommending a visit from Kissinger to Moscow in April followed by the summit in the US in June and arguing for a long-term agreement on exchanges, contacts, and cooperation, rather than the current system in which agreements needed to be renegotiated every two years. Brezhnev included mention of the start of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and mutual reductions of armed forces and armaments in Europe.⁶⁸⁴

Because such an ambitious project called for immediate action, Dobrynin returned early from consultations in Moscow early, allowing the backchannel diplomats to meet on the evening of March 6, before Kissinger left for vacation. During their telephone call earlier that afternoon, Kissinger offered to expedite Dobrynin’s travel approvals, and they joked about the Soviet side relinquishing missiles for nothing but “good will” and Kissinger’s vacation plans. They informally agreed to work on the assumption that Brezhnev’s visit to

⁶⁸² For the initial discussions, see: “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” April 24, 1972, 11:15 AM-1:45 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 760-67. For Kissinger and Dobrynin discussing the first formal proposal, see: “Memorandum of Conversation (US),” May 12, 1972, 4:22 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 813; and “Memorandum of Conversation (USSR),” May 12, 1972, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 813-15.

⁶⁸³ Message from the Soviet Leadership to President Nixon, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 258-61.

⁶⁸⁴ Other topics covered by Brezhnev included the conceptualization of a new SALT agreement, the expansion of trade, agriculture cooperation, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, UN recognition of East and West Germany, and ocean exploration. Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon, February 21, 1973, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 268-71.

the US would be followed by another trip by Nixon to the USSR, with Dobrynin proposing that the president travel throughout the country. Despite these positive feelings, Kissinger and Dobrynin both recognized the limitations posed by the immediacy of the June summit. Kissinger emphasized that given Brezhnev's lofty goals, they would have "a hell of a lot of work to do" in the next two months. Dobrynin agreed, stating that the two months would barely be enough time for the official SALT negotiators to get to know one another, leaving much of the work up to the backchannel. Kissinger reiterated that he was "under instructions to see to it that the visit will be a notable success," concluding that they would have to "work like dogs" to succeed.⁶⁸⁵

Brezhnev's proposal for a non-use of nuclear weapons agreement posed the most problems for American policymakers. During the Moscow summit, Nixon and Kissinger procrastinated on dealing with this issue, believing, as Nixon told Brezhnev, that it would pose a "very serious problem" to their allies, who might view it as an abandonment of the NATO alliance.⁶⁸⁶ Noting the general secretary's description of such an agreement as "a peaceful bomb," Kissinger was more forward in his memoirs: "That it was. It would have produced an explosion in the NATO Alliance, in China, and throughout the world. It would have been considered either a US-Soviet condominium or an American abdication. I politely turned it aside."⁶⁸⁷ After reviewing the initial draft, National Security Council Staff member Helmet Sonnenfeldt wrote to Kissinger, further highlighting the fears of the administration. Sonnenfeldt stated that from the Soviet perspective, this issue was a "winner," as "whatever

⁶⁸⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 6, 1973, 12:24 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁸⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation (US)," May 22, 1972, 6-8:10 PM, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972*, 831-36.

⁶⁸⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1152.

the outcome, the very nature of the subject may cast doubt on our Allied commitments or give the impression of a freer Soviet hand against China.”

As a result, the American side circumvented any binding agreements in order to reassure its allies that it would not limit US actions in the event of a conventional war and to dissuade the Chinese government from assuming that the agreement would make them more vulnerable to attack from the USSR.⁶⁸⁸ Despite the concern that the Soviet side was using the proposal to weaken the American position in the world, recent historians, including Vladislav Zubok, have concluded that Brezhnev made this proposal spontaneously, believing idealistically that Soviet-American antagonisms rested mainly on a fear of nuclear war, which could be lifted by a simple agreement between top leaders.⁶⁸⁹ Perhaps based on the cultural image of Soviet-American relations engrained in Brezhnev’s memory—Roosevelt and Stalin meeting during World War II—Brezhnev assumed that all of the problems that faced superpower negotiators in the 1970s could be solved easily, with friendly banter and well-meaning words shared by top leaders cutting through decades of mistrust and real conflicts over strategic interests.

Kissinger and Dobrynin clashed over the American side’s attempts to weaken the language in Soviet proposals on nuclear non-use, but used their personal relationship to overcome their mutual aggravation. On April 2, for example, Dobrynin called Kissinger, upset over changes made to the wording of Article I, which explained the superpowers’ mutual commitment to preventing the development of conditions that would lead to nuclear war. Dobrynin described the phrasing as “a complete disappointment,” viewing it as “a step

⁶⁸⁸ Memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), February 20, 1973, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 264-68.

⁶⁸⁹ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 221-22.

back from what we already discussed.” Kissinger told Dobrynin that the phrase was inserted to gain the support of the British, but he asked the Soviet ambassador to hold off on transmitting it to the Kremlin for a day, giving him a chance to consult with the president.⁶⁹⁰ Kissinger then phoned Sonnenfeldt to discuss the situation, and they agreed that they should leave in the phrase. The Soviet leadership might accept it, after all, and if not, it would provide the American side with proof that they went through “agony” to protect their British ally’s interests. If necessary, they could cut the phrase in question from Article I, since it already existed in the preamble.⁶⁹¹

The next day, Kissinger called Dobrynin, asking him to send the original, implying that it was to make sure that British officials felt their interests were being taken into account. To calm the angry ambassador, Kissinger told him “on an informal basis” that Nixon would “look with great sympathy at counter-proposals” and would be “very receptive to deleting it from Article I.” He concluded, “Anatole, we have never failed to complete an agreement and we will not fail this time. We will not fail this early in the Administration and this late in our relationship.” Kissinger also tried to defuse the situation, joking at the start of the conversation that he was winded from taking the stairs because he had “lost too many negotiations,” referring to one of the topics that they bonded over in establishing their relationship.⁶⁹² In this way, Kissinger and Dobrynin used their personal relationship to smooth over difficulties in talks, reminding one another of their previous successes. Thus,

⁶⁹⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 2, 1973, 6:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁹¹ Kissinger-Sonnenfeldt Telephone Conversation, April 2, 1973, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁶⁹² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 3, 1973, 6:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

unlike the backchannel talks in 1969 and 1970, these sorts of problems did not result in retrenchment on both sides, as the success of the Moscow summit generated confidence in both diplomats and the potential for the backchannel to overcome obstacles.

As before, relations between top American officials and Brezhnev mirrored the relationship in the backchannel. Kissinger recalled that, during his pre-summit trip to the USSR in May 1973, Brezhnev displayed “a new familiarity that probably went further than he intended,” with heavier drinking and more jokes than in previous meetings. He even told one anecdote that was somewhat anti-Semitic, and Kissinger wrote in jest that this perhaps indicated that he had been “promoted to an honorary equal.” Brezhnev also extended Kissinger a great honor by holding the talks at Zavidovo, the Soviet equivalent of Camp David, which had previously been used only to host foreign leaders during visits of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito and the Finnish president. Brezhnev took Kissinger hunting for wild boar, much to the horror of Kissinger, who, unbeknownst to the general secretary, abhorred killing animals for sport. Kissinger later admitted he found himself rooting for the prey.⁶⁹³

Brezhnev’s trip included time in both Washington and Nixon’s San Clemente home, and it built on the foundation of personal diplomacy established in Moscow the year before. In Washington, Nixon gave Brezhnev a Lincoln Continental, and the Soviet leader, thrilled with the gift, insisted that they immediately go for a drive. Brezhnev sped down the winding roads of Camp David with a terrified Nixon in the passenger seat and Dobrynin in the back seat. At one point, Brezhnev was surprised by a sudden curve, and he hit the brakes so hard that they nearly hit their heads on the windshield. Dobrynin later recorded, “Nixon was

⁶⁹³ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 228-33.

shocked, but still managed to say tactfully, ‘Mr. General Secretary, you drive very well.’⁶⁹⁴ In San Clemente, Nixon threw a party for Brezhnev, inviting members of the Hollywood and California elite, including Ronald Reagan. Brezhnev, though, was most excited to meet Western film star Chuck Connors, who presented Brezhnev with a cowboy belt and two Colt .45 revolvers he used in a film. He later shared a bear hug with Brezhnev on the tarmac prior to his departure from the US. Thrilled with Connors’s gift, Brezhnev buckled on the belt and “like a boy dexterously manipulated the pistols, imitating the movie cowboys and amusing his staff.”⁶⁹⁵ The banquet toasts were effusive, the alcohol flowed freely, and Brezhnev and Nixon grew increasingly comfortable with one another. As Kissinger concluded, “In the spring of 1973, Soviet-American relations were unusually free of tension.”⁶⁹⁶

In many ways, the achievements of the 1973 summit were limited. As early as March 6, Kissinger and Dobrynin conceded that a SALT agreement would likely be impossible at this summit, given the time restraints, and Dobrynin told his American partner that Brezhnev viewed the 1973 summit as “a buildup” for the successful signing of agreements the following year.⁶⁹⁷ On March 8, Dobrynin explained that the Soviet military would drag its

⁶⁹⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 279. Brezhnev had a penchant for expensive cars. As Kissinger later wrote: “Brezhnev, an automobile enthusiast, collected national cars as souvenirs on every State visit to every country; his ambassadors were not bashful about suggesting them.” At the 1972 summit, for instance, Nixon provided Brezhnev with a black Cadillac sedan. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 231-32. As a result, their humor often involved cars. During Kissinger’s pre-summit trip in 1973, Brezhnev joked that he would live an “ordinary life” while in the US, eating, sleeping, walking, and driving just like a regular American. Kissinger warned him that the secret service would forbid it, and Brezhnev responded, “I will take the flag off the car, put on dark glasses, so they can’t see my eyebrows, and drive like any American.” Kissinger shot back, “I have driven with you and I don’t think you drive like an American!” Memorandum of Conversation (US), May 7, 1973, 11:35 AM-2:55 PM, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 385-98.

⁶⁹⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 282-83.

⁶⁹⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 228.

⁶⁹⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 6, 1973, 12:24 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

feet on a new SALT proposal unless the American side “gave Brezhnev some excuse” to push a concrete American arms limitations proposal, which would require an agreement on the non-use of nuclear weapons.⁶⁹⁸ At the summit, the diplomats agreed on the Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement (PNW), a watered-down version of the non-use of nuclear weapons proposal presented by the Soviet side the previous year. They also concluded ten agreements on agriculture, trade, transportation, science, education, and the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Still, as Robert Dallek writes, “The PNW included no pledges against using nuclear weapons, and nothing in these agreements amounted to a fundamental change in relations.”⁶⁹⁹

Although the 1973 summit marked the high-water mark of détente, the participants’ assessment of Brezhnev’s trip to the US varies. Although Kissinger argues that “Brezhnev was sincerely prepared for a prolonged period of stability,” he stresses that “the impact of the 1973 summit was almost certainly unfortunate—not for foreign policy reasons but because of the dramatic demonstration of America’s internal disarray” during the Watergate scandal. Kissinger concludes that, this show of domestic disorder “undoubtedly made them [the Soviets] less willing to expend capital on preventing adventures by friendly nations,” particularly in the Middle East.⁷⁰⁰ Dobrynin, in contrast, asserts that the summit “served to advance the process of improving Soviet-American relations,” with both leaders “sincerely prepared for an extensive period of stability and further cooperation.” Moreover, “personal relations” between Nixon and Brezhnev “were consolidating,” and while “the Soviet

⁶⁹⁸ Memorandum of Conversation (US), March 8, 1973, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 274-76.

⁶⁹⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 492.

⁷⁰⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 300.

government began to understand [Nixon's] serious difficulties," they "still believed that he would overcome them, and that the process of consolidating [Soviet-American] relations would develop further."⁷⁰¹ Thus, while the personal relationship between the backchannel participants and top leadership was undoubtedly at its peak in June 1973, the meager practical results of the summit and the challenges forming in American domestic politics and the developing world hovered like storm clouds on the horizon.

The October War

The first of the storm clouds burst in the Middle East. During the summit, Gromyko and Kissinger discussed the region on several occasions, but on his final evening in California, Brezhnev took matters into his own hands. After excusing himself from dinner with complaints of jetlag, Brezhnev around ten o'clock at night demanded an immediate meeting with the president. Kissinger describes this as "a gross breach of protocol" that "was then, and has remained, unparalleled."⁷⁰² During the meeting, Brezhnev pressed Nixon to finalize a list of principles on the Middle East, warning, "if there is no clarity about the principles we will have difficulty keeping the military situation from flaring up."⁷⁰³ Kissinger viewed this as "a transparent ploy to catch Nixon off guard and with luck to separate him from his advisers." In his memoirs, Kissinger lectures, "It was the sort of maneuver that costs more in confidence than can possibly be gained in substance.

Concessions achieved by subterfuge may embarrass; they are never the basis for continuing

⁷⁰¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 284-86.

⁷⁰² Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 297.

⁷⁰³ Memorandum for the President's File by the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 23, 1973, 10:30 PM, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 538-42.

action between sovereign nations because they will simply not be maintained.” Kissinger describes the incident as an attempt by Brezhnev to browbeat the Nixon administration into accepting the Arab terms for a peace settlement without alterations, and when war erupted a few months later, Nixon and Kissinger were left to think that Brezhnev had carried through with his threat of renewed Arab offensives in the absence of an agreement on those terms.⁷⁰⁴

Dobrynin, however, suggests that this meeting was an earnest attempt by Brezhnev to warn Nixon and Kissinger of the growing danger of an Arab-Israeli war. After all, as general secretary, Brezhnev was accustomed to getting what he wanted when he wanted it, and he likely did not see an unannounced late night meeting, especially on such a critical topic, as particularly intrusive. Since the Politburo felt it was increasingly difficult to restrain its Arab allies, Brezhnev believed that only closer Soviet-American coordination could prevent renewed armed conflict, and he sought to gain Nixon’s support in this endeavor.

Unfortunately, given the “very obtrusive and clumsy manner” in which Brezhnev delivered the message, the American side was left to view this well-meaning message as a threat.⁷⁰⁵

Four months after the summit, hostilities erupted in the Middle East. On October 6, Egyptian and Syrian armies advanced on Israel from the ceasefire lines established at the end of the 1967 Six-Day War along the Suez Canal and Golan Heights. While the Arab armies initially made gains, especially in the Sinai Peninsula, the Israeli army eventually halted the offensive, turned back the Arab coalition, and advanced into Syrian and Egyptian territory. On October 22, with joint American and Soviet support, the UN Security Council passed Resolution No. 338, declaring an agreement on a ceasefire. However, hostilities resumed

⁷⁰⁴ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 297.

⁷⁰⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 283.

within a few hours. The Israeli army took additional territory, coming within twenty-five miles of Damascus and sixty-three miles of Cairo before a second ceasefire took effect on October 25, effectively ending the war.

As soon as hostilities began, the backchannel sprung into action. Kissinger called Dobrynin from New York on October 6 at 6:40 a.m., waking him up to inform him that the Israelis anticipated an Arab offensive. He implied that the Soviet authorities knew of these plans in advance, since Soviet officials stationed in the region were evacuating Soviet civilians from Damascus and Cairo. Kissinger informed Dobrynin that they were contacting the Israelis, encouraging restraint, and Dobrynin promised to ask Moscow to make the same demands of their Arab allies.⁷⁰⁶ They spoke an additional thirteen times that day, emphasizing the importance of preventing the conflict from destroying the superpowers' progress in détente. Kissinger and Dobrynin both described the developments as “madness,” with Kissinger telling his counterpart, “We should, I think, use this occasion to first not to have everything we have achieved destroyed by maniacs on either side and after quieting it down to see what can be done constructively.”⁷⁰⁷

Initially, Kissinger proposed restoring the 1967 ceasefire line and establishing a fact-finding commission through the UN Security Council, then continuing the private discussions started by Kissinger and Gromyko. He hoped to avoid a fight over who started the conflict to avoid the “hell of a mess” that would ensue if Soviet and American officials were compelled to defend their allies publicly. Dobrynin described it as a constructive

⁷⁰⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 6, 1973, 6:40 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁰⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 6, 1973, 9:20 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

beginning and promised to wire Moscow for confirmation.⁷⁰⁸ By the end of the day, the Soviet side agreed with the American side's concerns about the conflict and promising a future message about the potential for joint action, but argued against holding an emergency session of the Security Council, which could lead to a public Soviet-American kerfuffle, as both sides rushed to defend their allies.⁷⁰⁹

Dobrynin frequently gave short and tentative answers to Kissinger's questions during these initial phone calls, reflecting both his disappointment with events in the developing world and his frustration with being kept out of the loop. Dobrynin later described the attack as a "complete surprise," and as with other examples of Soviet involvement in crises in the developing world, Dobrynin received no telegrams on the subject of growing military tensions in the Middle East. He was not informed of the evacuation of Soviet civilians from Egypt and Syria or the conversation between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the Soviet ambassador in Cairo in which Sadat hinted at the eruption of hostilities in the near future.⁷¹⁰ Left in the dark by his own government, Dobrynin had little information on the attitudes or policies of Kremlin officials, and he dealt with his shock over the outbreak of the war by remaining as noncommittal as possible in responding to Kissinger's comments.

On the evening of the first day of hostilities, Kissinger and Dobrynin shared a phone conversation indicating the extent to which the backchannel facilitated superpower cooperation. In deference to Soviet concerns about putting the issue to the Security Council,

⁷⁰⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 6, 1973, 9:35 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁰⁹ Scowcroft-Dobrynin Telephone Conversations, October 6, 1973, 2:10 PM, and October 6, 1973, 5:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 289-90. In fact, at the start of the war, Dobrynin and Kissinger agreed that they previously thought they would have at least three additional months of peace in the region to work out an agreement. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 6, 1973, 11:25 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

Kissinger agreed to delay the decision until the following morning, and he asked Dobrynin to explain Soviet intentions. Dobrynin acknowledged that the conflict put the Soviet leadership in a “difficult position publicly.” Since the Arab states believed that they were retaking land that been stolen from them by Israel in the 1967 war, the Soviet side could not simply tell them to retreat to the ceasefire lines. By asking the Arab leaders to withdraw from land they previously controlled, Dobrynin told Kissinger that “it would look like we are trying to sell them out” or that the Soviet leadership was in collusion with the US and Israel. Kissinger expressed his understanding of the Soviet situation and agreed with Dobrynin’s recommendation that due to these conditions, it should be the Nixon, not Brezhnev, who contacted the Egyptian leadership to keep this issue out of the UN General Assembly, where it would turn into a “bloodbath.”

Still, Kissinger emphasized to Dobrynin that the military situation seemed to be tilting dramatically in Israel’s favor, meaning that the Arab states would be best off agreeing to a ceasefire, retreating to the 1967 lines, and using this outburst to reinforce their point that a solution should be brokered in the immediate future. Dobrynin did not know how to make the surrendering of their own territory, even in a temporary sense, palatable to the Egyptians, and the pair agreed to work overnight on formulations that could lead to a resolution. Kissinger told Dobrynin that the results of the next few days would either serve as a validation of their work in the backchannel or as the event that destroyed détente. He reminded the Soviet ambassador that they had handled these sorts of problems in private before and nothing prevented them from doing so again.⁷¹¹

While talks between Kissinger and Dobrynin remained largely constructive during the

⁷¹¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 6, 1973, 7:20 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

war, they also could be tense. For example, on October 9, Kissinger read Dobrynin a message from Jordan, stating that its representative in the capital city of Amman told the Jordanian king that the Soviet leadership wanted all Arab states to enter battle as soon as possible. Dobrynin called it an “unbelievable story,” and Kissinger suggested that, while the American side had not jumped to conclusions, the Soviet leadership should encourage calm in the region.⁷¹² An hour later, Kissinger was less charitable, and after reading another report confirming this story, he told Dobrynin, “I hope Moscow understands that if it turns out that you fooled us, you are going to pay a heavy price in your relationship with us.”⁷¹³ The following day, Dobrynin protested a quote attributed to the State Department about “Russian irresponsibility” in handling the crisis. Kissinger promised to instill greater discipline in his newfound position as Secretary of State.⁷¹⁴ As talks for a ceasefire dragged on, Kissinger blamed the Soviet Union for slowing progress, angrily telling Dobrynin that the Americans planned to “wash our hands of it and let nature take its course.”⁷¹⁵ A few hours later, Dobrynin read a telegram from Moscow blaming the US for the lack of a settlement, pointing to the ways in which their insistence on waiting for British and Australian support slowed progress to a halt. The Soviet airlift of supplies to the Arab states and the American airlift to Israel each provoked heated responses from the backchannel partners.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 9, 1973, 11:29 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 9, 1973, 12:32 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹⁴ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 10, 1973, 9:45 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 13, 1973, 5:00 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 13, 1973, 7:55 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

During a visit to Moscow between October 20 and 22, Kissinger brokered a deal with the Soviet leadership on a ceasefire that became UN Security Council Resolution 338. However, several violations of the ceasefire led to unprecedented tensions between Dobrynin and Kissinger. The use of UN peacekeeping forces quickly emerged as a main issue. The Soviet side pushed heavily for introducing peacekeeping forces on October 24, but Kissinger threatened to veto any such resolution. Dobrynin complained that the Politburo had “become so angry” that they demanded the introduction of troops, since the US “allowed the Israelis to do what they wanted,” callously violating the ceasefire agreement.⁷¹⁷ Later, Dobrynin forwarded a telegram from the Kremlin demanding the introduction of troops and warning, “if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally.” Kissinger was outraged by what he interpreted as an ultimatum and an implicit threat to use force unilaterally.⁷¹⁸ He angrily responded to Dobrynin, telling him that such an action would lead to a “very serious response.” He urged, “Don’t pressure us! I want to repeat again, don’t pressure us!”⁷¹⁹

With Nixon preoccupied by Watergate, Kissinger essentially made himself responsible for most of the important decisions during this crisis. That evening, he held a meeting with several top security and intelligence officials in the US government, after which he decided to slow down the Kremlin’s timetable for introducing troops by pushing for additional talks. This group decided that they should simultaneously back up their demand

⁷¹⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 24, 1973, 7:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷¹⁸ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 583.

⁷¹⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 24, 1973, 10:15 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

with “some noticeable action” that conveyed the seriousness with which the Americans took the situation. Therefore, they decided to raise the American alert level to DefCon III, the highest peacetime alert level, but did not directly inform the Soviet government of this shift, instead hoping that the noticeable change in alert levels would catch the Soviet leadership’s attention and bring them to the negotiating table. Kissinger, in particular, believed that this was a critical moment in the crisis, as he hoped to prevent the introduction of additional Soviet troops to the Middle East at all costs.⁷²⁰ The alert lasted until the next day, at which point discussions were well under way on the composition of the group of UN observers that would take the place of peacekeeping forces.

Dobrynin’s response to this maneuver represents a major break in the backchannel relationship, as, for the first time since 1969, the Soviet ambassador lashed out at his American partners. First, on the evening of October 26, White House Chief of Staff General Al Haig called the Soviet ambassador to clarify some of Nixon’s comments at a press conference, in which the president, attempting to divert attention from the threats of impeachment over Watergate, suggested that Brezhnev backed down to the display of power in the defense alert.⁷²¹ Dobrynin took the opportunity to describe why he found the alert so alarming. He pointed out that he talked to Kissinger “every hour on the hour,” and he would have been perfectly fine with a firm response to Brezhnev’s telegram, allowing both sides a chance to communicate their concerns and attempt to find common ground. Instead, without any communication with the embassy or over the hotline, the alert was raised, and the embassy discovered this only when it was announced on an American radio news program.

⁷²⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 587-88.

⁷²¹ Kissinger described this press conference unflatteringly as Nixon summoning Brezhnev for “a test of manhood” at a time when “calm, purposeful, determined leadership” was necessary. *Ibid.*, 606-7.

Dobrynin described this as an “artificial crisis,” complaining that it was designed to make the Soviet Union look like “weaker partners” in comparison to the “braver United States.” This put the faction of the Soviet leadership that favored détente in a difficult position, and as Dobrynin concluded, it “damaged very much of what was done” to improve Soviet-American relations over the previous four years.⁷²²

The next day, Dobrynin spoke with Kissinger, and he reiterated these themes. At first, Kissinger attempted to defend his position, emphasizing, “We had the impression that you were planning a military move. We did not invent this.” Dobrynin criticized Kissinger for not contacting Brezhnev to express American concerns about introducing a peacekeeping force to the region. Kissinger conceded that it was a “blunder,” but reaffirmed that the American side was convinced that the Soviet leadership was about to embark on a unilateral action. Dobrynin cut him off, coldly stating that he could have waited an hour for additional information from Brezhnev, but Kissinger evidently “didn’t want to have it.” Dobrynin then reminded Kissinger of Nixon’s comparison of the October War to the Cuban Missile Crisis, exacerbating an already tense situation. Kissinger protested, “Don’t remind me of that. It was not well done.” Dobrynin fired back, “It was done badly. It was unbelievable.” Kissinger pleaded, “Too much is at stake for us to be angry with each other. Let’s not have it fester. As a friend—” Dobrynin interrupted, noting that he had gotten over it after two days, but that the anger in Moscow remained palpable.⁷²³

Indeed, Victor Israelyan, who served on an improvised group that took notes and prepared talking points for the Politburo during the October War, has written about how the

⁷²² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 26, 1973, 8:04 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷²³ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 27, 1973, 11:24 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

conflict exacerbated tensions in the Politburo over the future of détente. As Israelyan states, most members of the Politburo wanted to take meaningful action. Defense Minister Grechko and KGB Chairman Andropov proposed some form of mobilization and others requested an increased state of readiness. Kosygin and Gromyko cautioned that such moves could lead to an escalation of the confrontation, and after two hours of fiery debate, Brezhnev suggested waiting, allowing Nixon to cool down, and reopening negotiations in Washington.⁷²⁴ This account illuminates Dobrynin's comments about how Kissinger's decisions caused problems in the Kremlin for Soviet supporters of détente, and it demonstrates how Kissinger's actions made it harder for Brezhnev to promote détente, as it lent ammunition to those in the Politburo who would oppose future initiatives with the Nixon administration.

Dobrynin continued his assault on Kissinger in the following weeks. On October 27, Dobrynin complained about Kissinger's protests when the Soviet Union sent 70 observers to the Middle East, noting that the US side already had more than 100 in place. When Kissinger continued to hedge, Dobrynin suggested that Kissinger griped about the number "just to make a point that you are tough." After Kissinger asked that they not go from cooperation to contests over toughness in a week, Dobrynin pressed the matter until the secretary of state finally ended the conversation with a promise to call him back.⁷²⁵ Two days later, Dobrynin asked Kissinger to arrange an appointment with the president, since he had to deliver a message from Brezhnev about the "crisis of confidence" that now existed at the level of the two heads of state. Dobrynin emphasized that he should deliver it personally, since he had spent so much time and energy in improving Soviet-American relations over the

⁷²⁴ Victor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 180-83.

⁷²⁵ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 27, 1973, 12:20 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

previous decade, making the recent turn of events particularly difficult for him to swallow.⁷²⁶

The following day, Kissinger proposed that they hold the meeting at Camp David, mirroring previous moments when the American side proposed a showier venue for talks to highlight the importance of the conversation. Dobrynin agreed to the meeting with the president and dinner with Kissinger, but when the secretary of state proposed that he stay longer for a movie or additional socializing, Dobrynin told Kissinger that he would have to return by nine or ten in the evening. Kissinger attempted to lighten up the mood with a joke, telling Dobrynin that the press release would suggest that they were taking him to Camp David to keep him as a hostage, but Dobrynin refused to play along, coldly stating, “If you like.”⁷²⁷ As Dobrynin later wrote, he was “rather angry” at Kissinger for the crisis that emerged following the DefCon III incident, since it was contrary to the spirit of détente and the provisions of the Basic Principles and the PNW.⁷²⁸ His frosty attitude in the weeks after the crisis reflects these feelings of betrayal, as the person with whom he had worked to put the superpower relationship on a new course demonstrated callousness in ignoring those agreements and placing it on rocky ground. Dobrynin’s emotional response intimates genuine anger, as his negotiating partner in the backchannel flouted recent agreements and, perhaps more importantly, the spirit of their partnership.

The October War brought the US and the USSR precariously close to conflict. Robert Dallek rated it at “possibly the most serious international crisis of Nixon’s

⁷²⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 29, 1973, 9:20 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷²⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 30, 1973, 10:27 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷²⁸ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 297.

presidency.”⁷²⁹ Despite Dobrynin’s frustration with Kissinger in the aftermath of the war, the backchannel perhaps prevented the conflict from spreading. Both diplomats consciously used the legacy of what they had done over the previous four years to encourage caution from their partners. For example, on October 24, Kissinger tried to reassure Dobrynin, discussing the importance of preserving détente, “Now the important thing is for you and us to stay together having made this historic achievement We’ve got to stay together for the peace settlement. That is the most important thing.”⁷³⁰ Two days later, Dobrynin emphasized these same feelings to White House Chief of Staff General Alexander Haig: “It is very important to keep the personal relationship as strong as it was before. . . . It is very important now to keep really everything as much as possible intact.”⁷³¹

Memoir accounts reinforce the point that the backchannel played a critical role in ameliorating tensions between the superpowers during the October War. Sonnenfeldt, who was critical of the backchannel in many ways, proclaimed it to be a “good thing” in this case, as “it might not have worked out quite that smoothly” if negotiated through normal channels.⁷³² Moreover, as Dobrynin concludes in his memoirs, “The Middle East War never grew into a direct military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States—in contrast to the Cuban crisis—precisely because of the remarkable new level of Soviet-American relations.”⁷³³ Indeed, the personal relationship between Soviet and American

⁷²⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 520.

⁷³⁰ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 24, 1973, 10:10 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷³¹ Haig-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 26, 1973, 8:04 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷³² Interview with Helmut Sonnenfeldt, July 24, 2000, *The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2007son01>.

⁷³³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 300.

leaders motivated the two sides to broker a resolution to the crisis in order to prevent a breakdown in the relations they had worked so hard to construct.

Yet this crisis raised questions about détente in both capitals that eventually overwhelmed the backchannel's ability to cope with crises. Dobrynin wrote that the Soviet leadership began to question if the Nixon administration would cooperate "when it really mattered," and they wondered if the US actually intended to begin a military campaign against the Soviet Union. They feared the potential for crises in the developing world to derail progress in Soviet-American relations. While they remained committed to détente, enthusiasm for future initiatives cooled and the war seemed to highlight the limits of détente rather than its strengths.⁷³⁴ Kissinger later reflected that he was pleased with the end result of the crisis, with Egypt drifting closer toward the US, which would then be in a position to broker a Middle East peace without Soviet interference. Still, Kissinger's anxiety over what he saw as Brezhnev's unprecedented ultimatum is palpable in his memoirs, suggesting that even he saw this as a foreboding development in superpower relations.

Watergate

If Brezhnev truly believed that the threat of nuclear conflict could be eliminated, as he claimed in his televised address to the US public at the 1973 summit, his hopes were soon crushed, as the Watergate scandal eventually limited the administration's ability to control foreign policy. The scandal began on June 17, 1972, when five men were arrested for breaking and entering into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate building complex in Washington. The men carried money that the FBI quickly

⁷³⁴ Ibid., 301.

traced to the “slush fund” of Nixon’s personal campaign organization, the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP). Despite this information, the public did not suspect that top administration officials were involved in planning the operation until early 1973, when one of the convicted burglars implicated the White House and campaign leaders to the judge, who quickly passed it on to the Erwin Committee, established by Democratic senators investigating the campaign’s behavior.

By mid-March, Nixon spent most of his time attempting to cover up his involvement in the scandal, as White House officials started talking to the Erwin Committee and the Justice Department. On April 30, Nixon announced the resignations of Chief of Staff H. R. Haldemann and counsel John Ehrlichman and the firing of counsel John Dean, who had been in charge of the cover-up. Dean’s testimony, in particular, became a public sensation, as he described the various measures taken to hide the White House and the Nixon campaign’s involvement in the burglary. In mid-July, testimony revealed that Nixon had been taping all conversations in his offices, with the logbooks showing entries on key dates in the Watergate chronology. Nixon fought to keep the tapes out of the investigation, claiming executive privilege, but from April to August 1973, Watergate dominated the headlines, leaving Nixon a nervous wreck struggling to fulfill the duties of the presidency.⁷³⁵

The controversy came to a head in October 1973, in the midst of the Arab-Israeli War, when the appeals process ended and Nixon was ordered to turn over the tapes. The president attempted to work around the order to limit what would be released to the investigation and the public. Nixon also ordered his attorney general to fire the special prosecutor in charge of investigating the scandal. The attorney general and his deputy

⁷³⁵ Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 378-83.

resigned rather than fulfill the order and, while the special prosecutor was eventually fired, the so-called “Saturday Night Massacre” of October 20 destroyed Nixon’s credibility. Most Americans believed that, if Nixon would go to such lengths to prevent the release of the tapes, he must have been much more involved than previously imagined. When Nixon finally submitted the tapes to the authorities, eighteen and a half minutes of key sections were missing, setting off a new media firestorm implicating Nixon in the cover-up.

Ultimately, the House organized impeachment hearings.⁷³⁶ Through the winter of 1974, several tapes were released to the public, revealing what historian William Bundy has described as “the President’s endless discussions with his aides of ways to put pressure on people and corrupt them.” The White House appealed to the Supreme Court for a ruling on executive privilege, hoping to avoid turning over the remainder of its tapes, but its appeal failed on July 24, with all eight judges ruling that executive privilege existed but did not supersede a subpoena based on the need to gather materials for a criminal investigation of senior officials in the executive branch. Between July 27 and 30, the House approved three of the five articles of impeachment against the president, and White House lawyers reviewed the tapes and determined that a “smoking gun” implicated Nixon. Nixon yielded to Republican pressure on August 7 and agreed to resign. He left the White House two days later.⁷³⁷

Until late 1973, Dobrynin avoided reporting extensively on the Watergate scandal, misreading it as a minor blip in presidential affairs that would soon pass. In April, five days before the firing of Ehrlichman and Haldemann, Kissinger raised Watergate in a telephone

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 425-27.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., 460-62.

conversation, joking that Nixon had been “occupied with domestic matters.” Dobrynin promised Kissinger that he had been playing it down in his reports.⁷³⁸ In May, Kissinger brought up Watergate for the first time, assuring Dobrynin that Nixon would not resign, and Dobrynin showed his support by complaining to Kissinger about the sensationalist press coverage of Watergate.⁷³⁹ Following his pre-summit trip to Moscow, Kissinger told Nixon that Dobrynin did not care about Watergate, as he complained only about “the amateurishness of the guys who did it” and asking why it was done out of the White House. Kissinger assured Nixon that the Soviet leadership’s only concern was the Democrats, whom they perceived as the major stumbling block to détente.⁷⁴⁰ Kissinger even reported to Nixon in July 1973 that Dobrynin found it “incomprehensible” that “a country could do to itself what we have been doing,” especially considering what seemed to him to be a minor offense. The Soviet ambassador merely requested that he explain to Moscow that Nixon intended to stay, which Kissinger gladly confirmed.⁷⁴¹ Dobrynin would not have been alone in underestimating the extent of Watergate as late as the summer of 1973, with other experts still believing the Nixon would hold on to office. Still, his vehement defense of the Nixon administration reflects his desire to stroke Kissinger’s ego, assuring the egotistical American diplomat that his opponents were in the wrong and that the Nixon administration would overcome this challenge.

⁷³⁸ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, April 25, 1973, 9:31 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷³⁹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversations, May 24, 1973, 6:40 PM, and June 3, 1973, 12:30 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts; and Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 274.

⁷⁴⁰ Conversation between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), May 11, 1973, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 451-53.

⁷⁴¹ Memorandum of Kissinger-Dobrynin Conversation (US), July 30, 1973, NSArch, The Kissinger Transcripts.

By the October War, Dobrynin displayed a more acute awareness of the problems posed by Watergate, especially after Nixon's disastrous press conference on October 26. During Dobrynin's phone call with Kissinger the following day, when the Soviet ambassador began his assault on the secretary of state for his behavior during the crisis, Kissinger attempted to explain that Nixon's performance could "only be explained in terms of emotional stress over a domestic situation." In this sense, unlike Haig, who tried to tell Dobrynin the previous evening that the poor performance simply came as a result of a bad choice of words, Kissinger emphasized the impact that Watergate had on Nixon's psyche, effectively allowing him to throw a wrench into Soviet-American relations. Dobrynin explained that he understood this problem, but remained steadfast in his condemnation of the speech.⁷⁴²

A letter from KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov to Brezhnev confirms the Soviet ambassador's conclusion that Nixon's behavior during the October War was directly tied to Watergate. Andropov speculated that, as the threat of impeachment became more real, the Jewish lobby in Congress could limit Nixon's actions and his capacity for implementing agreements reached with Soviet authorities.⁷⁴³ In response, Brezhnev included a supportive statement in reference to Watergate in his letter to Nixon on November 10, as the Soviet and American leaderships struggled to come to grips with the legacy of the October War. Brezhnev emphasized that he and his colleagues viewed "with understanding" the "complexities" faced by the Nixon administration in establishing détente. Furthermore, Brezhnev wrote, "We would like, so to say, to wish you in a personal human way energy and

⁷⁴² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, October 27, 1973, 11:24 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁴³ Pis'mo Iu. Andropova L.I. Brezhnevu o polozhenii na Blizhnem Vostoke, October 29, 1973, Box 24, Folder 11, Dmitrii Antonovich Volkogonov Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

success in overcoming all sorts of complexities, the causes of which are not so easy to understand at a distance.”⁷⁴⁴ Brezhnev never addressed Watergate directly, but he demonstrated a surprising degree of support for the president, indicating Brezhnev’s understanding of détente as something that relied on top-level personal diplomacy. Brezhnev’s letter denotes that he appreciated how the pressures of Watergate helped spur the October War breakdown, and he sought to ameliorate that problem and bolster détente by expressing personal support for Nixon’s cause.

By January, Watergate became an impediment to the ability of the White House to conduct foreign policy on its own. Kissinger reassured Dobrynin in several backchannel conversations that the new vice president, Gerald Ford, asked him privately to continue as secretary of state in the event that he succeeded Nixon, ensuring the extension of détente. Moreover, Kissinger suggested at that point that he was coming to grips with the probability that Nixon would have to leave office, and he complained of Congressional interference in his work.⁷⁴⁵ By March, they found themselves dealing with questions about the integrity of the backchannel. In particular, Kissinger informed Dobrynin that somebody told him that the only person in the Soviet government left with faith in Nixon and Kissinger was the Soviet ambassador. Dobrynin called it “nonsense,” and Kissinger assured him that he believed this.⁷⁴⁶ Kissinger demonstrated his resolve in the backchannel up to the very end of the Nixon administration. On July 13, the week before Dobrynin left for a long vacation that kept him out of Washington during the final weeks of Nixon’s presidency, Kissinger

⁷⁴⁴ Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XV: Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington: GPO, 2011), 625-29.

⁷⁴⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 306.

⁷⁴⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, March 23, 1974, 3:35 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

informed him that he would stay in Washington for the summer, vowing to “restore a little discipline” and “show some of my opponents in this town that I did not survive for five and a half years by being a pushover.”⁷⁴⁷

Even when the Nixon presidency seemed doomed, the backchannel retained its characteristic humor and cooperative attitude. In July, for example, Kissinger pointed to a rumor that Dobrynin would be returning to Moscow to take the position of Foreign Minister. Dobrynin chided Kissinger for having poor sources, and Kissinger cracked that they would have to take the wiretap off the Kremlin, with Dobrynin joking that the White House should fire whoever makes them, since they were not good enough. The discussion briefly took a more earnest tone, with Kissinger stating that he would be “torn” by such a development. Dobrynin would receive a more important position, but Kissinger said he would “hate to lose a personal friend here.”⁷⁴⁸ This conversation played on many familiar themes, including jokes about the American and Soviet bureaucracies, Cold War espionage, and even the topic of wiretaps, referencing the Watergate scandal.

Ironically, the Watergate scandal managed to bring Nixon and Brezhnev closer together. The two leaders opened a channel of personal communication about Watergate, creating what Zubok has described as an “increasingly surreal” situation, as “the isolated president began to view partnership with the general secretary as a peaceful island in the storm-tossed sea of the Watergate scandal.”⁷⁴⁹ The Soviet general secretary, believing “that the scandal was being used against Nixon by opponents of détente,” provided a sympathetic

⁷⁴⁷ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, July 12, 1974, 10:09 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 241.

ear. In Zubok's words, Brezhnev was "Nixon's staunch friend and supporter, probably the last he had among the leaders of great nations, including his own."⁷⁵⁰ With Nixon's morale at a low, Brezhnev sent him a letter on May 28, 1974, designed to bolster Nixon's self-esteem before the summit that Dobrynin describes as "unprecedented in the history of [Soviet-American] relations." Brezhnev praised Nixon's resilience and his decision to push forward with improving the Soviet-American relationship. He wrote:

This is the only way for a statesman confident in the correctness of his chosen course and well aware of the weakness of those who, for their narrow purposes or for reasons of shortsightedness, come out against his policy. In such cases you really need stamina and spiritual strength. Surely there are people in the United States and elsewhere who expect Richard Nixon to give way and break down. But, as we note with satisfaction, you are not going to please them in that respect.⁷⁵¹

Dobrynin notes that the president was "clearly moved" by the message, and that the irony of the situation was that, at the twilight of his presidency, Nixon, "the old cold warrior," appeared to warm to the Soviet Union, becoming "frank, direct, and cynical" in talks, perhaps spurred by the growing isolation he experienced during the Watergate scandal. He believes that the personal relationship with Brezhnev helped considerably, writing, "after all, we are all human."⁷⁵² Perhaps more accurately, Nixon and Brezhnev were both figures who valued strong individual leadership in government, believing that personal diplomacy could break through many of the roadblocks to progress in superpower talks, and neither fully grasped how a scandal like Watergate could bring down a president.

Therefore, during the Watergate crisis, the leadership of both superpowers viewed closer relations as important. While Nixon sought greater support from abroad as a means to

⁷⁵⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 302.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 310-11.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 305; 310-11.

counterbalance his increased “isolation” at home, Brezhnev drew closer to the president in an effort to preserve Soviet gains in détente, fearful that American opponents of détente would use the crisis to stop SALT II negotiations and rekindle the Cold War. This development, Brezhnev understood, would discredit his approach to foreign policy at home, weaken his arguments for détente, and require additional defense spending that the Soviet Union could not afford. By August 9, 1974, when Nixon resigned, his relationship with Brezhnev was the closest it had ever been.

This attitude was reflected in the Soviet press at the time, which Brezhnev ordered to avoid anti-Nixon themes.⁷⁵³ *Pravda* developed three tactics to deal with Watergate. First, it ignored the crisis, choosing instead to cover other scandals happening around the world. Those included an Italian “Mail Scandal,” reported five days before Nixon’s resignation, a drought in the US, and inflation, which *Pravda* described as “problem number one for the USA.”⁷⁵⁴ Second, it focused on Nixon’s second trip to Moscow in June 1974, which Fraser J. Harbutt describes as “a third showy summit spectacular” organized by the Soviets to help the president counter his crumbling image at home.⁷⁵⁵ In fact, little was accomplished at the summit, as the White House wanted to dodge criticism from the Right for being weak on foreign policy issues and Kissinger hoped to avoid publicity that could drag him down the “political whirlpool” of Watergate.⁷⁵⁶ Three days before Nixon’s resignation, *Pravda* printed

⁷⁵³ Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 234.

⁷⁵⁴ See V. Drobkov, “Pochtovyi skandal,” *Pravda*, August 4, 1974, 5; “Zasukhoi v SShA,” *Pravda*, July 30, 1974, 5; and “Trevozhnye signaly v ekonomike zapada,” *Pravda*, August 6, 1974, 5.

⁷⁵⁵ Harbutt, *The Cold War Era*, 234.

⁷⁵⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 311. While no progress on SALT was made at the third summit, the two sides signed agreements limiting underground nuclear tests, reducing the number of ABM systems from two to one per side, forbidding environmental warfare, and producing rules to govern the replacement, dismantling or destruction of strategic weapons.

a retrospective on the warming of Soviet-American relations since Nixon took office, and the newspaper placed special emphasis on the third summit. The article states, “Wide circles of the world public give high marks to the work accomplished during the negotiations. The third Soviet-American summit . . . began an important stage in the cause of eliminating the danger of war and improving the international political climate on the whole.”⁷⁵⁷

Finally, when the scandal reached a boiling point, the newspaper defended Nixon’s innocence. For example, when an August 3 article reported that the House “came to a preliminary agreement to begin debate on the question of impeachment of the president on August 19,” *Pravda* stood by the president. “A representative of the White House again announced that the president is confident of the fact that if the members of the House of Representatives carefully and impartially weigh the facts, they will come to the conclusion that the charges advanced by the commission do not hold up, the article said.”⁷⁵⁸ Once Nixon’s resignation became imminent, the newspaper assured its readers that détente would carry on regardless. The August 9 article that predicts the president’s resignation that day also includes quotes from Kissinger and Democratic Senate Majority Leader Michael Mansfield confirming that détente would continue.⁷⁵⁹ The next day, when the paper announced Nixon’s resignation and Ford’s rise to the presidency, it repeated these assurances. Even the seven-sentence biography of Ford notes, “In his address, G. Ford stated his opinion in support of the policy of the normalization of Soviet-American relations and favorably appraised the results of the Soviet-American summits.”⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁷ G. Alekseev and S. Gerasimov, “V interesakh vsego chelovechestva,” *Pravda*, August 6, 1974, 4.

⁷⁵⁸ “V palate predstavitelei kongressa SShA,” *Pravda*, August 3, 1974, 5.

⁷⁵⁹ “K otstavke R. Niksona,” *Pravda*, August 9, 1974, 1.

⁷⁶⁰ “Dzh. Ford – novyi prezident SShA,” *Pravda*, August 10, 1974, 1.

A focus on the Soviet Embassy's activities reveals that the Watergate scandal represented one of the few cases in which Dobrynin's reporting to the Kremlin failed to convey the gravity of the situation.⁷⁶¹ Dobrynin's supportive comments to Kissinger, trashing the media frenzy around Nixon's fall and the allegations against the administration, can be dismissed as examples of Dobrynin buttering up his negotiating partner to put him in a more cooperative mood. Still, Brezhnev and the rest of the Soviet leadership remained woefully clueless about the real reasons behind Nixon's fall, as their own experience in authoritarian government led them to believe that a strong president, such as Nixon, could effectively overcome any challenges posed by Congress. As Dobrynin later conceded: "The Kremlin still believed that the real source was some conspiracy by anti-Soviet and pro-Zionist groups trying to scuttle Nixon's policy of good relations with Moscow. Even Gromyko held that opinion." Dobrynin insists that he attempted to explain Nixon's violations of American law, but the Soviet leadership refused to listen, as "they never even thought possible such a thing as the criminal prosecution of the highest authority."⁷⁶²

Yet Dobrynin's memoirs also reveal subtle hedging on his claim that he successfully communicated the situation to Soviet authorities. When explaining that Soviet authorities did not believe that Nixon's resignation was a possibility as late as April and May 1974, he

⁷⁶¹ In the debate about Watergate's effects on American foreign policy, Kissinger and Dobrynin maintain that it played a central role in the deteriorating role of Soviet-American relations. Dobrynin points to the ways that Watergate strengthened the position of the opponents of détente. Kissinger adds that it eroded executive authority and made Soviet leaders bolder in their adventures in the developing world. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 311-12; and Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 122-23; 300-1. On the other side of the argument, Robert Dallek has argued that while Watergate undermined Nixon's ability to act overseas, it did not substantially change the thrust of American foreign policy, and many of the restrictions on the administration's policies came from other sources. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, 495-96.

⁷⁶² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 310. In his memoirs, published fifteen years later, Gromyko came closer to the truth, describing the legal reasons for Watergate, even if he only went so far as to say that senior White House officials were implicated in the crime. Still, he described it as a "minor episode" that, he lamented, "almost totally obscured the positive aspects of the Nixon administration's activities in the sphere of relations with the Soviet Union." Gromyko, *Memoirs*, 278-79.

concedes that he was “cautious” in predicting such an event in writing to the Kremlin, even if he recognized the possibility.⁷⁶³ By the end of the 1974 summit, roughly a month before Nixon’s resignation, Brezhnev remained convinced that Nixon would finish out his term, while Gromyko predicted that he would hold out for a year.⁷⁶⁴ Dobrynin explains that Nixon’s resignation came as “an unpleasant surprise” to the Soviet leadership, who still did not understand how “a powerful president could be forced into resignation by public pressure and an intricate judicial procedure based on the American Constitution.”⁷⁶⁵ Overall, these sources suggest that Dobrynin’s reporting on this matter failed to explain to the Kremlin the significance of the issue. Moreover, they highlight the mental divide between the embassy and the Kremlin, as Dobrynin found himself unable to explain something with no analogous examples in Soviet politics to Soviet bureaucrats with little to no experience in American affairs. Finally, Dobrynin’s reporting on Watergate reflects his own cultural biases, as even he had difficulty understanding how this scandal could bring down Nixon until spring 1973, despite his extensive experience working in the US. Never before had Dobrynin witnessed Congress threaten the executive branch’s authority in such a direct manner, and perhaps relying on Soviet images of an imperial presidency or accepting Kissinger’s claims that the White House could single-handedly make foreign policy, the Soviet ambassador failed to anticipate the potential consequences of Watergate.

“Things Will Continue as They Were”

The discussions between Kissinger and Dobrynin at the start of the Ford presidency

⁷⁶³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 310.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

reflected the optimism that, without the weight of Watergate, a return to the glory days of détente would be possible. Dobrynin ended his vacation on the Black Sea a month early, sharing his first phone call with Kissinger three days after Ford took office. Kissinger joked that he just told Ford earlier in the morning that Dobrynin would likely return early, so Dobrynin was making him look like a “great man” in front of his new boss. Dobrynin laughed and shot back that he came back to Washington only because Brezhnev thought that being with Kissinger would prove more relaxing for the Soviet ambassador than lounging on the Black Sea coast. Kissinger agreed to arrange for a presidential meeting to allow Dobrynin to deliver a personal message from Brezhnev, and, expressing delight at the Soviet ambassador’s homecoming, he declared, “I need not tell you that things will continue as they were.”⁷⁶⁶ Meeting with Ford two days later, Dobrynin came away from the meeting with “a favorable impression” of the president and the conviction that Kissinger would control American foreign policy.⁷⁶⁷

Indeed, the initial months after Ford took office showed great promise. In his first meeting with Dobrynin, the new president proposed a meeting with Brezhnev in Vladivostok devoted to a friendly, if preliminary review of the problems facing Soviet and American policymakers, as well as a discussion of a future SALT agreement.⁷⁶⁸ Kissinger visited Moscow for talks in October, setting a new basis for SALT II. During the Nixon-Brezhnev summit four months earlier, negotiations followed on the basis of “offsetting asymmetries.” For example, the American side would agree to trade a Soviet advantage in launchers for an

⁷⁶⁶ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, August 12, 1974, 10:37 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁶⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 320-21.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 322-23.

American edge in warheads. In order to avoid controversy at home, though, where critics of détente liked to point to the asymmetries and claim that the American side accepted a disadvantage, Ford demanded that Kissinger attempt to achieve equal aggregates, with the Soviet and American sides receiving identical ceilings in launchers and missiles.

SALT II was also the first set of negotiations covering multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), single ICBMs and LBMs with multiple warheads that could strike several targets at once.⁷⁶⁹ Ford arrived for the “mini-summit” in November, and on this basis, managed to achieve an agreement with common ceilings for launchers and MIRVed missiles for the next ten years. Dobrynin described this as a real victory for détente, noting that “the Vladivostok agreement became a significant starting-point for all subsequent nuclear disarmament talks. . . . Regardless of its technical merits or deficiencies, the Vladivostok summit provided a sense of continuity to the SALT process.”⁷⁷⁰ In other words, Ford picked up where Nixon left off in his meetings with Brezhnev, producing a viable SALT agreement in his first four months in office and ensuring that détente could continue.

Personal relations between superpower diplomats remained cordial. In the backchannel, for example, Kissinger and Dobrynin casually discussed various health concerns, with the secretary of state recommending Vice President Nelson Rockefeller’s osteopath when Dobrynin complained of a bad back.⁷⁷¹ When Kissinger requested additional accommodations for American journalists in Vladivostok, he joked about Vladivostok’s status as a closed city and a military base, noting that if there was not enough space in the

⁷⁶⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 277-79.

⁷⁷⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 331-33.

⁷⁷¹ Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, December 2, 1974, 10:23 AM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

normal facilities, the Soviet side could place them near the military airport or the harbor, where they could take pictures of Soviet ships. Kissinger also proposed that the Soviet side could choose between adding ten journalists or accepting a ceiling of 100 fewer ICBMs. Dobrynin shot back that Kissinger always provided such difficult options to choose from, and he promised to telegram Moscow and get back to him the following day.⁷⁷²

Relations between Ford and Brezhnev also seemed to begin well at Vladivostok. In their first conversation, they mentioned their desire to build a relationship with similar warmth to that shared between Nixon and Brezhnev, and they traded plenty of banter. At one point, Brezhnev noted Kissinger's love of *pirozhki*, or traditional Russian baked or fried buns with meat or vegetable filling. Kissinger joked that he had gained twenty-five pounds due to détente by eating so much food during talks. Ford quipped that the sugar shortage in America was solely due to Kissinger's eating habits.⁷⁷³ Like the breakthrough in SALT that led to the success of the Vladivostok summit, the development of friendly personal relations suggested that positive breakthroughs in Soviet-American relations could still be achieved, in spite of the Watergate scandal and the loss of Nixon.

This optimism proved fleeting. Soon after their first meeting at Vladivostok, when Ford and Brezhnev retired to separate cabins for rest, Brezhnev had the first of two seizures that would strike him during this trip to the east. Not only was the general secretary under considerable stress, having flown 7,000 miles for a summit that still had questions to be settled in top-tier negotiations, but he also began to suffer from atherosclerosis, which

⁷⁷² Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, November 15, 1974, 4:28 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁷⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation (US), November 23, 1974, 2:30 PM, NSArch, The Kissinger Transcripts.

produced moments of asthenia after strain.⁷⁷⁴ His progressively debilitating illness, along with his habit of popping sedatives, left Brezhnev less capable of running the day-to-day affairs of government and managing crises.⁷⁷⁵ Dobrynin recalls that things went downhill from here, arguing that Brezhnev's illness slowed the summit process, ensuring that personal diplomacy at the highest level could not overcome the various stumbling blocks that faced superpower diplomats. To his credit, Brezhnev not only stuck through negotiations, but also wielded his authority as general secretary to put down opposition from Defense Minister Grechko when he had to make further concessions to complete the SALT agreement.⁷⁷⁶ Still, over time, Brezhnev's condition grew weaker, and his ability to control the different factions of the Politburo dwindled.

Furthermore, a resurgent Democratic majority in the Senate, emboldened by the Watergate scandal, sought to reclaim a role in foreign policy. The main protagonist of this story, Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, represented a unique blend of pro-New Deal Democrat and Cold Warrior, and he found détente to be a "perversion and a strategic mistake." As journalist Gal Beckerman writes in his history of the Soviet Jewry, Jackson believed that "the greatest sin of détente was that it let America turn a blind eye to the internal character of the Soviet Union while making an illusory peace." Two and a half months after the 1972 summit, *The New York Times* published an article explaining that the

⁷⁷⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 329.

⁷⁷⁵ Chazov, *Zdorov'e i vlast': Vospominaniia "kremlevskogo vracha"*, 75; 85; 112-13; 116-17.

⁷⁷⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 329-31. Kissinger proposed that if the Soviet leadership would exclude NATO forward-based systems from the agreement, the US side would waive limitations on Soviet "Satan" missiles and the number of their warheads. Brezhnev had to call the Politburo members, who were asleep at the time, to receive permission. When Grechko resisted, Brezhnev yelled so loudly that he could be heard through the office walls, and he threatened to return to Moscow and call an emergency Politburo meeting. Grechko finally relented. In return for the Soviet compromise, Ford dropped his last objections to the formation of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 245.

Soviet Union instituted a new system of exit visas for Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel ostensibly to pay for their state education. The fees were tiered by level of education, with 11,000 rubles (\$13,200) for a university degree and up to \$22,000 rubles (\$25,400) for a Ph.D. This attempt by the Soviet government to discourage emigration and prevent the resultant “brain drain” of top scientists provided Jackson and his young aide Richard Perle with the perfect issue in the battle against détente. They publicized the cause of Jews in the USSR, copying Kissinger’s linkage by making the granting of MFN to the USSR contingent upon the elimination of the “diploma tax” and increased Jewish emigration. Introduced in October 1972 as an amendment to the Trade Reform Act, it finally passed through the House on December 11, 1973.⁷⁷⁷

Jackson attempted to broker a deal with the White House to ensure passage of the bill and Soviet easing of emigration restrictions. Kissinger served as a go-between to determine rates of emigration that would appease Jackson and be acceptable to the Soviet side. At a White House ceremony on October 18, 1974, Jackson signed a letter outlining Congress’s demands, and Kissinger signed a letter vouching for Soviet promises. During a subsequent press conference, Jackson described the signing of the agreement as a “historic understanding in the area of human rights.” The Soviet side, though, reacted poorly to Jackson publicizing the letters, and they felt as if the numbers in the letter did not reflect their positions. Gromyko submitted a new letter to Kissinger cancelling any deal on the amendment, but Kissinger hid the letter, hoping to push through the trade bill and deal with the Soviet side’s objections later. On December 13, the morning of the Senate vote, the Foreign Ministry released a copy of the letter to the public, but both Jackson and Kissinger

⁷⁷⁷ Beckerman, *When They Come For Us, We'll Be Gone*, 273-78.

remained calm, and the bill passed five days later, with Ford signing the bill on January 3, 1975.

The publication of the letter ultimately mattered little, since the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, along with the Stevenson Amendment, which capped the amount of credit the Soviet government could receive from the US Export-Import Bank at a mere \$300 million, pushed the Soviet leadership to pull out of the 1972 Trade Agreement. Jackson could still claim victory, insofar as Congress obtained influence in foreign policy and human rights concerns were now forever tied to concessions to the Soviet Union, but in the end, the Soviet Union did receive MFN or credits, and Kissinger could no longer claim to his negotiating partners that he had free reign in brokering deals, as his ability to back up his words with actions came into question. Moreover, the loss of Jackson's carrot of MFN status meant that the ambitious senator could not influence Jewish emigration from the USSR.⁷⁷⁸

Kissinger expressed his frustration with the Jackson-Vanik Amendment privately in meetings with his staff of State Department Soviet experts, saying, "But what bothers me about all of this is that the Soviets are getting nothing out of détente. We are pushing them everywhere and what can I deliver in Moscow?" Vowing to "have a public brawl" with Senator Henry Jackson, the primary sponsor of the Trade Bill amendment, he continued, "The same sons of bitches who drove us out of Vietnam and said it would be immoral for us to tamper with the North Vietnamese internal system now try to destroy détente and assert that it's our moral obligation to change internal Soviet policies." He concluded, "Every stinking, God damned bureaucrat in this town has reservations about cooperation with the Russians. I am not asking about their reservations." He repeated, "I am not asking about

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 300-9.

their reservations. I am asking what they can do.”⁷⁷⁹ Increasingly surrounded by unfriendly bureaucrats and politicians who hoped to cripple his ability to negotiate unilaterally, Kissinger was left to pursue his policies of détente in a world that became less receptive to his work each day.

Kissinger’s frustration with restraints on his foreign policy colored his diplomatic conversations with Brezhnev in Moscow in 1974. Although a meeting on March 25, 1974, began with the usual pleasantries, with Kissinger joking about how Brezhnev’s cigarette holder looked like a MIRV, the initial cracks in détente’s armor soon appeared. Brezhnev first discussed the “good foundation” that they had laid, promising that he would “not now speak of those who want to shake or destroy that foundation” and emphasizing his belief that “when those people become more mature they will apologize to their own people for the harm they are trying to do.” He later added: “I have never seen President Nixon disappointed with what we have done. Only [Senator] Jackson. . . . And he is not America.”⁷⁸⁰ At this point, however, the two men could still joke about the matter. Two days later, for example, Brezhnev discussed his fears of the growing sentiment in America that the US needed to build a larger nuclear arsenal as a display of strength. The general secretary stood up, imitating the gestures of a campaigning politician, stating that if he gave a campaign speech and called for the Soviet Union to become stronger than America, “the military men [would] say, ‘Give us the money.’” Kissinger laughed, “If you said that, Senator Jackson would give you wide publicity in America.” Amused over the number of times the senator had come up,

⁷⁷⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Soviet Staff Experts, 18 March 1974, 11:40 AM,” in *The Kissinger Transcripts*, ed. William Burr (New York: The New Press, 1999), 224-28.

⁷⁸⁰ “Kissinger-Brezhnev Conversation, 25 March 1974, 11:05 AM-1:57 PM,” in *The Kissinger Transcripts*, ed. William Burr (New York: The New Press, 1999), 231-33.

Brezhnev exclaimed, "Senator Jackson again!"⁷⁸¹

But the Jackson-Vanik Amendment did not remain a laughing matter for long. In a meeting on October 24, seven months later, Brezhnev attacked the American approach to détente. Regarding most favored nation status, Brezhnev lectured:

Everything was agreed and crystal clear two and one-half years ago. Yet we do not see any part of that agreement fulfilled. Several days ago, I read that the United States had decided to accord MFN to several countries including China. But, regarding the Soviet Union, MFN would be accorded only as a special favor and only for 18 months. Let me say frankly that we cannot accept that 'gift' (hits table with hand). We see it as a discriminatory practice that we cannot agree to. I wish to emphasize that!⁷⁸²

Brezhnev loudly complained about many facets of American foreign policy, including conflicts in the Middle East, cancelled contracts in grain sales, and restricted access of Soviet business representatives to American factories, but he soon returned to the trade bill and a series of letters between Jackson and Kissinger that discussed a Soviet promise to allow 60,000 Jews to emigrate from the USSR to Israel. After asserting that "the Soviet Union has not given an obligation in terms of numbers," Brezhnev concluded, "We have said we would not erect barriers. . . . The import of this is that Jackson has won a great victory over the White House and that he has managed to extract certain concessions from the Soviet Union." Kissinger, left speechless, simply said, "What burns me up is that a lot of what the General Secretary has said is true."⁷⁸³

When given the opportunity, Kissinger defended his policies. He explained that his relationship with President Ford was "at least as close as that with his predecessor." He

⁷⁸¹ "Kissinger-Brezhnev Conversation, 27 March 1974, 5:50-9:10 PM," in *The Kissinger Transcripts*, ed. William Burr (New York: The New Press, 1999), 255.

⁷⁸² "Kissinger-Brezhnev Conversation, 24 October 1974, 11:00 AM-2:00 PM," in *The Kissinger Transcripts*, ed. William Burr (New York: The New Press, 1999), 331.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, 332-33.

assured Brezhnev that he and Ford were “both determined as soon as the election is over to have a showdown with the Congress on who controls foreign policy.”⁷⁸⁴ Later, the issue of MFN drove Kissinger into a frenzy. “[Senator Jackson’s] manner is as humiliating for me as it is for you (hits table with hand),” he said. “The press is saying that Kissinger has been defeated by Jackson. I’m as angry as you are.” Following this tirade, Kissinger left the room for three minutes to regain his composure, returning with a joke that Gromyko’s proposal for a lunch break was “ending this discussion in the middle of [his] most eloquent speech.”⁷⁸⁵ Despite the jokes, Kissinger’s limitations as secretary of state left him incapable of managing his system of diplomacy. With Kissinger now working in a secretarial position instead of as a presidential advisor, he was open to congressional oversight, and, as a result, could no longer secretly pursue negotiations through the backchannel. Moreover, with Congress inserting moral concerns into détente, Kissinger seemed less credible to his Soviet negotiating partners, making personal appeals to the Soviet leadership far less effective.⁷⁸⁶ In sum, Congress, reacting to the Watergate scandal, struck at the very heart of Kissinger’s negotiating strategy by passing the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. The move discouraged Soviet policymakers and stalled détente.

As Dobrynin summed up in his memoirs, “Probably no other single question did more to sour the atmosphere of détente than the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 337.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 341. While to some extent Kissinger’s tirade was simply a performance designed to convince Brezhnev that he still supported the policies of détente, taken in combination with Kissinger’s private outburst with his Soviet staff seven months earlier, it suggests a certain level of honesty in the secretary’s frustrations.

⁷⁸⁶ “Trials of Détente: Washington-Moscow, 1974-1975,” in *The Kissinger Transcripts*, ed. William Burr (New York: The New Press, 1999), 323-24.

Union.”⁷⁸⁷ The Soviet government felt as if it could no longer trust Kissinger’s linkages when negotiating détente, since his guarantees for MFN status fell through, and they felt betrayed by his handling of the letters with Jackson. The Soviet leadership exhibited concerns that American initiatives in détente, for the first time, attempted to interfere with what they perceived as Soviet domestic affairs. This episode also demonstrated that Kissinger could no longer construct and implement foreign policy on his own, without participation from the Congress and input from American public opinion. Dobrynin concludes that, during the Ford administration, it was evident that Kissinger looked back on the earlier period “with nostalgia,” wishing he could regain that sense of independence.⁷⁸⁸ This posed serious difficulties for the backchannel, which had always been premised on the notion that Kissinger and Dobrynin could pursue policy solutions in secret, without the pressures applied by a free press or elected American officials with different sets of interests. With the awareness that any agreement they made could be contested by outside bodies, the backchannel lost much of the luster that it previously held.

Meanwhile, broader cracks in the foundations of détente began to make themselves clear, thanks to the Angolan Civil War. The Soviet side supported the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), with the nationalist and anticommunist National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) backed by the CIA and the nativist national unity group, National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), aided by China. Until April 1974, these groups were preoccupied with fighting the Portuguese colonial regime and, when that fell in April 1974, they turned on one another. The Soviet leadership, aware of the

⁷⁸⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 334.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

increase of CIA covert support for the FNLA in January 1975, sought to strengthen the MPLA, which had serious divides as a result of poor organization and communication, so that it could serve as the dominant partner in governing the country. The Soviet Union's Cuban allies, who had close ties to African revolutionary movements, pushed the Soviet government to intervene with military advisors, transport planes, and Cuban troops on the ground, but the Soviet leadership hesitated, understanding how military intervention could negatively impact détente. Prodded by the more ideologically-minded International Department, Moscow eventually provided aid, with the stipulation that it be used primarily to counter invading South African troops. Without Soviet consent, Cuba introduced ground troops in the conflict. By spring 1976, the MPLA overcame its opposition, with many in the Kremlin unprecedented in their optimism for Soviet Third World policy, believing that "the world was turning in our direction."⁷⁸⁹

As a member of the "Americanist" camp of the Foreign Ministry, Dobrynin found the superpower conflict in Angola alarming, defining it as the most important disagreement in pushing Americans away from détente. In his view, the American public and the Ford administration viewed Angola as a "test" of détente and, while he tried to warn the Kremlin of this fact, his "reports and arguments fell on the deaf ears of the morally self-righteous." He met with Boris Ponomarev, the head of the International Department, who argued that the US was involved in many conflicts in the developing world, including the toppling of the socialist government in Chile in 1973, and the USSR should not acquiesce to "American arrogance." Later, Dobrynin spoke with Brezhnev, who claimed that the USSR was simply "helping local patriots and internationalists," not following the American pattern of

⁷⁸⁹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 218-49.

establishing military bases around the world.

Neither Ponomarev nor Brezhnev proved receptive to Dobrynin's explanation that the American side viewed Angola, rightly or wrongly, as a violation of détente, empowering anti-détente forces in the American government and putting Ford on the defensive. In the end, Dobrynin claims, this demonstrates the disparity between Soviet and American ideas of détente. The American side believed that détente precluded the expansion of Soviet influence in the developing world, while Soviet side overestimated the permanence of détente in the American political scene. Both sides failed to predict the weakness of putting so much weight on SALT alone in defining détente between the superpowers.⁷⁹⁰ Thus, Dobrynin was caught between a rock and a hard place, trying to explain to a skeptical American contingent that the USSR remained interested in détente, while simultaneously attempting to warn the Soviet leadership that actions in the developing world would have an impact on American interest in détente. Ultimately, neither side cared to listen to his warnings, cutting the embassy out of the discussion.

In this environment, Ford found it difficult during the 1976 presidential campaign to strike a balance between the pro-détente message recommended by Kissinger and appeasing conservatives in both the Republican and Democratic parties, especially California Governor Ronald Reagan, who ran against Ford in the primary. Noting the poll numbers against his administration and the strong critiques from the right, Ford stopped using the word "détente," ostensibly because it was foreign, in order to follow a policy of "peace through strength." He did not abandon the agreements signed at Vladivostok, but he began to take a stronger

⁷⁹⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 321-22; 351-52; 360-63; 371-72. Kissinger argued that domestic opposition to détente in the US prevented the Ford administration from restraining the Soviet Union in Angola. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 846.

posture against the USSR to appease the shifting public tide against détente.⁷⁹¹ Furthermore, the final rounds of SALT discussions took place in January, with follow-up high-level correspondence in March, tabling any progress that could be made in backchannel talks to further the Vladivostok agreement.⁷⁹² Dobrynin argues that, after Vladivostok, Ford was posed with two choices in his electoral campaign. He could have turned the Vladivostok agreement into a formal SALT II treaty for approval by the Senate, or he could have rejected this option and disowned his one major foreign policy achievement. Because he appeased the Right and abandoned détente, Dobrynin contends, Ford lost the election.⁷⁹³

On November 2, 1976, Democrat Jimmy Carter won the presidential election, making Ford a lame-duck president. The day after the election, Dobrynin offered Kissinger his condolences, “I just wanted to say to you that I am going to miss you – in the future, I mean.” Promising to “stand outside the government for what [he] stood for inside,” Kissinger responded, “I will miss you, too. If it is possible to have a Marxist friend. . . .” After lamenting that the completion of a SALT II agreement probably would have led to a different electoral outcome, the primary negotiators of the back channel diplomacy hung up their phones and went their separate ways.⁷⁹⁴ They would remain close after Kissinger’s departure from government, meeting whenever they were in the same city. On January 17, 1989, Kissinger even discussed with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev the possibility of restarting the backchannel under the newly elected American President George H. W. Bush.

⁷⁹¹ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 594-95; 604; 614.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 597.

⁷⁹³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 372-73.

⁷⁹⁴ “Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, 3 November 1976, 4:30 PM,” <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB135/19761103.pdf> (23 October 2005).

Kissinger confirmed that Dobrynin would serve as the Soviet contact, and he would work through American National Security Advisor and Kissinger protégé Brent Scowcroft.

Kissinger, of course, volunteered his services to help set it up and implied that he wanted to be involved.⁷⁹⁵ This attempt to reboot the backchannel seems to have gone nowhere, though, bringing the Kissinger-Dobrynin partnership to an end.

Jimmy Carter and the Dissidents

If the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and the Angolan Civil War tested the superpower relationship during the Ford administration, then Jimmy Carter's presidency (1977-1981) coincided with the rapid decline of Soviet-American relations. The backchannel, frozen by Ford's turn to the right in the presidential elections, collapsed under Carter, as the superpowers became entrenched in antagonistic positions. The Carter administration's posturing during SALT and pursuit of the dissident issue, as well as new conflicts in the developing world, proved to be more than the embassy could handle, as it tried to find common ground with the new president.

During the 1976 electoral campaign, Dobrynin's network of contacts came into play, as Averell Harriman agreed to secretly serve as a go-between for Democratic Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter and Brezhnev. Dobrynin and Harriman first discussed this idea at a private dinner party at the end of July. In response, Harriman wrote on July 30 that he would visit Moscow as a private citizen in order to make an informal exchange of views.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁵ Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Henry Kissinger, January 17, 1989, in Savranskaya, Blanton, and Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*, 345-46.

⁷⁹⁶ Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Dobrynin quickly arranged for Harriman to meet with Brezhnev and Aleksandrov-Agentov for nearly three hours on September 20.⁷⁹⁷ Some minor conflicts are evident in Harriman's report on the conversation. For example, Brezhnev complained about the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, American behavior in Africa, and the turn against détente in the American presidential elections. Harriman attempted to explain Carter's rhetoric, promising Brezhnev that it was just a consequence of electoral politics and that Carter favored détente. Most importantly, Brezhnev asked if Carter supported the Vladivostok agreement, which Harriman assured the general secretary that the president elect, in principle, did. Harriman concluded that, while both sides said "some tough things," the overall tenor of the meeting was positive.⁷⁹⁸ The exchange went on until Carter's inauguration, becoming official on November 16, with Harriman receiving permission from Carter and Dobrynin from Gromyko to begin talks before the president assumed office.⁷⁹⁹

The most alarming trend to come from these initial exchanges was the hint that Carter would not be "bound by previous negotiations," suggesting to the Soviet leadership that Carter might renege on the agreements reached at Vladivostok. According to Dobrynin's report, Harriman stated that Carter "would like to reserve for himself the right to express certain possible new thoughts or correctives" while finishing up a SALT treaty. This was unacceptable to the Soviet side, which felt that the Vladivostok agreement was finalized. The Soviet leadership did not want to permit Carter to alter the agreement, as they would be

⁷⁹⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 377.

⁷⁹⁸ Box 1050, Folder 7, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁹⁹ Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

put in the position of renegotiating SALT every time a new administration took office.⁸⁰⁰ Still, Dobrynin used the channel to forward Carter a copy of Brezhnev's January 18, 1977, speech at Tula, in which the general secretary announced the Soviet government's support for détente and his personal readiness to work with the new administration. It also served as the clearest definition for détente ever given by Brezhnev, explaining it as "an overcoming of the Cold War," a willingness to resolve differences and conflicts at the negotiating table, and a recognition of the superpowers as equal states with equally legitimate interests powering their actions.⁸⁰¹ Whatever caution the Soviet side felt was tempered by their optimism that a new presidential administration could produce fresh momentum for détente.

The selection of Carter's foreign policy team, in many ways, suggested the problems that the backchannel would face in the coming years. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Polish émigré and Columbia University political scientist, had a long reputation among Soviet authorities as an outspoken critic of the Soviet Union and its policies.⁸⁰² For example, in a July 1971 conversation with Harriman, Dobrynin referred to Brzezinski as an "emotional Polish nationalist," a critical evaluation that Harriman apparently shared.⁸⁰³ Kissinger even told Dobrynin after the election that he tried to caution Carter against appointing his campaign foreign policy advisor Brzezinski as secretary of state, since he was "excessively emotional and not able to think impassively in the long term."⁸⁰⁴ Dobrynin and

⁸⁰⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 379; and Memorandum of Dobrynin-Harriman Conversation (USSR), December 1, 1976, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997.

⁸⁰¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 379-80; and Box 1050, Folder 7, and Box 991, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁰² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 383.

⁸⁰³ Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁰⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 368.

Brzezinski still developed a friendly relationship, bonding over chess, and Brzezinski invited Dobrynin's family to his house for social occasions.⁸⁰⁵

Brzezinski played less of a role in direct negotiations, though, than Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who became Dobrynin's primary partner in superpower talks. In an unprecedented move, Kissinger held a lunch with Vance and Dobrynin, in which the outgoing secretary of state explained the benefits of the backchannel to the incoming secretary of state and encouraged the two to continue with the backchannel system.⁸⁰⁶ Usually, these initial meetings between new diplomatic partners are friendly, without controversy, but in this case, Vance raised the issue of his personal commitment to human rights, to which Dobrynin snapped back that personal convictions were fine, so long as they were not brought to bear on superpower relations. Kissinger had to jump into the conversation, urging Vance not to bring this into the public conversation. However, Dobrynin left feeling certain that the secretary of state would raise it again. At their first meeting after Carter's inauguration, Vance further hinted that Carter would demand additional cuts in the Vladivostok limits, giving Dobrynin concern for the future of SALT. Dobrynin eventually developed a close relationship with Vance, praising the secretary of state in his memoirs for his preparation, meticulousness, reliability, and unbiased approach to the Soviet Union.⁸⁰⁷ Most importantly, these meetings demonstrated to Dobrynin that the backchannel would no longer be conducted on the basis of secret diplomacy, with a

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 382-83; and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 153.

⁸⁰⁶ The lunch was arranged by Kissinger over the phone in December. Kissinger-Dobrynin Telephone Conversation, December 4, 1976, 12:15 PM, and December 20, 1976, 6:25 PM, NSArch, Henry Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts.

⁸⁰⁷ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 380-82.

confidential channel that allowed its participants to sound out different proposals without the scrutiny of the public or the American political establishment.

Following his inauguration, Carter exchanged a series of letters through the backchannel with Brezhnev, which revealed the cracks that existed in their relationship before negotiations even began. With regard to SALT, Carter requested that the Soviet side allow some of the items that they deemed settled during the Kissinger period be reconsidered in negotiations, detaching a deal on American cruise missiles and the Soviet “Backfire” bomber from the Vladivostok agreement.⁸⁰⁸ Brezhnev was infuriated because, as Zubok has argued, he “paid with his own health” to obtain Politburo support for the Vladivostok agreement, spending a tremendous amount of political capital in the process.⁸⁰⁹ He responded to Carter eleven days later in heated fashion, stating that the Soviet side would “firmly reject” such an approach as a sign that the American government hoped to make “the conclusion of the agreement more complicated or maybe even impossible.”⁸¹⁰ Carter protested the “moderately sharp tone” of Brezhnev’s previous letter, which he felt did not give adequate credit to his “good intentions,” declaring that the issues of cruise missiles and “Backfire” had not been settled in Vladivostok. Forcing an agreement in this round of SALT, then, would only lengthen negotiations, delaying the agreement even further.⁸¹¹

Brezhnev wrote back that he did not understand Carter’s comments, since his previous letter

⁸⁰⁸ Letter from Carter to Brezhnev, February 14, 1977, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997.

⁸⁰⁹ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 255.

⁸¹⁰ Letter from Brezhnev to Carter, February 25, 1977, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997. Dobrynin informed the Politburo that Vance received the letter from Dobrynin by saying that he thought it was “this is the kind of letter that the President needs to receive now,” indicating that he thought Carter approached “certain international problems too lightly.” Brzezinski, in his memoirs, states that while Vance viewed it as “good, hard hitting, to the point,” he believed it to be “brutal, cynical, sneering, and even patronizing.” Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 154-55.

⁸¹¹ Letter from Carter to Brezhnev, March 5, 1977, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997.

was “business-like and respectful,” and demanded that cruise missiles be included in the final arrangement, since doing otherwise would indicate a return to the initial positions in discussions and a rehashing of the negotiating process.⁸¹²

Vance, who was scheduled to fly to Moscow for negotiations with Brezhnev and Gromyko on March 28-30, met with Dobrynin before his trip. Vance informed the Soviet ambassador of his plan to enter the meeting with two SALT proposals. Carter’s preferred option was a “comprehensive” approach with deep cuts in the limits agreed upon at Vladivostok, and if the Soviet leadership rejected that proposal, Vance would propose a “limited” option, based on the Vladivostok agreement, but excluding the cruise missiles and Backfire bomber. Dobrynin wrote in his report on this conversation that this would entail major reductions, mostly at the expense of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, and he described it as “completely obvious” that the American side sought “a one-sided advantage.” Vance planned to propose that the Soviet side place strict limits on its heavy ICBMs, while the American side would merely promise not to develop its own heavy ICBMs. Dobrynin appealed to Vance to take Brezhnev’s letters into account, understanding why these positions would not be acceptable to the Soviet side before traveling to Moscow.⁸¹³ As Dobrynin wrote in his memoirs, “It is exceedingly rare for an ambassador to tell a secretary of state so bluntly that his trip will be a failure if the president is going to insist on his proposals, but I also knew too well what he faced in Moscow.”⁸¹⁴

Carter and his foreign policy team did not heed Dobrynin’s warnings, and the

⁸¹² Letter from Brezhnev to Carter, March 15, 1977, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997.

⁸¹³ Memorandum of Dobrynin-Vance Conversation (USSR), March 21, 1977, published in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 5, 1997.

⁸¹⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 392.

Moscow meetings between Vance, Brezhnev, and Gromyko were a disaster. Before Vance came to Moscow, Brezhnev, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Andropov met at Brezhnev's dacha to review these new positions, vowing to "teach the Americans a lesson." When Vance arrived, they interrupted the secretary of state and did not even allow him to present the second, more limited option. They insulted Carter personally and, in a specially convened press conference, Gromyko denounced Carter's proposals. Vance later stated at a conference of former diplomats on the collapse of détente, "We got a wet rug in the face, and were told to go home."⁸¹⁵ By this point, the feelings of optimism for a potential breakthrough in Soviet-American relations on both sides of the Iron Curtain at the start of the Carter administration had dissipated.

The Carter administration's new focus on human rights issues further complicated this situation from the Soviet perspective. Dissident issues were nothing new in Soviet-American relations during détente. For example, in 1970, the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the prominent Soviet dissident and author of several books critical of Soviet authority, most prominently, *The Gulag Archipelago*. The American and Soviet presses began a battle over Solzhenitsyn.⁸¹⁶ The new twist in this discussion during this period, though, is that the Carter administration involved the presidency in this fight, while the Nixon and Ford administrations had been satisfied to discuss it in the

⁸¹⁵ "SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust." Conference at Musgrove Plantation, Simons Island, GA, May 6-9, 1994. Transcripts available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. Quoted in Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 255-56.

⁸¹⁶ For instance, Dean Reed, the American performer who found fame in the Eastern bloc, wrote a letter criticizing Solzhenitsyn, claiming that it was the US, not the USSR, that had a "sick society." Din Rid, "Otkrytoe pis'mo A. Solzhenitsynu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 27, 1971, 3.

backchannel behind closed doors.⁸¹⁷ As a result, the Soviet leadership felt that Carter's human rights campaign served only to make cheap political points in the press at the expense of the Soviet Union, rather than it being a sincere expression of Carter's beliefs, bolstered by the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which guaranteed protections for human rights on the European continent.⁸¹⁸ As early as February 1977, after the State Department protested the arrest of prominent dissident Aleksandr Ginzburg for alleged currency violations, the Kremlin instructed the embassy to meet with Vance and hit hard against Carter's human rights accusations. It complained that the US did not have the right to meddle in another country's domestic affairs. For their part, the Soviet leaders did not link their country's relations with the US to issues from their moral compass, such as American support for right-wing dictatorships in the developing world or "multi-million unemployment, deprivation of rights of ethnic minorities, race discrimination, unequal rights for women, the violation of citizens rights by the state organs, the persecution of people with progressive convictions and so on." The Soviet leadership also charged that members of the American press and the American Embassy in Moscow were involved with the dissidents.⁸¹⁹ In this sense, by taking the question of human rights and the dissidents out of the backchannel, the Carter administration set off a negative reaction in Moscow, where it was perceived that Carter was engaging in an anti-Soviet smear campaign in the press, particularly given the different conceptions of human rights that prevailed in each country's ideological discourse.

⁸¹⁷ For example, when Solzhenitsyn came to the US after his exile from the Soviet Union in 1974, Ford declined to meet with him, despite tremendous pressure from the press and pro-dissident members of Congress. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 648-52.

⁸¹⁸ Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 256-57.

⁸¹⁹ CPSU Central Committee Politburo Decision, "About the instructions to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington for his conversation with Vance on the question of 'human rights' and text of instruction," February 18, 1977, published in *CWIHP*, no. 5, 1997.

This situation was complicated by the lack of understanding in the Foreign Ministry of the importance of the issue to the American president. In September 1977, Gromyko visited the White House for talks with Carter. The president raised the issue of Anatolii Shcharanskii, the dissident who gained notoriety, both in the US and Moscow, for attacking Soviet human rights violations. In what Dobrynin believed to be a brilliant diplomatic maneuver, Gromyko feigned ignorance, asking, “Who is Shcharanskii?” The president, somewhat bewildered, moved on to another topic. When the Soviet diplomats returned to their car, Gromyko turned to Dobrynin and asked, “Who really is Shcharanskii?” Dobrynin concluded, “It was my turn to be amazed. It emerged that he knew little indeed about the Shcharanskii case, because he had instructed his subordinates in Moscow not to bother him with what he called such ‘absurd’ matters.”⁸²⁰ In this sense, Soviet and American diplomats talked past one another on the issue of human rights, with neither side understanding the other’s motives or desires.

Events in the developing world also demonstrated the growing weakness of the backchannel and the fragility of Soviet-American relations. First, in the Horn of Africa, the superpowers again found themselves involved in a proxy war, which American policymakers argued created a crisis in Soviet-American relations. In 1974, the American-backed Ethiopian emperor was overthrown in a coup, a situation that Soviet-backed Somalia exploited in order to take Ogaden province, a contested territory. Feeling emboldened by the success of the Angolan venture, the Soviet leadership, especially the International Department, pushed for additional Soviet intervention in conflicts in the developing world. The Soviet Union and Cuba supported the leftist rebels in Ethiopia who engineered the coup,

⁸²⁰ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 399-400.

helping to prevent further Somali incursions into Ethiopian territory. Soon, the US provided support to the Somali government, and hostilities ensued in 1978.⁸²¹

The consequences for détente were catastrophic. The Soviet leadership underestimated the extent to which these interventions shaded the ways that American officials viewed the prospects for détente.⁸²² Vance and Brzezinski argued bitterly over this issue. The secretary of state contended that Soviet actions in Ethiopia, no matter how appalling they may be, should not alter plans for the more significant SALT negotiations. Brzezinski, however, claimed that “they must understand there are consequences in their behavior.” Indeed, as he later wrote, “SALT lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden.”⁸²³ Dobrynin was stuck in the middle, attempting to explain to Moscow that these campaigns riled American officials, undermined détente, and required action through the backchannel, while he told the American side that these were local conflicts and not designed as a test of Carter’s will. Given the rising fears about each other’s intentions, he failed. Dobrynin concludes that the Soviet authorities “made a serious mistake” in getting involved in these African campaigns, writing: “Our supply of military equipment to these areas, the activities there of Cuban troops, and especially our airlift to get them there, persuaded Americans that Moscow had undertaken a broad offensive against them for control over Africa. Although that was not really the case, these events strongly affected détente.”⁸²⁴

Even twenty years later, Brzezinski and Dobrynin locked horns over this issue. Brzezinski remained convinced that this was a central component of Soviet foreign policy

⁸²¹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 250-87.

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 282-83.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 189.

⁸²⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 405-7.

and a test of Carter's will, while Dobrynin argued that it was largely driven by the International Department and a matter of relatively minor importance to Soviet leaders when compared with détente.⁸²⁵ Indeed, Dobrynin insists in his memoirs that Gromyko, as the head of the Foreign Ministry, was above all a cautious person, who opposed maneuvers that would lead to a confrontation with the US. The developing world was "not his prime domain," as he believed that minor proxy conflicts in Africa could hardly affect Soviet-American relations in the final analysis. The International Department, chaired by Boris Ponomarev, maintained contacts with the leaders of liberation movements in the developing world, and it pushed the revolutionary agenda. Gromyko and Ponomarev "despised" one another and rarely coordinated, exacerbating the differences between these bureaucracies.

The "pragmatist" core of the Foreign Ministry, especially "Americanists" such as Dobrynin, were uncomfortable with the consequences these crusades in the developing world had for détente, but struggled to articulate this message, especially in memos that had to respect the ideological guidelines of the Party. Moreover, as much as Dobrynin tried to explain to American policymakers that these actions did not constitute a "grand plan to deliberately undermine the world positions of the West," he failed, given American popular perception of the expansion of Soviet power in Angola, Ethiopia, and eventually Afghanistan.⁸²⁶ In this sense, the complex bureaucratic rifts in the Soviet foreign policy apparatus placed the embassy in a difficult position, attempting to encourage détente with the American side while outlining to Soviet leaders how adventurist policies in the developing world could ultimately undermine this effort.

⁸²⁵ "SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust," Conference at Musgrove Plantation, Simons Island, GA, May 6-9, 1994. Transcript available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

⁸²⁶ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 404-5.

By the time the US and the USSR finally came to an agreement on a SALT II treaty at a 1979 summit in Vienna, based largely on the Vladivostok agreement, détente was too weakened by these various confrontations to survive. As the treaty came up for ratification in the Senate, a round of challenges emerged from Congress and in the press, most notably as a result of the Cuban Brigade scandal in 1979. As part of the agreement to end the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Soviet Union was secretly permitted to keep a military detachment of between 2,000 and 2,600 men in Cuba for the purpose of training Cuban soldiers to use Soviet military equipment. This information was leaked to the public in 1979 for reasons that are not clear, although Dobrynin speculated that it may have been a calculated leak by American intelligence services. Regardless, it caused a political scandal, with Frank Church, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, shutting down deliberations on the SALT II treaty ratification. Dobrynin, then in Moscow to attend to his father's funeral and his dying mother, returned to meet with Vance in Washington. There, the secretary of state laid out the American complaints, to which Dobrynin replied that these were the same troops who had been there for nearly twenty years. After weeks of meetings and public statements by the Carter administration, prepared with the aid of Dobrynin, they managed to move past this incident, but Dobrynin, understandably bitter, later wrote that he missed his mother's funeral "for what was at best a stupid mix-up and at worst a political ploy based on false or distorted information."⁸²⁷ Years later, he told historians and other former diplomats at a conference that this was the moment at which détente died with no potential for return, as it seemed to

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 428-29.

Soviet policymakers to be a deliberately manufactured crisis designed to humiliate the Soviet Union.⁸²⁸

The election of Carter had caused a serious decline in the prospects for détente, and by June 1978, Brezhnev grimly declared in a speech to the Politburo that “a serious deterioration and exacerbation of the situation has occurred,” with Carter apparently “intent upon struggling for his election to a new term as President of the USA under the banner of anti-Soviet policy and a return to the ‘cold war.’”⁸²⁹ With the end of Kissinger’s tenure in the State Department in 1977, the personal tone of negotiations at the top level changed dramatically. The backchannel was pushed to the side, and Soviet and American policymakers assumed the worst about one another, stalling détente.

Conclusion

On December 27, 1979, after months of deliberation in the Politburo, Soviet forces entered Afghanistan, attempting to prop up the communist regime in Kabul in what they hoped would be a short, cheap, and relatively easy conflict. The American side responded by calling the invasion “the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War.” Carter canceled grain sales to Moscow, restricted Soviet fishing rights in US waters, and postponed submission of the recently-concluded SALT II nuclear arms limitations treaty to Congress. He also announced that the US would boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, with over sixty other nations following suit. Détente ended, and constructive superpower talks did

⁸²⁸ “The Collapse of Détente: From the March 1977 Moscow Meetings to the December 1979 Invasion of Afghanistan,” Conference at the “Playhouse” on the Rockefeller Estate, Pocantico Hills, New York, October 22-24, 1992. Transcript available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.

⁸²⁹ “Speech by L.I. Brezhnev to CPSU CC Politburo, 6/8/1978,” *The Cold War International History Project*, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034F5A8-96B6-175C-9DD9D17B9F404E16&sort=Collection&item=US-Soviet%20Relations (17 March 2006).

not resume until President Ronald Reagan's second term.⁸³⁰ The backchannel had also completely deteriorated. Dobrynin, in a Moscow hospital at the time, had not been told about the invasion plans, and therefore had no opportunity to warn Soviet leaders of the consequences their actions might have for Soviet-American relations. When he returned to the US, he joined Vance for informal discussions on how to relieve tensions in the midst of war, but, given the emotional reaction of the Carter administration to the Afghan War, fueled by the paranoia about Soviet intentions that formed during the African campaigns, this proved impossible.⁸³¹

Overall, the complex bureaucratic nature of the Soviet foreign policy apparatus and the embassy's position in Washington left it in a vulnerable position in negotiating détente. Dobrynin did not have access to all of the information he needed to clarify to the Soviet government how proposed moves in the developing world would affect superpower relations. The Soviet ambassador had difficulty explaining the magnitude of Watergate and the shift in the public discourse against détente, and once Kissinger left the White House, he no longer had the personal rapport with American policymakers to explain the Soviet position and "think out loud" in seeking a mutually acceptable solution.

While Soviet foreign policy in this period seemed unclear to American leaders trying to identify the Soviet government's grand strategy, the reasons for contradictions become more apparent when considering the bureaucratic chaos in Moscow, especially as Brezhnev became increasingly infirm and unable to successfully coordinate strategy. The lack of

⁸³⁰ Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan* (New York: Harper, 2009).

⁸³¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 434; 48-54. Dobrynin's former schoolmate Israelyan was coincidentally in the hospital, as well, and described Dobrynin as sincerely surprised. Israelyan was disturbed that the top leadership would plan out something with such obvious ramifications for superpower relations without consulting Dobrynin. Israelyan, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War*, 318.

lateral clearances between different bureaucracies with a stake in foreign affairs, as well as the insular nature of bureaucracies that functioned in a patronage system, did not allow for the kind of discussion necessary to develop such a grand strategy. The seemingly contradictory nature of the Kremlin's decisions gave Washington fits, as it came to the assumption that the Foreign Ministry's support of détente was a mask to shield American eyes from its true aggressive intentions.

PART II: A CASE STUDY OF THE SOVIET EMBASSY'S CULTURAL DEPARTMENT

Détente did not consist only of backchannel talks on the global conflict between the superpowers. Rather, new cultural offensives undertaken by both the US and the USSR played a critical role in framing détente for their respective populations, as Soviet and American citizens received unprecedented information from both foreign and domestic sources that challenged stereotypical thinking on how to view the opposing superpower. With expanding tourism, cultural exchange programs, and trade deals, as well as growing person-to-person contact, détente represented a new cultural phenomenon that impacted the lives of civilians on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Statistical evidence documents the dramatic expansion of cultural exchanges of this time. Five hundred and sixteen Soviet citizens visited the US through exchange programs in 1958, the first year of official exchanges. This number increased to 1,000 by the mid 1960s, and, after a brief lull in the late 1960s due to the Soviet reaction to the Vietnam War, rose to roughly 1,500 in 1972. By 1977, the total number of Soviet visitors under exchange programs grew to 4,615.⁸³² Regarding tourism, in 1969, approximately 20,000 Americans visited the Soviet Union and, at the height of détente in 1976, official figures suggested that over 65,000 Americans went to the USSR, although the US tourism industry put the number at 100,000.⁸³³ Similarly, in trade, American exports to the Soviet Union rarely amounted to

⁸³² Yale Richmond, *US-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-86: Who Wins?* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 10-12.

⁸³³ Paul Hollander, "American Travelers in the Soviet Union in the Cold War Era," *Society* 44, no. 3 (March-April 2007): 73-82; James Cracraft, "Unofficial Thaw in the Cold War," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 3, no. 8 (May 1986): 20-22.

more than \$100 million a year before 1971. In that year, they jumped to \$162 million, then \$550 million in 1972, and an astounding \$1.195 billion in 1973. As a grain deal expired, exports fell to \$607 million in 1974, but they rebounded to \$1.833 billion in 1975 and \$2.3 billion in 1976.⁸³⁴

A number of dramatic episodes in US-Soviet cultural relations illustrate the extent to which détente affected everyday life in both the US and the Soviet Union. The 1975 Apollo-Soiuz Test Project, the first example of Soviet-American collaboration in space, witnessed the docking of the Soviet spacecraft Soiuz with the American spacecraft Apollo. Broadcast live on television in both countries, it was largely viewed as a positive sign of the cooperative possibilities opened by détente.⁸³⁵ Other cultural moments displayed the lingering distrust between the superpowers, including the 1976 hockey game between the Stanley Cup champion Philadelphia Flyers and the Soviet Red Army team. The Flyers won 4 to 1, utilizing a brutal style of play that compelled the Soviet team to leave the ice in the middle of the game, refusing to return until the NHL informed Soviet officials that they would not be paid for the tour unless they finished the game. Examining the reactions of the Soviet and

⁸³⁴ Marshall I. Goldman, *Detente and Dollars: Doing Business with the Soviets* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 4-5; Philip J. Funigiello, *American-Soviet Trade in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 188-89. Funigiello argues that this growth was artificial to a certain extent, as it was driven by agricultural exports, but this does not change the fact that trade expanded dramatically in this period, both between the Soviet and American governments and between the Soviet government and private American businesses.

⁸³⁵ The Soviet government produced souvenirs to commemorate the event, and *Pravda* released a cartoon featuring the two spacecraft docked together above the planet, with astronauts from each side standing on their respective ships and holding flags that met to form the “M” in “Mir,” the Russian word for “peace.” Samuel A. Toven, “Stamps: Russians Glory in Space Success,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1975. V. Zharinov, “Mirnoe sosushchestvovanie dvukh razlichnykh sistem,” *Cartoon, Pravda*, 16 July 1975, 5. Also cited in Kevin J. McKenna, *All the Views Fit to Print: Changing Images of the US in Pravda Political Cartoons, 1917-1991* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 144. American observers claiming that it demonstrated the “human side of the Soviet space program” and would make it more difficult for “the Kremlin to maintain an image of America as an ideological enemy.” Theodore Shabad, “Soyuz Uncensored: English Chat and a Fish Story,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1975; Christopher S. Wren, “Space Shot: The Tangible Soviet Benefits,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1975.

American press, historian John Soares concluded that the match in Philadelphia “advertised the darker side of détente.”⁸³⁶

If Apollo-Soiuz demonstrated the strengths of cultural diplomacy and the Flyers-Red Army match displayed its weaknesses, the trade agreement concluded by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade and PepsiCo CEO Donald M. Kendall stands as a more ambiguous case. This agreement allowed Kendall to produce and sell Pepsi in the USSR in exchange for importing Stolichnaya vodka and Soviet wine and champagne to the US. In the USSR, Pepsi sales were limited at first to Moscow and the Black Sea resorts, and a *New York Times* report on Soviet vacationers at the Black Sea noted that Pepsi’s “exotic appeal” made it one of the “particularly chic ways to spend money along the Black Sea coast.”⁸³⁷ In the US, Stolichnaya’s popularity grew quickly, gaining 65 to 70 percent of the deluxe vodka market by 1980.⁸³⁸ Stolichnaya became a target, however, when the superpower relationship hit roadblocks. To protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, for example, liquor stores boycotted the brand and destroyed cases in the street.⁸³⁹ As late as 1988, William F. Buckley reflected negatively on the deal, complaining that economic diplomacy was ineffective at restraining in Soviet power, and he asked whether Kendall had “put in for Pepsi concessions

⁸³⁶ Soares writes that Western columnists remained divided over the game, with one calling it “the triumph of terror over style” and another commending the Flyers for defeating the Red Army team. John Soares, “Cold War, Hot Ice: International Ice Hockey, 1947-1980,” *Journal of Sport History* 34, no. 2: 207-30. *Komsomol'skaia pravda* lamented that the otherwise brilliant series with NHL teams was “tarnished by the insufferable barbarity” of the Flyers, and it ran a cartoon depicting the Philadelphia players as Neanderthals on skates, carrying clubs instead of hockey sticks. A. Pumpianskii, “Schet tret'ei serii - pobednyi!,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, January 12, 1976. Also see Todd Denault, *The Greatest Game: The Montreal Canadiens, the Red Army, and the Night that Saved Hockey* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 263-71.

⁸³⁷ Malcolm W. Browne, “With Vacation at Peak, Russians Live It Up,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1974.

⁸³⁸ Philip H. Dougherty, “Advertising: Chinese Vodka Takes On Its Russian Counterpart,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1980.

⁸³⁹ Judith Cummings and Albin Krebs, “Notes on People: Down the Hatch,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1980.

in Gulag.”⁸⁴⁰ Thus, in the American imagination, Stolichnaya could represent both improved superpower relations and the evils of the Soviet Empire.

These anecdotes demonstrate the critical importance of the cultural dimensions of détente in shaping the ways that both American and Soviet civilians experienced the period. The next two chapters explore the myriad questions posed by cultural diplomacy. The goal of these chapters is to step back from top-level diplomacy to provide a case study of how embassy diplomats operated on the ground level. I explain how cultural officers stationed at the embassy understood their work and their contributions to détente, and I argue that embassy diplomats focused their efforts on developing ties with mainstream organizations in an attempt to portray the USSR as a safe and dependable negotiating partner and mainstream power. Moreover, for all of their strengths, embassy cultural diplomats confronted challenges that resemble those faced by Dobrynin in top-level talks, with bureaucratic divides, unpredictable curveballs from conflicts in the developing world, and shifting public opinion in the US impeding their work.

⁸⁴⁰ William F. Buckley, "Pepsi at the Summit," *National Review*, June 24, 1988, 57.

CHAPTER 6

SELLING DÉTENTE: SOVIET CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE US, 1969-79

An important function of the Soviet Embassy in this period was to manage the explosion of new mainstream cultural exchange opportunities that emerged as a result of détente. Following the first cultural exchange agreement of 1958, the superpowers entered a phase that former State Department official Yale Richmond described as “exchange tourism,” in which both sides sent leading specialists to examine the other’s activities. These cultural exchange agreements lasted for two years and led to a modest growth in travel between the US and the USSR. By the early 1970s, the second phase of “cooperative activities” began, thanks in large part to a new cultural exchange agreement, signed at the 1973 summit, which lasted six years and guaranteed greater continuity and permanence. Moreover, in 1967, the Soviet institution previously responsible for cultural exchanges, the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, was abolished, and its responsibilities shifted to the Foreign Ministry’s Cultural Department, which appeared to most American diplomats to have greater incentive to expand cultural exchanges. The Soviet government also began working with the American private sphere for the first time to organize new cultural exchanges that had to be identified and explained to Moscow by embassy officials.⁸⁴¹

⁸⁴¹ Richmond, *US-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-86: Who Wins?*, 1-15.

Soviet-American cultural relations in the first two decades of the Cold War have received some scrutiny from historians,⁸⁴² however, Soviet cultural diplomacy during the Brezhnev period remains relatively unexplored in the historiography. One author who examines this period, Yale Richmond, himself advocated for an active cultural diplomacy program during the Cold War, and, in his later work, has explored the ways in which American public diplomacy aided the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁸⁴³ Richmond's arguments heavily influence my thinking on this topic, but he focuses mainly on exchanges and American public diplomacy initiatives, not the work of the Soviet Embassy. Robert D. English has addressed similar questions in his study of how contact with the West shaped the "new thinking" of the generation of Soviet leaders who rose to prominence in the 1980s.⁸⁴⁴ Robert F. Byrnes, who managed American academic exchanges with the Soviet Union for nearly twenty years, argued that these early cultural exchange programs had positive and negative consequences for both sides. The US sent students to the USSR to experience life in the Soviet Union, but American academic institutions had to accept interference from the

⁸⁴² See, for example, Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 2 (2003); Rosa Magnúsdóttir, "Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes Toward the United States of America, 1945-59" (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006); Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961*; Amanda Wood Aucoin, "Deconstructing the American Way of Life: Soviet Responses to American Information Activity in the Khrushchev Years" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Arkansas, 2001); and Vladimir Pechatnov, "Exercise in Frustration: Soviet Foreign Propaganda in the Early Cold War, 1945-47," *Cold War History* 11, no. 2 (January 2001): 1-27. David Caute occasionally addresses the post-Khrushchev years, though he largely focuses on the first two decades of the Cold War. David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). VOKS, one of the primary institutional predecessors to SSOD, has received some attention from scholars, most notably in Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁴³ Richmond, *US-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-86: Who Wins*; Yale Richmond, *Soviet-American Cultural Exchanges: Ripoff or Payoff?* (Washington: Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1984); *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); and *Practicing Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Odyssey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

⁸⁴⁴ English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*.

US government in organizing exchange programs demanded by the Soviet regime. While the Soviet government provided its technical students with experience in superior American laboratories and production facilities, it also exposed its students to American freedoms, consumer goods, and economic strength, undermining Soviet propaganda on the absolute weakness and deficiencies of American society.⁸⁴⁵ I spend less time addressing the long-term impact of American foreign policy, focusing instead on the ways in which lower-level diplomats conceptualized détente and implemented their programs.

Since cultural exchange involved dozens of bureaucracies in Moscow, I concentrate on the American Department of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, or SSOD.⁸⁴⁶ From 1961 to 1976, this department was known as the Institute of Soviet-American Relations, or ISAO. It rebranded itself as the USSR-USA Society in 1976.⁸⁴⁷ On the surface, the ISAO/USSR-USA Society consisted of social activists, scientists, cultural figures, and others who supported the development of better relations between the USSR and the US in the spirit of peace and mutual understanding.⁸⁴⁸ Prominent Soviet citizens who belonged to the official leadership of the organization included Nikolai Blokhin, a renowned oncologist and president of the Academy of Medical Sciences, who served as president of the ISAO/USSR-USA Society; Georgii Arbatov, the director of the Institute of the USA and Canada; Georgii Zhukov, the political

⁸⁴⁵ Robert F. Byrnes, *Soviet-American Academic Exchanges, 1958-1975* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

⁸⁴⁶ In Russian, *Soiuz sovetskikh obshchestv druzhby i kul'turnoi svyazi s zarubezhnymi stranami*, abbreviated SSOD.

⁸⁴⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1999, ll. 68-69.

⁸⁴⁸ This description is common in Soviet sources. See the USSR-USA Society's 1976 internal summary of its operations in GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1202, ll. 88-89. These sentiments are repeated in a 1978 letter to an American who visited the USSR the previous year, asked his guide about the Institute of Soviet-American Relations, and was told that there was no such organization. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1999, ll. 68-69.

columnist for the newspaper *Pravda*; A.B. Iakovskii, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta*; and Valerii Kubasov, a famous cosmonaut. In practice, however, a group of bureaucrats with ties to the Communist Party and especially the Foreign Ministry ran the organization's day-to-day activities.⁸⁴⁹ During détente, the leaders of the ISAO/USSR-USA Society included Gennadii Fedosov, who served as secretary general until 1972 and again in 1979, and Aleksei Stepunin, who led the USSR-USA Society from 1973 to 1978.⁸⁵⁰ In addition to the secretary general and his deputy, the ISAO/USSR-USA Society typically had three secretaries who handled most of the correspondence and worked with American delegations sent to the USSR.

The ISAO/USSR-USA Society employed representatives stationed at the Soviet Embassy who reported to Moscow on the cultural organizations' activities and helped plan and execute cultural exchange programs. These representatives also served as the Foreign Ministry's cultural affairs officers, indicating the close ties between the Foreign Ministry and SSOD. The heads of the cultural affairs office during détente included Stepunin, who finished his tour at the embassy in 1969; Valerian Nesterov, who served from 1969 to 1972; Fedosov; and Vladimir Zolotukhin, who served through the rest of détente.

While many of the files from the Foreign Ministry's Cultural Department remain classified, the SSOD files are available to researchers. For this reason, studying SSOD

⁸⁴⁹ Magnusdottir, "Keeping Up Appearances," 154-155.

⁸⁵⁰ There were periods of several months in 1972-73 and 1978-79 when the previous secretary general had departed but a new one had not yet been selected. In these circumstances, the deputy took control, including E. K. Shubichev in the earlier period and V. I. Gorin in the latter period. These times tended to be a bit chaotic, as cultural leaders in the US rarely knew whom to write to in Moscow. For example, in March 1973, Richard Morford complained, "Nobody seems to give us advice as to the present score in terms of leadership in the Institute in Moscow." See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, l. 23. Also, on March 29, 1978, Fred Neal of the American Committee on East-West Accord wrote Stepunin to discuss a future trip to Moscow for talks on a future exchange program. He wrote back to Gorin on April 18, stating, "You have undoubtedly seen my earlier letter to Stepunin. Fedosov tells me that you are now in charge of things, and I look forward to meeting you when I arrive in Moscow May 13." See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1996, ll. 31-32, 35.

provides key insight into how embassy cultural diplomats understood their work and what they hoped to accomplish during détente. SSOD defined itself as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), and the cases forwarded to SSOD by the Soviet Embassy typically matched this profile as well. Thus, this chapter focuses on groups such as the YMCA, or private social organizations that sought exchange programs with the USSR.

The “Sharpest Weapons” of the Cold War

In a long memo to the Foreign Ministry on March 15, 1970, Ambassador Dobrynin set forth his proposals for developing Soviet propaganda at the start of détente. Although he devoted some space to discussing propaganda against American policies, including “the uncompromising fight with bourgeois, imperialist ideology” and the need to expose the “aggressive foreign and reactionary domestic course of American ruling elites,” Dobrynin spent most of the memo addressing the need for “comprehensive positive propaganda on the domestic and foreign policy of the CPSU and the Soviet government.” To push the American government to positions at the negotiating table favorable to the Soviet leadership, Dobrynin hoped to develop “the potential of friendly—or at least non-hostile—feelings of many Americans toward the Soviet Union” by focusing on “basic, cardinal issues of international relations” in which the interests of the Soviet Union lined up with public opinion in the US. In particular, he cited American polls suggesting that the public wanted the superpowers to come together on strategic arms limitations, expand trade and cultural exchanges, and resolve conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

The goal of this propaganda campaign was to encourage support for “the normalization and improvement of relations with the USSR,” a critical aspect of Soviet

propaganda in the US that Dobrynin described in its current state as “weak.” Emphasizing that Soviet propaganda in the US should come off as “clear” and “positive,” Dobrynin said the effort should focus on the potential for improvement in Soviet-American relations to encourage progress in the early stage negotiations for détente. Furthermore, Dobrynin recommended campaigning against Nixon’s attempt at reconciling the US and the PRC. By highlighting the dangers of negotiating with the Chinese—the brutality of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the volatility of the Chinese regime, Mao’s willingness to resort to war in the nuclear age—Dobrynin hoped to convince the American public that in the era of triangular diplomacy, the US would be better off dealing with the USSR, a more dependable Great Power that shared Western cultural values.⁸⁵¹

A 1975 speech given by a representative from the embassy’s cultural office confirmed Dobrynin’s attitude. The representative emphasized that the embassy was focused on “stabilizing the positive achievements in the development of Soviet-American relations” and countering the forces in the US that opposed the development of détente. It used the openings provided by détente to establish ties with “the most representative and influential organizations” possible, including groups such as the YMCA, the World Trade Center in New Orleans, and other mainstream American organizations that advocated for détente. This made possible a more widespread distribution of Soviet propaganda through delegations visiting the US, lecture tours by embassy staff, and media coverage, all of which allowed diplomats to highlight the Soviet government’s interest in better US relations. Most

⁸⁵¹ RGANI, f. 5, op. 62, d. 56, ll. 94-128

importantly, the representative claimed that the embassy's work helped "demonstrate the mutual benefits and usefulness of the expansion of Soviet-American relations."⁸⁵²

During détente, the Soviet Embassy became a critical center for US-Soviet cultural relations, as Soviet diplomats specializing in cultural and economic affairs played a major role in improving superpower relations. They explained the changing landscape to officials in Moscow, initiated contact with potential partners, conducted the bulk of talks with American cultural agencies, and concluded agreements with various organizations. They accompanied delegations of prominent Soviet citizens on trips throughout the US and gave lecture tours across the country. Without embassy diplomats serving as liaisons between American organizations and the Moscow elite, the tremendous growth of cultural programs would have been nearly impossible. In fact, the head of the Citizen Exchange Corps, one of the major private exchange organizations, perhaps put it best, calling Soviet cultural officers "one of the sharpest 'weapons' in our particular form for the fight for peace."⁸⁵³

To accomplish the goals set by Dobrynin to publicize détente, the diplomats in the Cultural Department of the Soviet Embassy traveled the country, meeting with representatives of the American business community and mainstream American cultural organizations. Nesterov, who served as the head of the Cultural Department from 1969 to 1972, is a prime example of a Soviet diplomat who excelled under these conditions. In July 1971, Stephen James, the head of the Citizens Exchange Corps, wrote Ambassador Dobrynin to praise Nesterov for "help[ing] us walk the tightwire of Soviet-American amity without once slipping off in the past two years during the continuing oscillation between love and

⁸⁵² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1598, ll. 49-63.

⁸⁵³ GARF. f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 102, ll. 184-85.

tension between our two countries.” He singled out one of Nesterov’s best performances: giving the introductory speech at the traveling Leningrad children’s art exhibition. James states that Nesterov’s skills “somehow reached a new peak in the most unlikely place of all—the ‘heartland’ of America’s ‘silent majority,’ Lincoln, Nebraska.” Nesterov apparently used his “spontaneous wit” to charm the crowd and the local press. Indeed, Nesterov handled the press so deftly that James remarked he was “second to none” in this “delicate area of diplomacy.”⁸⁵⁴ Lincoln’s mayor, Sam Schwartzkopf, confirmed this in a letter to Nesterov, in which he supported the continuation of the program, stating that it was a “real pleasure” to meet the Soviet cultural representative and that “the people in Lincoln were very impressed” by the exhibit. Schwartzkopf, evidently feeling the impact of Nesterov’s visit, further proposed an exchange of Soviet and Midwestern American mayors.⁸⁵⁵

A year later, James wrote Dobrynin once more, this time because he heard of the possibility that Nesterov would be rotated back to Moscow. He noted that “the depth and breadth of cultural and trade relations has increased pyramidally,” especially since the advent of détente, and losing an experienced and professional diplomat like Nesterov would prove disastrous. He again complimented Nesterov’s ability, calling him an “unusually gifted man” whose “sense of the great range of American ‘styles’ and his ability to adapt to them, and his intuitive sense of the nuance of the American idiom are without parallel in my experience.” James concluded that, because of Nesterov’s “enormous energy, flexibility and wit it has been far easier than ever before to overcome many myths about the USSR that are so rife in American minds and so obstructive to our work.” In short, Nesterov represented a new kind

⁸⁵⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 102, ll. 184-85.

⁸⁵⁵ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 62, p. 385, d. 17, l. 56.

of Soviet cultural diplomat, who James felt “facilitate[d] the proliferation of our work in ways which were never before possible.”⁸⁵⁶

If James felt nervous about the veteran diplomat’s departure, he was most likely thrilled to learn that Nesterov’s replacement was Fedosov, who previously served as the head of the American Department for Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (or SSOD) and ultimately worked as the head of the Cultural Department of the Soviet Embassy from 1972 to 1979. Fedosov graduated from the Maurice Thorez Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages in 1961 and completed his graduate education at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in 1969. He later led the Cultural Department at the Soviet Embassy in London from 1985 to 1989, eventually serving as Soviet Ambassador to the Seychelle Islands and to Djibouti.

Just before his appointment in Washington, Fedosov traveled the US, visiting Binghamton, New York, and other cities. The local press was on hand for the visit, and one writer, Steve Hambelak of *The Sunday Press*, penned an article, “I’ll Never Forget Fedosov.” Reporting on a meeting between Fedosov, a Soviet academic, and undergraduates and graduate students in political science at the State University at Binghamton, Hambelak noted that the Soviet representatives spoke excellent English and “were friendly, not hostile. They were at ease, not uncomfortable. They were most polite, not boorish or argumentative.” Hambelak stated that he most remembered Fedosov’s “sense of humor, his incredibly fast wit. He reminded me of William Buckley, who isn’t my political cup of cognac, but whom I admire as the wittiest spokesman the right wing has.” The author listed the ways that

⁸⁵⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 102, ll. 181-83.

Fedosov used humor to extricate himself from uncomfortable lines of questioning. At one point, for example, when asked about the American opening to China, he said that “he was no authority on ping pong policy, ‘nor an expert on panda bears.’” Hambelak concluded that Fedosov was “a far, inaudible cry from the cliché type of Russian that most of us have come to know through books, movies, and live television reports from the United Nations.” He contended that “it is hard picturing a Fedosov . . . visiting the US, say, during the Stalin era” and that he was “a breath of fresh air in the endlessly stale and stupefying Cold War atmosphere.”⁸⁵⁷ Through their wit, their fluency in English, their general understanding of American audiences, and their ability to deflect criticism with humor, diplomats such as Nesterov and Fedosov presented a more positive image of Soviet citizens to American audiences.

Selling Détente

Reports from embassy diplomats recount multiple levels of progress in outreach efforts to the American public. In 1973, Fedosov helped the CEC to open a Soviet children’s art exhibit in Grand Rapids, a traditionally conservative region, which attracted 2,000 visitors in two weeks. There, Fedosov gave two talks, along with a TV interview and a meeting with local businessmen. The first talk, “The Development of Multinational Soviet Culture,” attracted a crowd of between 350 to 400 people at the Fountain Street Church. The second, “Peaceful Coexistence and Soviet-American Relations,” drew 150 people at the local branch of the World Affairs Council. Signs of Soviet-American animosity reared their head at both speeches. The first audience asked “the traditional questions about the dissidents

⁸⁵⁷ Steve Hambelak, "I'll Never Forget Fedosov," *The Sunday Press*, April 30, 1972.

Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and Panov,” and a group of Lithuanian immigrants interrupted the second speech to voice “an anti-Soviet declaration, which was condemned by the majority of those present.” Still, Fedosov reported that the general tenor of the first question-answer period was “good-natured and indicative of the poor awareness of Soviet reality” in the US. In examining the trip, he concluded, “Even in relatively remote areas of the US, along with the persistently poor awareness and occasional ignorance about Soviet domestic and foreign policy, there are definite positive changes in public attitudes.”⁸⁵⁸

Later in détente, as the Watergate scandal unfolded and Congressional support began to form for the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the questions from the American audiences changed. In March 1974, Fedosov attended the World Affairs Conference at the University of Colorado, where he delivered several speeches and participated in panels on Soviet-American relations. He wrote back that while “well-reasoned presentations” supporting the improvement of Soviet-American relations were “positively received by the audience,” the “questions from the audience reveal the negative effect of the American press, especially in connection with so-called ‘human rights’ and emigration from the USSR.”⁸⁵⁹ At an April 1974 conference on Soviet-American relations at the American Academy of Political and Social Science in Philadelphia, Harry Schwartz, an editorialist for *The New York Times* who specialized in Soviet and East European affairs, gave a speech “couched in the spirit of the ‘Cold War.’” Schwartz’s speech, the embassy representative noted, “irritated the American audience,” which primarily wanted to hear about strategic arms limitations, trade, science and technology, and the exchange of ideas and people. The Americans expressed concern

⁸⁵⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 138, ll. 132-33.

⁸⁵⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 82-84.

that Soviet-American relations had run into “serious difficulties” due to the “complex political situation in the US.”⁸⁶⁰ In other words, with Watergate crippling the presidency and the debate over the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the conversation sometimes shifted from progress in détente to pessimism about Soviet-American relations and criticism of human rights violations. The optimism expressed in earlier reports was noticeably more subdued.

By 1976, public enthusiasm for closer superpower relations cooled, and human rights issues and superpower conflicts in the Third World dominated the question and answer sessions. Crowds became less receptive to the Soviet message. One delegation wrote, “Our meetings with political and public figures in the US showed that the new wave of anti-Soviet hysteria in the US, partly connected to the current electoral campaign, causes hesitancy and apprehension” among “figures who, in the initial period of détente, actively lobbied for cooperation with the USSR. At the same time, everywhere we receive a hospitable and warm welcome, and privately—‘off the record’—people express the warmest desires for friendship with our country.”⁸⁶¹ The delegation noted that some mainstream organizations with connections to the American Department of SSOD held out hope that conditions would improve with the election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency, but a subsequent report in 1977 stated that “the situation in the country after Carter’s arrival to the White House continues to be difficult.”⁸⁶²

While the reports on lectures and conferences during this period struck an upbeat tone and almost always observed that the audiences supported détente in principle, they also acknowledged the growing critiques of Soviet policy. During a 1976 trip to Boston, Fedosov

⁸⁶⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 110-11.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid. For the 1977 report, see GARF f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

⁸⁶² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 12-15.

remarked that “the anti-Soviet rhetoric associated with the presidential campaign has a definite influence on the minds of youth.”⁸⁶³ He later reported on a conference in Portland, in which several prominent speakers—including historian Richard Pipes and Senator and Democratic Presidential candidate Frank Church—delivered speeches critical of the Soviet Union. Pipes, in particular, gave an “explicitly anti-Soviet” speech, describing détente as a “Soviet invention” and a “one-way street” that would benefit only the Soviet Union. Fedosov recalled that the audience asked tough questions about Solzhenitsyn, Soviet intervention in the Angolan civil war, the Sino-Soviet split, and “civil rights” in the USSR, and one group even handed out fliers protesting Soviet whaling.⁸⁶⁴ Fedosov stated that one speaker at an Oklahoma conference on human rights and foreign policy argued that “of the European countries, the single biggest violation of human rights is taking place in the Soviet Union.” The Soviet diplomat explained that the audience, while seemingly receptive to his speech, was “absolutely unfamiliar with the Soviet position on the question of human rights.”⁸⁶⁵ While cultural officials tried to put a positive spin on these lectures, signs of growing audience discontent still permeated their reports.

There is no question that embassy representatives were conscious that Moscow evaluated their performance when they wrote their summaries, and that they had to present their efforts in a positive fashion. Even Fedosov, who had previously served as the head of the American Department of SSOD, carefully avoided too much self-criticism. Yet these memos reveal the focus of their work: outlining a positive view of Soviet society, defending Soviet foreign policy, deflecting criticism of Soviet domestic policy, and highlighting Soviet-

⁸⁶³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 105-6

⁸⁶⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 122-23b.

⁸⁶⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1994, ll. 224-26.

American achievements or potential for joint agreement in strategic arms limitation, trade, science and technology, and conflict resolution around the globe.

To accomplish these tasks, the embassy employed diplomats who had a strong command of English and thus could engage in difficult conversations with American audiences, using humor to defuse sensitive subjects and keep the mood positive, even when the questions were pointed or protestors interrupted the proceedings. Since the embassy leadership called for expanding the reach of Soviet propaganda beyond Soviet sympathizers in the US, the diplomats visited universities, academic conferences, church organizations, world trade centers, cultural festivals, Rotary clubs, YMCA branches, and other mainstream institutions. In these venues, Soviet diplomats hoped to convey the image of the Soviet Union as a modern, stable, and dependable negotiating power. Above all, they sought to garner support for détente and the normalization of Soviet-American relations, eager to pressure the Nixon administration to the table with concessions favorable to the Soviet Union.

New Work with Mainstream Organizations

Cultural officers at the Soviet Embassy attempted to broaden the reach of public diplomacy by including new types of agencies and individuals in their cultural programs. In particular, they tried to take advantage of the flood of private mainstream organizations interested in starting exchange programs with the Soviet Union after the 1972 Moscow summit.⁸⁶⁶ One prominent example of this is the YMCA, which began working closely with

⁸⁶⁶ Yale Richmond has taken note of this sudden interest in cultural exchange programs, stating that “with encouragement from the White House, almost every government agency, as well as many non-governmental entities, wanted a piece of the action. A good part of each day at EUR/SES [the State Department’s Soviet and East European Exchanges Staff] was spent explaining to governmental and private organizations exactly how to

the embassy in early 1974. Fedosov forwarded the SSOD leadership a report in March detailing two months of preliminary talks between the embassy and the YMCA, including two face-to-face meetings and several phone calls. Fedosov concluded that a change in leadership at the YMCA's International Department made establishing a program with the organization easier. The new group received permission from the National Board to organize exchanges with various Soviet organizations, including SSOD, and they made proposals on the basis of avoiding "internal bureaucratic barriers to the establishment of friendly contacts with the Soviet Union." This indicated to the Soviet diplomats the real potential for an expanded program, and Fedosov forwarded the reports to Moscow with a request for additional instructions.⁸⁶⁷

Embassy diplomats began taking an active role in courting the YMCA, attending events to discuss improving Soviet-American relations and the potential for a permanent program between Soviet agencies and the YMCA. In December 1974, embassy cultural representative Metelkin traveled to COSMOS III, an international weekend held at Northwestern Michigan College and sponsored by the Michigan YMCA, where he "provided opportunities for discussing USA-USSR détente." On his way there, he stopped in Lansing, Michigan, to meet with several top state politicians and state YMCA executives. He appears in a photo with these figures in the YMCA newsletter, wearing a nice suit with slicked-back hair, smiling broadly.⁸⁶⁸ One of these officials, Jackie Vaughn III, traveled to Moscow shortly thereafter, with the embassy recommending that SSOD accommodate his requests,

go about starting an exchange with the Soviet Union." This also involved close cooperation with the Soviet Embassy's cultural section. Richmond, *Practicing Public Diplomacy*, 138, 148-49.

⁸⁶⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 69-72.

⁸⁶⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 147-48.

given their desire to expand relations with the YMCA.⁸⁶⁹ Embassy representatives, led by SSOD official Vladimir Molchanov, escorted a SSOD delegation to a Los Angeles YMCA event in April 1975. A photo shows Molchanov in the style of the time—with a plaid jacket, bushy hair and long sideburns—posing with his Russian colleagues.⁸⁷⁰ The initial memorandum explained that the YMCA volunteered to take on some duties for the upcoming Soviet-American Youth Forum. It planned a barbecue at the Alexandria YMCA, inviting several representatives from the Soviet Embassy, cultural officials from the State Department, the YMCA committee that arranged the activities, and the host families and participants.⁸⁷¹ In this regard, the embassy sent cultural officers to important YMCA events and involved the YMCA in its cultural programs to help develop closer relations and a more effective exchange plan.

The expansion of the embassy's relationship with the YMCA reached its peak with the 1976 Statesmanship Project, which called for a delegation of thirty-five to forty-five people, half of whom would consist of "outstanding YMCA leaders" from around the country. The other half would come from "top representatives of the arts." Initially, the YMCA proposed in January 1975 that this group stay in the USSR for four weeks, traveling to Moscow, Leningrad, Ukraine, Georgia, and, at the suggestion of the embassy, at least one of the Central Asian Soviet republics, and meet with top figures from Soviet artistic fields, as well as members of the Communist Party and Soviet government.⁸⁷² Two months later, Fedosov contacted Stepunin with additional details worked out in meetings with YMCA

⁸⁶⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, l. 146.

⁸⁷⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 825, l. 45.

⁸⁷¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 819, ll. 87-98.

⁸⁷² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 822, ll. 25-26, 28.

officials. He explained that half of the delegate slots would go to cultural representatives and half to authorities in business, industry, and education. This was an ambitious plan, and Fedosov recommended it to Moscow for consideration, noting “the importance of increasing contacts with prominent representatives of the American public” and the potential for receiving a group of senior representatives from “one of the largest and most influential organizations in the US.”⁸⁷³ In November, the YMCA said it would follow the embassy cultural representative’s advice and plan its trip through SSOD and the embassy.⁸⁷⁴ By December, Fedosov forwarded additional details, with the proposed dates of June 4 to July 5, 1976. He repeated his support for the program, although he emphasized that, given these dates, SSOD would have to respond to American bicentennial celebrations and counter the American propaganda with events celebrating the formation of the Soviet state and positive aspects of Soviet life.⁸⁷⁵

In the end, while SSOD files do not contain a Soviet summary of events during the Statesmanship Project, it appears that the YMCA at least viewed the program as a great success. In August 1976, the chairman of the National Board of YMCAs of the USA wrote to the embassy and SSOD to thank them for their hospitality and hard work. The group was received with “warmth and friendliness” wherever it went, he wrote. The chairman also expressed satisfaction that the YMCA group, organized under the theme, “Two Hundred Years of US History Through Music, Song, and Dance,” was matched with equally outstanding Soviet artists. He concluded that the program “gave all of us an opportunity to share the arts in a very informal way, as well as thoughts, ideas and personal human

⁸⁷³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 55-56.

⁸⁷⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1210, ll. 10-12.

⁸⁷⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 226-28.

experiences.”⁸⁷⁶ Thus embassy representatives helped the YMCA and SSOD produce an engaging program that opened new doors to Soviet influence in mainstream American culture.

If the budding relationship between the YMCA and SSOD demonstrates the expansion of cultural ties in their own right, the International House in New Orleans represents how the growth of Soviet-American trade relations in this period often deepened cultural ties. Fedosov first investigated the potential for a partnership between SSOD and the International House in April 1974, when he visited and met with its leadership, local businessmen, politicians, the leadership of the New Orleans Port Authority, and the city’s mayor. The International House, founded in 1943 as the first world trade center in the world, had a membership base of 2,500 businessmen from Louisiana and other southern states. Its library contained more than 16,000 volumes, received 500 periodicals on trade, and hosted foreign language classes. In addition, its leadership expressed an interest in receiving Soviet publications. The International House’s officials regularly gave interviews on radio and TV and in professional publications, and the group produced a weekly half-hour program on local public television broadcast on 115 stations in the South. Fedosov reported that both the business community and the public expressed enthusiasm for establishing a relationship with SSOD, provided the exchange programs did not have an overtly propagandistic character. He recommended that SSOD establish formal ties quickly.⁸⁷⁷ The International House offered a promising opportunity for cultural exchange, and Fedosov did not want to miss out on it.

⁸⁷⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1212, ll. 226-27.

⁸⁷⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 97-101.

The program between SSOD and the International House did not blossom until 1976, after Fedosov made a return visit to New Orleans in March, again meeting with the International House's officials and local leaders. He emphasized the tremendous interest in improved Soviet-American relations in the city, since a high percentage of the goods exported by the US to the USSR, especially grain, left from the port of New Orleans.⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, the Americans who visited the USSR in late 1975, such as the deputy director of the port authority, expressed great satisfaction with their trip, hoping that a return delegation to New Orleans could include Soviet businessmen and shipping experts. A television reporter who joined the delegation released a series of fourteen segments on the local news that were seen by about 500,000 people and, while a few critics complained that the reporter had been "brainwashed in Moscow," many viewers expressed great satisfaction with the coverage of Soviet life. Furthermore, the newly offered Russian language courses at the International House flourished, with fifteen to twenty businessmen stopping by twice a week to receive instruction from an enthusiastic American teacher.⁸⁷⁹

In this environment, with increased trade generating good will in New Orleans toward the expansion of Soviet-American relations, Fedosov met with Rolland Golden, an award-winning local artist with connections to the International House, to hold preliminary negotiations for displaying an exhibition of his works in Moscow. Following the talks, Golden agreed to send fifty-to-sixty slides of his paintings to Moscow, where experts could choose the works to be displayed in the exhibition. Then, Golden would ship the paintings to

⁸⁷⁸ Grain had particular significance, since in 1972, Nixon and Brezhnev agreed to a deal that allowed the Soviet Union to purchase it at a subsidized price. Soviet traders made use of this deal to relieve a catastrophic grain failure in the USSR, purchasing nearly the entire American stored reserve. This resulted in higher grain prices in the US and ferocious attacks on détente, earning the deal the nickname "the great grain robbery." Funigiello, *American-Soviet Trade in the Cold War*, 184; and Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 338-42.

⁸⁷⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 49-52.

Moscow, assemble a catalog, and pay for airfare to and from the Soviet Union, where he would travel with the collection. Fedosov emphasized that the public fully supported the trip, which would include Moscow and one or two other cities, and he strongly recommended that SSOD move forward in organizing it.⁸⁸⁰ The program guide, which contained descriptions of fifty-one paintings, expressed a desire that this five-city tour of Golden's work would be "the first such undertaking in what is hoped to become an annual exchange in the 'visual détente.'"⁸⁸¹ This reflected Golden's stated goal, conveyed in a letter to Stepunin and Fedosov, to "help promote a better understanding between the peoples of our countries."⁸⁸² While the final organization of the trip suffered from some miscommunications—the SSOD leadership expected Golden to send the paintings directly to Moscow, whereas Golden expected the Soviet side to pick up the crates when they arrived by ship in Odessa and ship them to Moscow—the show eventually opened in December 1976 to rave reviews, with three prominent American diplomats in attendance.⁸⁸³

Participants' accounts described the Golden's exhibition as a success. In his letter to SSOD after the trip, Golden thanked Molchanov for being a "good friend" and attending to his "every need and desire," praising the Soviet diplomat's "honest, integrity and idealism," as well as his sense of humor. Golden lamented the "slow dissolvment [sic] of Christianity," but celebrated "the vigor and warmth of the Russian people." Golden promised that the slides of the trip came out nicely and would be featured along with an interview with him in local television. Telling Molchanov that he already missed Soviet soft

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁸¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, l. 186.

⁸⁸² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, l. 23.

⁸⁸³ Ibid; GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 27, 97, 104; and GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, l. 236.

drinks “Rush-cola” and “Rush-up,” Golden joked, “If you ever decide to become a capitalist, we should go into business together and make Rush-cola an American household word.” He remarked that he missed Fedosov during his most recent visit to New Orleans, but looked forward to the embassy secretary’s return so that they could get together and drink the bottle of Soviet vodka he brought back to the US.⁸⁸⁴

SSOD’s new partnership with the International House provides an example of how positive developments in one area of Soviet-American relations could open room for progress in other fields. Here, the favorable environment for Soviet-American relations, shaped by political factors such as the Moscow summit and Nixon and Kissinger’s eagerness to use wheat sales as a trading chip in détente, led to a growth in trade. The resultant increase in Soviet-American business in New Orleans helped raise public interest in Russian language and culture in the city, making a cultural program between the International House and SSOD a priority. Of course, this process was not universally smooth. One problem arose when the Associated Press published a report about a Soviet television documentary on New Orleans produced during the visit of a SSOD delegation, narrated by famed Soviet diplomat and delegation member Valerian Zorin. The documentary described the city as a place of “historic nostalgia, gaudy commercialism, extremes of poverty and wealth, racist exploitation, assassination plotting and jazz.” The director of the International House responded by sending Fedosov a message, saying he was “embarrassed” and bombarded with protest letters from angry supporters, including the mayor.⁸⁸⁵ Still, cultural representatives from the Soviet Embassy correctly identified New Orleans as a site that was ripe for Soviet

⁸⁸⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 232-33.

⁸⁸⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 99-100, 215.

cultural programs, thanks to political and economic developments in Soviet-American relations, and successfully pursued exchanges that promoted Soviet culture and détente.

One curious case in the expansion of ties to mainstream groups following a successful trade program came with Dana McBarron, who owned a cattle ranch in the state of Washington. In 1974, thanks to the help of the head of the Agricultural Department of the embassy, McBarron completed a successful deal with the Soviet government and offered a bull named Bonny Boy as a gift to the Soviet people. In turn, the Soviet government agreed to purchase an additional bull, two cows, and two calves, all of which would be sent to Vladivostok by train. From there, they would travel to Moscow for an exhibition before they settled into their new home in the Altai Mountains bordering Mongolia and China. At the ceremony celebrating their departure for the USSR, McBarron wore a kilt, while members of the Seattle Scottish-Boys Pipe Band played bagpipe music. McBarron gave red bandanas to the Soviet sailors and declared them “honorary cowboyskis of Cape St. Mary.” Amid the festive atmosphere, McBarron told a reporter that the Soviet government was “dickering to purchase 150 more” cattle, but the purchase price “is my business.” Soon after, he toured the USSR to help promote the exchange.⁸⁸⁶

The personal letters between McBarron and Soviet representatives at the embassy and in Moscow reveal the ways in which personal diplomacy remained a key aspect of SSOD’s work in the US. The two men developed an intimate way of talking. The SSOD official in charge of their case, Molchanov, referred to McBarron as “father,” while the American businessman called his Soviet contact “son Vladimir.” McBarron wrote remarkably personal letters to his Soviet friends, telling them about his local charity work, his vacation plans, and

⁸⁸⁶ “Cattle on Historic Trip to Siberia,” *Seattle Times*, August 15, 1974; “A Cattle Drive from Seattle to Siberia,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 15, 1974.

his diet. For example, in July 1976, two years after the cattle deal, McBarron wrote Molchanov to congratulate him and “Daughter Galina” on their recent wedding. The American told Molchanov that he hired a man whose son has muscular dystrophy to run the sales division of his lumber company. He also reminisced about his trip to Russia, wishing that he had access to the mushrooms at Angarsk and Molchanov’s mother’s recipes. With his wife struggling with cancer treatments, he told Molchanov that they would be traveling to Florida over the holidays to see her family.⁸⁸⁷ Molchanov wrote back to “Father” McBarron expressing condolences over his wife’s illness and reminding him that even though he had to cancel preliminary plans to visit the Soviet Union that year, he would be welcome to visit Moscow anytime he wanted.⁸⁸⁸ When his son tragically died in November 1976, McBarron wrote a heart-wrenching letter to his friends at SSOD. He said his son’s life was “enriched by your kindness—your compassion—your understanding—your hospitality—your friendship.” McBarron then asked that Molchanov contact Father Valentine at Zagorsk to have a requiem mass said for his son, and concluded, “I write so immediately to share my grief—as this is your loss also! I know Vladimir—you also as my son—his brother—both honor and mourn with me and with his mother.”⁸⁸⁹ It is unclear if Molchanov followed through with his “father’s” wishes, though the SSOD leadership sent a letter of condolence on the loss of McBarron’s son, the “magnificent Mark.”⁸⁹⁰

SSOD diplomats maintained these sorts of personal relationships, formed through negotiations with the embassy and experiences with delegations, even after the completion of

⁸⁸⁷ GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 1609, l. 96.

⁸⁸⁸ GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 825, l. 18.

⁸⁸⁹ GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 251-52.

⁸⁹⁰ GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, l. 250.

the exchange. In the McBarron case, this did not lead to palpable gains for publicizing détente, since the American was fairly old and soon faced an array of personal problems that distracted him from the promotion of détente. Still, he met with a Soviet delegation in 1975 and remained a friendly voice toward Soviet diplomats, even as détente weakened in the late 1970s.⁸⁹¹ In sum, the work in personal diplomacy performed by Soviet diplomats at the embassy and in Moscow left a lasting impression on the American participants in exchange programs and, for some, produced deep and lasting feelings of friendship.

Idaho Dick

Along with increased opportunities for exchanges with existing cultural organizations, new advocacy groups attempted to take part in the expansion of cultural ties that came with détente. For example, Richard Kassatly formed the Institute for Soviet-American Relations (ISAR) in 1973. Kassatly, who gave himself the moniker “Idaho Dick” following his success in the potato business, was a burly, middle-aged son of Lebanese immigrants who drove around town in a Rolls Royce and was heavily involved in the Washington scene, working as a lobbyist, helping to found the Georgetown Club in 1966, and serving on the Board of Trustees of the local chapter of Goodwill.⁸⁹² In a letter to Dobrynin introducing his agency in October 1973, Kassatly emphasized that the ISAR was an NGO involved with cultural, educational, and technical exchanges, claiming that “people who know and understand each other in these fields could better communicate in a non-political way and could encourage further co-operation as time goes on.” He stated that his

⁸⁹¹ GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 825, l. 101.

⁸⁹² J.F. Ter Horst, "'Idaho Dick' Helps Soviets," *Sarasota Journal*, October 15, 1973; Jack Egan, "First Maryland Black Bank Chartered," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 1973; and "Skidmore Alumnae Leader Here," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 1974.

organization had connections and sources of funding that could make a positive impact on Soviet-American relations. In particular, he cited the example of a recent visit to the US by three members of the Ministry of Justice, whom he took to a Washington Redskins football game. “Their love for sports proved a natural bond between our people and the ministers of Justice experiencing firsthand the spirit of the American spectators,” he wrote. His proposals for exchange programs included one in the field of culinary arts, in which he hoped that Soviet culinary masters, such as the chef at the Soviet Embassy, would teach American chefs how to cut and arrange raw vegetables to resemble floral arrangements, along with other skills.⁸⁹³

Perhaps Kassatly’s most unusual suggestion was his proposal for a Soviet wine tasting event. Here, Kassatly described Brezhnev as “a connoisseur of fine wines and a patron of the culinary arts,” and suggested that his “fondest experiences” during a recent trip to the USSR came while drinking Soviet champagne with his lunches and dinners. Kassatly wrote that “although [Soviet] champagne might not be of great vintage years,” they were “good all-around full-bodied” and “its taste was not to be passed by so lightly.” He added, “it was priced in an area that never prohibited you from enjoying a bottle for lunch or dinner in the Soviet Union.” Kassatly hoped the tasty inexpensive drink could be featured in a tasting at the Georgetown Club for Congressmen and Washington socialites, with Soviet wine, Armenian brandy, and food prepared jointly by the chefs of the club and the Soviet Embassy.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, ll. 105-12.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid.

Here, as elsewhere in his correspondence, Kassatly emphasized his connections with important figures in Washington. He mentioned that the idea for the wine tasting came about during a discussion with Zane Hansen, chairman of the board and CEO of the Mack Truck Company. Kassatly repeatedly referred to his ties to Senator Eugene McCarthy, the ISAR national chairman. In one instance, Kassatly discussed this relationship at the Soviet-American Youth Forum with Robert Rozhdestvensky, the famous Soviet poet, promising to arrange a joint poetry reading with the American senator. In addition to McCarthy, Kassatly implied that a “very prominent American educator” who recently resigned from the Nixon administration would be signing on as ISAR’s chairman of education, perhaps referencing Sidney P. Marland, who had stepped down as assistant secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare a few weeks earlier. Overall, Kassatly hoped to leave the impression that “men of the highest caliber” led the ISAR.⁸⁹⁵

In the long run, the ISAR’s relationship with the ISAO failed to take root in subsequent years. Kassatly visited Moscow in December 1973 as secretary general of the ISAR, and he invited Stepunin to visit Washington in early 1974 to create a program for the next two years.⁸⁹⁶ By February, when Fedosov met with Kassatly to discuss his progress, Stepunin had not accepted the invitation, and Kassatly had not yet secured funding to pursue a rigorous exchange program. Kassatly informed the Soviet representative that he continued to have difficulty registering the ISAR as an NGO. He griped that the State Department and Justice Department had been “constantly calling” and asking about “what the Institute did, whether he received money from the Soviet Embassy, whether he had been offered money in

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, ll. 172-73.

Moscow, etc.” Fedosov characterized Kassatly as cautious, perhaps as a result of these inquiries, as the American repeated several times that the ISAR would not take on political issues, including the question of Jewish immigration. Kassatly, in fact, told Fedosov that he had “never seen official circles so nervous and demonstrating such suspicion in everything concerning the expansion of contacts between the USSR and US” in the cultural realm. He expressed fear that, unless he took extreme caution to portray the ISAR as a purely neutral cultural and educational institution, the press would tar him as a “new tool of Communist propaganda.”⁸⁹⁷

Furthermore, due to Kassatly’s inability to receive registration as an NGO, his promises of support from prominent Americans did not come to fruition, creating serious doubts about his credibility in the eyes of Soviet cultural officers. During the meeting with Fedosov, Kassatly gave several “evasive answers” about who served on the Institute’s board of directors. Finally, after Fedosov pressured him to come clean, he conceded that, apart from himself, he could only count on Senator McCarthy as a member of the board.⁸⁹⁸ During a March 5 meeting with Fedosov, McCarthy suggested that Kassatly, whom he met while the latter served as a lobbyist on Capitol Hill, proposed that the senator serve as the president for his cultural exchange organization. McCarthy accepted Kassatly’s proposal, commenting, “I allowed him to use my name.” Fedosov observed that, while McCarthy seemed generally interested in the progress of Soviet-American relations, he did not participate in the work of the ISAR in any practical way, trusting in Kassatly, who used McCarthy’s name for advertising purposes.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 62-64.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20 d. 467, ll. 71-72.

In addition to the weakness of the organization, Fedosov pointed to Kassatly's apparent financial motives as a second reason to be cautious in dealing with the ISAR. He wrote in his February memo that, while the ISAR could be useful in displaying Soviet exhibits or meeting with Soviet delegations, it could not be depended on for more extensive work due to "some questions" concerning Kassatly's motives.⁹⁰⁰ As a profile of Kassatly in the *Saratoga Journal* in October 1973 suggests, around the same time that he formed the ISAR, Kassatly started IDK (Idaho Dick Kassatly) Currency Arbitrators. This brokerage facilitated trade between the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Trade and American businesses, which frequently relied on barter. Kassatly provided the example of an American firm attempting to sell manufactured goods to the Soviet government. If the Soviet side offered lumber in return, but the American firm wanted plywood, Kassatly's company would handle the logistics of shipping the lumber to Japan, having it made into plywood, and shipping it back to the US, ultimately taking a cut from the American firm's profits from plywood sales. As the article argued, Kassatly "is getting in on the ground floor of a growing class of specialists who hope to parlay their knowledge of Soviet trading practices into high-paying businesses."⁹⁰¹ Fedosov recognized Kassatly's motives in this regard, as the American informed him of his desire to help Arrow, Merrill Lynch, White Industries, and other companies establish a foothold in the Soviet market. Fedosov recommended that the ISAO exercise caution in dealing with Kassatly: "There is no doubt that above all Kassatly is interested in receiving commissions from concluding deals between the Ministry of Foreign

⁹⁰⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 62-64.

⁹⁰¹ Horst, "'Idaho Dick' Helps Soviets."

Trade and various American companies.”⁹⁰² Thus Kassatly’s maneuvering only confirmed Soviet stereotypes about wily capitalists looking to do whatever they could to exploit Soviet markets. Kassatly’s contacts with the ISAO gradually disintegrated, but his business boomed, and he founded and chaired the National Association of Pension Fund Managers and served on President Ronald Reagan’s inaugural committee. His business remains active today as IDK Gulf Street Merchant Bankers.⁹⁰³ In this sense, Kassatly might not have found success running the ISAR or improving cultural ties between prominent Soviet and American citizens, but he fulfilled his ultimate goal of developing his international business acumen.

“This is Not Any Friendship Society”

The American Committee on US-Soviet Relations, later known as the American Committee on East-West Accord, represents a second and perhaps more successful cultural society that formed in the 1970s and worked closely with the Soviet Embassy to promote cultural exchanges. Fred Warner Neal, an academic who founded the international relations program at Claremont Graduate School, led the American Committee at its founding in July 1974, and in many ways he remained the Soviet Embassy’s primary contact at the committee, even after he was no longer technically in charge of it. Neal had long advocated for better relations with the Soviet Union. In fact, in November 1973, as opposition to Nixon mounted, especially on the Left, Neal felt compelled to defend the embattled president at the Reed College Lecture. He lamented that he might “be fated always to be in the minority”: when

⁹⁰² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 467, ll. 62-64. Indeed, as early as July 1973, Kassatly appears in the records of Gosplan, requesting a meeting with the Chair of Gosplan, N.K. Baibakov, to discuss the expansion of US-Soviet economic ties while he is in Moscow for the Civil Aeronautics Symposium. Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 4372, op. 66, d. 5835, ll. 48-51.

⁹⁰³ "IDK Principals/Founders," http://www.gulfstreetfunds.com/IDK_-_Site/IDK_Principals.html.

Nixon arrived on the scene, he was an anti-Nixon Republican; when Nixon became president, he was an anti-Nixon Democrat; and “now, when the momentum of public opposition against the President is reaching a crescendo, I find myself unable to join in.” Neal criticized “well-meaning liberals” and those who opposed Nixon on every issue, suggesting that by playing into Cold War fears, they merely guaranteed a return to poor superpower relations. Although Neal viewed Nixon as “inept, venal, and even disastrous in many ways,” he ultimately decided the “achievement of détente is worth keeping Nixon in office.” As he concluded, “It is ironic indeed that one has to turn to Nixon, the former Cold Warrior par excellence, as a guarantee against a return to Cold War policies, but that seems to be the situation.”⁹⁰⁴ For Neal, the end of the Cold War was the ultimate goal, and any politician who promoted détente, no matter how personally repugnant, would receive his support.

These attitudes shaped Neal’s decision to assemble a bipartisan nongovernmental organization of prominent figures—intellectuals, scientists, businessmen, clergy, entertainers, and former politicians and diplomats—that aggressively waged a public campaign in support of détente. Indeed, the American Committee’s roster included such luminaries as former ambassador and Harvard Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, PepsiCo CEO Donald Kendall, Harvard Chemist George B. Kistiakowsky, Senator Eugene McCarthy, President of the Mayo Clinic Dr. Howard P. Rome, Duke University President Terry Sanford, and actor Kirk Douglas. Neal asserted that this was an independent organization, free from the influence of Moscow or Washington, with famous and influential voices calling for the amelioration and eventual cessation of the superpower conflict.

⁹⁰⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 50-70.

Unlike Kassatly, Neal successfully conveyed the impression to the Soviet government that he had sufficient support in the American government to influence policy. On January 18, 1974, when discussing the committee with Soviet cultural representatives, he claimed that Kissinger personally suggested the idea for the organization to Neal.⁹⁰⁵ In a November 11 message to Stepunin, Neal enclosed a copy of a confidential letter from Ford. The new president thanked Neal for his congratulations and good wishes, promised to work for the improvement of Soviet-American relations, and, most critically, expressed appreciation for the committee's work to meet that objective.⁹⁰⁶ Even if these messages exaggerated Neal's influence in Washington, they effectively convinced the ISAO leadership and embassy representatives that Neal could make an important contribution by defending détente at the top levels of government.

As a result, the Soviet Embassy and the ISAO played a central role in aiding the formation of Neal's committee. Neal met with Stepunin in Moscow in the early months of the winter to discuss the founding of the committee, and he wrote him on at least three separate occasions before the committee's first meeting to update Stepunin on its development.⁹⁰⁷ Moreover, as Neal reported to Stepunin, he was in "close touch" with Fedosov and Dobrynin regarding all aspects of the planning process.⁹⁰⁸ Neal saw Dobrynin on the eve of the committee's planning meeting, expressing a desire to receive an invitation from a Soviet organization to visit Moscow in September or October of that year. He hoped

⁹⁰⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op, 20, d. 1604, ll. 47-49.

⁹⁰⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 23-34.

⁹⁰⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 38, 39, 85.

⁹⁰⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 39.

that the delegation would meet with representatives of the Soviet public, including Brezhnev, in order to “raise their prestige in the public eye of both countries.”⁹⁰⁹

Neal also used these early connections with Soviet authorities to present himself as an expert on American politics and offer his advice on how Soviet policy initiatives would play with Beltway insiders. For example, when visiting Moscow in early 1974, Neal bet Stepunin ten rubles that Nixon would not be impeached. This clever move gave Neal a reason to send Moscow periodic updates on his personal opinions regarding Nixon’s standing in Washington. Thus, on March 20, Neal wrote that he wanted to scale down his bet from ten rubles to five rubles, given the increased likelihood of Nixon’s impeachment, though he maintained that the Senate would not convict the president.⁹¹⁰ By April 30, he offered his analysis again, saying that he now would bet a small number of rubles that the House would convict Nixon and another small sum that the Senate would not convict him, complaining that this situation “complicates our problem” of promoting détente.⁹¹¹ Furthermore, on June 18, 1974, Neal mentioned that he set up Gromyko’s son for lunch with Senator Walter Mondale, and he suggested that Soviet authorities should invite Mondale to the USSR and give him “the most posh treatment,” since Neal believed that the Minnesotan could be “wooded away” from supporting the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.⁹¹² In this sense, Neal used the promise of the American Committee and loose connections with the Nixon and Ford administrations to gain access to Dobrynin and other Soviet leaders, presenting himself as an

⁹⁰⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 48-49.

⁹¹⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 38.

⁹¹¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 39.

⁹¹² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 85.

open and reliable source of information for national politics and a motivated and innovative advocate for détente.

Neal's ambition in the early days of the committee's work is revealed in his communications with Soviet authorities, as he expressed hopes to bolster détente by fundamentally altering the state of superpower cultural relations. Although he was more than willing to cooperate with friendship societies by hosting delegations, arranging meetings with officials, or giving his opinion on American policy or superpower relations, he always kept a careful distance from SSOD. In his initial meeting with Dobrynin, for example, Neal requested that the invitation for the group's trip to Moscow not come from SSOD, since the committee was not formally a friendship society motivated by a pro-Soviet ideology or a love of Russian culture.⁹¹³ Neal further emphasized in the July 10, 1974, press release announcing the formation of the organization that "this is not any friendship society." Rather, he stated, "We are for the closest cooperation between the USA and the USSR not because we love the Russians but because it is in our interest as well as theirs and everybody else's. We may be critical of both Washington and Moscow if we think their policies call for it."⁹¹⁴ By May 1976, he held the same line, telling a SSOD delegation visiting the US that his group did not want to be associated with the friendship society.⁹¹⁵

The ISAO's internal documents reveal that Soviet officials explained Neal's attitude as the result of the anti-détente political climate in the US. The 1976 delegation, for example, connected his response to "the new spell of anti-Soviet hysteria in the US, partly related to the electoral campaign." Later, they reflected on "the complexity of the current

⁹¹³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 48-49.

⁹¹⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 3-6, 10-11.

⁹¹⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1604, ll. 47-49; GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

political situation,” predicting an increase in assaults against détente by “reactionary circles.” Indeed, the members of the delegation observed that these conditions caused apprehension not just for Neal, but also for others who “actively advocated cooperation with the USSR” earlier in détente. As Neal lamented to the Soviet delegation, it was extremely difficult to form a “representative respectable organization” in the US in support of détente.⁹¹⁶

In reality, though, it appears that Neal attempted to do something more radical, as he hoped to form cultural organizations composed of nonpolitical pro-détente elites in each country. When differentiating his organization from American friendship societies, Neal told the ISAO that the American Committee was a “lobbying firm” to promote the improvement of Soviet-American relations in the context of “American national interests” through “covert actions.”⁹¹⁷ As part of this plan, Neal made the bold move of suggesting that the ISAO develop a new organization parallel to his committee. He told SSOD leaders and embassy representatives that, “in the eyes of Americans,” the ISAO had a long history of working with “pro-Soviet” organizations, meaning that news of an ISAO-American Committee connection would produce skepticism rather than excitement in the US. When he first proposed this in 1974, the SSOD leadership protested, arguing that the ISAO already existed for thirteen years and did not need to be replaced. He then recommended that SSOD take a few members from the current leadership, perhaps joining up with other Soviet professional organizations like the Institute of the USA and Canada, and simply rename it.⁹¹⁸

Neal then took the brash and unprecedented step of suggesting that the ISAO include “so-called dissidents” in the new organization, as “this would impress American public

⁹¹⁶ Ibid.

⁹¹⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll.41-44, and GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

⁹¹⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 102.

opinion.” Neal specifically named Roy Medvedev, whose blustering critique of Stalinism, *Let History Judge*, had recently been published in English.⁹¹⁹ Understanding that Neal’s decision to bring up dissidents in official circles could lead to serious difficulties for the American Committee’s program with the Soviet government, Fedosov explained the “faux pas” and encouraged Neal to write a letter retracting this idea after his return to the US. Neal fell short of this, writing: “I realize the undesirability of this. But I did want to shock people into thinking about some new ideas.”⁹²⁰

Some prominent Soviet figures showed interest in forming this sort of organization, without the dissidents, and while it did not change much about the practical work of the American desk at SSOD, they made some effort to address Neal’s concerns. Arbatov, head of the Institute of the USA and Canada, told Neal that a committee composed of figures “with positions as important in our society as your members have in yours” was under consideration in Moscow, even if “its mode of operation would be different than the American Committee.”⁹²¹ Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR P. N. Fedoseev also wrote the SSOD leadership to support the embassy’s recommendation for close cooperation with the American Committee, suggesting that SSOD and the Institute of the USA and Canada could pick suitable board members for a new organization to parallel the American Committee.⁹²² The decision to rename the ISAO the “USSR-USA Society” appears to have been partly inspired by these discussions, and while the practical changes to

⁹¹⁹ Ibid; and Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, trans. Colleen Taylor (New York: Knopf, 1971).

⁹²⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 38.

⁹²¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 119-28.

⁹²² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 151.

SSOD's activities in the US remained minimal, Fedosov reported to Moscow in June 1976 that Neal seemed pleased with the new name and the opening of USSR-USA Society offices in cities throughout the USSR.⁹²³

Despite Neal's ambitions to change the way that cultural organizations advanced détente, the American Committee had weaknesses that ultimately hampered its efforts in early years. First, Neal failed to garner the financial support needed to maintain an active program, and he frequently complained about money issues in conversations with Soviet diplomats. During the initial planning for the American Committee, Neal repeatedly told SSOD leaders that he anticipated financial difficulties, to the point that the ISAO official who took notes on the discussions felt that Neal might have been fishing for financial support from the Soviet government.⁹²⁴ Shortly after the founding of the American Committee, Neal told an embassy representative that he believed a \$50,000 annual budget would give them sufficient funds to run an effective program and he felt confident that he could raise that sort of money, although the embassy official noted that Neal was vague in explaining how he planned to accomplish this.⁹²⁵ A few months later, Neal wrote to Moscow that the finance committee was raising money "somewhat slowly," but hoped that its fortune would improve with the opening of a permanent office in Washington.⁹²⁶ By 1976, it became clear that Neal's initial optimism about fundraising was misplaced. One delegation reported that two years after the founding of the American Committee, Neal had secured only \$30,000 total, and all but \$4,000 had been spent on a delegation to Moscow. A far cry from the \$50,000

⁹²³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 150-51.

⁹²⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 102

⁹²⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 46-47.

⁹²⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, l. 23

annual budget that Neal predicted, most of this money was donated by wealthy members of the board, including Kendall and Galbraith. As the delegation lamented, Neal “constantly complained about financial difficulties,” which ultimately restricted the American Committee’s ability to lobby in favor of détente.⁹²⁷

Second, Soviet officials expressed criticism of the diverse nature of the American Committee. When visiting Moscow, Neal told SSOD authorities that the activity level of members often depended on their profession, with businessmen, public figures, and scientists more active than doctors or lawyers.⁹²⁸ In the end, as the delegation concluded, several members of the American Committee who could have made a substantial contribution to its efforts articulated concerns that being perceived as “pro-Soviet” would hurt them in business or in politics.⁹²⁹ In 1976, the USSR-USA Society summary for the American Committee noted that its members lived too far apart, and the interparty nature of the organization meant that there were often great differences between the opinions of individual members on any number of issues central to the defense of détente.⁹³⁰ In other words, the organization’s diverse members, who numbered between 100 and 130 by the mid-1970s, made it difficult to formulate a single program that satisfied the majority of people and allowed for mass participation.

Third, Soviet officials assumed that stronger leadership might overcome these challenges. As the 1976 summary argued, “A number of the problems rest on Professor

⁹²⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

⁹²⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 41-44.

⁹²⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

⁹³⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1604, ll. 47-49.

Neal's lack of organizational skills."⁹³¹ Indeed, the delegation that year suggested that Neal could come up with only vague excuses for why the committee had not found success two years into its existence, noting that they failed to convince any number of influential people to serve as the chairman of the American Committee, a fact that several members used as a "specious excuse" to resign from the organization. The report advised that the embassy should play a more active role in guiding the American Committee's activities and that Soviet diplomats should use their connections in the American business community to identify a "reputable and well-known" person to serve as the chair. More importantly, the delegation concluded that, while Neal was "friendly" to Soviet cultural authorities, he was also a "disorganized, constantly scattered person" who lacked the skills and the organizational activity necessary to manage the American Committee. They recommended that he retain his leading role in the American Committee, but that Soviet diplomats persuade him to delegate organizational responsibilities to someone else.⁹³²

The Soviet leadership's impressions of Neal's organizational incompetence in the early years of the American Committee's existence intensified upon receiving reports from the Soviet Embassy following discussions with other members of the organization. In particular, Carl Marcy, a former Chief of Staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who served as director of the American Committee in its initial years, met with Fedosov shortly after opening the American Committee's office in Washington. He complained about Neal's "difficult character traits," especially his "dictatorial tendencies." While Neal was an asset in persuading influential Americans to start the organization in the first place, after its

⁹³¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1604, ll. 47-49.

⁹³² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 31-40.

early expansion, Marcy believed that he had “neither the ability, nor the time and resources” to manage the American Committee.⁹³³ Although he later spoke of Neal favorably, this early impression of Neal reinforced the opinions of SSOD leadership.⁹³⁴

Overall, Neal and the American Committee could not deliver on the full promise of the organization, and their attempts to influence politics at the highest level in the US did not succeed. In 1976, for example, two members of the committee served as advisors to the Carter administration: Galbraith and Columbia University Professor Richard Gardner. Marcy informed an embassy representative, though, that Carter advisor Stuart Eizenstat instructed the American Committee members not to “provoke” Carter into making positive statements about Soviet-American relations, since “any statement on this issue could complicate his campaign.”⁹³⁵ Thus, even when American Committee members could secure a position close to an important politician, their suggestions for policies in favor of détente often fell on deaf ears. As public support for détente deteriorated in the late 1970s, the American Committee had a more difficult time spreading its message, and its work with the USSR-USA Society declined as a result.

This is not to say that the American Committee ran a completely ineffectual program. By the late 1970s, the organization’s finances stabilized somewhat, thanks in large part to a \$10,000 donation from the UAW. They had three permanent employees stationed in Washington.⁹³⁶ George F. Kennan, one of the most famous American diplomats of the twentieth century and a vocal supporter of détente, agreed to serve as co-chair of the

⁹³³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1203, ll. 107-9.

⁹³⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 173-74, 189-90.

⁹³⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 173-74.

⁹³⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 72-73.

American Committee, and several other prominent Americans signed on, such as former Senator Stuart Symington.⁹³⁷ Furthermore, the American Committee actively published works in support of détente, such as *Détente or Debacle: Common Sense in US-Soviet Relations*, which featured articles by Galbraith, Kendall, Kennan, Kistiakowsky, and political scientist Stephen Cohen.⁹³⁸ Neal and the American Committee also worked diligently to counter the rhetoric of the Committee on the Present Danger. This group, founded in November 1976 to oppose détente, included luminaries such as California Governor and future President Ronald Reagan, former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, top American strategist Paul Nitze, and historian Richard Pipes.⁹³⁹ In one instance, Neal informed embassy diplomats that he traveled to Washington to report at a conference convened by Congress in May 1977. There, he countered arguments about the “Soviet military threat” articulated by Nitze and General George J. Keegan, the former head of US Air Force intelligence.⁹⁴⁰ These actions were not insignificant, and they signaled that a pro-détente voice remained in force, despite the shift in public opinion.

⁹³⁷ Ibid. Also, Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 270.

⁹³⁸ Fred Warner Neal, ed. *Detente or Debacle: Common Sense in US-Soviet Relations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).

⁹³⁹ There are no comprehensive histories of the Committee on the Present Danger, but Nicholas Thompson provides a detailed description of the organization and its activities. He explains that Nitze, in particular, took a leading role in the committee’s activities, and he describes the committee as “one of the oddest, and most successful, citizen-lobbying groups of the Cold War” and “a holding pen for the men and women later called neoconservatives,” allowing Scoop Jackson Democrats and Goldwater Republicans to link up in an organization that would shape American conservatism into the twenty-first century. Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove*, 262-63.

⁹⁴⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 72-73. Earlier that month, Keegan revealed to *Aviation Week & Space Technology* magazine that his work for the government demonstrated that the Soviet military was close to revealing a charged-particle beam weapon that could be used in anti-ballistic missile systems. While most national security and intelligence officials disagreed with Keegan’s conclusions, this set off a fierce debate in Washington about the capacity of Soviet technology and the utility of détente for slowing the arms race. Jr. Clarence A. Robinson, “Soviets Push for Beam Weapon,” *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, May 2, 1977.

The Fishman Affair

Despite Dobrynin's work to coordinate the approach and activities of embassy personnel, disparities remained between different diplomats' conceptions of détente. For example, in 1975, the Citizen Exchange Corps, a nonprofit NGO dedicated to building cultural exchanges between the US and the USSR, opened negotiations with the embassy's cultural affairs division for an exchange program with bilingual educators. In October 1976, the Soviet delegation visited the US, and the program was judged an overall success, both in allowing for an exchange of ideas and pedagogical approaches and in creating positive press for détente. The American delegation made plans to visit Moscow in December 1976 when the CEC received a phone call from the embassy eight days before the scheduled departure, stating that one delegate, Dr. Joshua Fishman, would likely not receive a visa. The CEC noted with frustration that Dr. Fishman had been included on the list of delegates as early as March 1976, about eight months earlier. Eventually, embassy officials conceded that, while they might finagle a visa for Dr. Fishman in January, they could not do so before the scheduled visit, and the delegates refused to proceed with the trip without Dr. Fishman.⁹⁴¹

There are several potential reasons that Dr. Fishman's visa may have been declined in advance of the trip, although SSOD's files never provide a direct explanation. One memo that discusses the Fishman affair contains a long complaint by Stepunin about problems in receiving American visas for cultural programs in the US. He cites visas arriving at the last moment before the trip, including one instance in which the visa arrived two hours before the plane departed, and unprecedented restrictions on travel within the US under visas assigned to prominent Soviet visitors. It is possible that Fishman did not receive his visa due to

⁹⁴¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1209, ll. 151-53, 170-74; f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 8-11; op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 208-10

retribution for these perceived slights to Soviet visitors, although this connection is not specifically made in the available documents.⁹⁴² In their letter of complaint, CEC authorities speculated that the refusal probably resulted from Dr. Fishman's affiliation with Yeshiva University and his status as an Orthodox Jew, given the Soviet Union's general unwillingness to work with individuals with any ties to Israeli or Zionist institutions. Precedent exists for this sort of visa denial. For example, in helping the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education plan a visit of American scientists to the USSR for a conference in 1972, Science and Technical Counselor E. Belov recommended that geneticist Seymour Fogel and astrophysicist Irwin I. Shapiro not receive invitations, the former because of a "telegram of Zionist character" that he sent to the embassy, the latter because of his participation in "Zionist activities."⁹⁴³ Still, when directly questioned about this by CEC representatives, embassy personnel denied that Dr. Fishman's ties to Israel posed a major problem, and the internal memos do not make reference to Israel.⁹⁴⁴ Regardless, embassy cultural officials seemed genuinely confused by the situation. Thus, the Fishman affair likely arose as a result of a miscommunication between the embassy's cultural office and consular division.

American organizations reacted strongly to the Fishman affair and became more reticent to commit to exchange programs with the Soviet Union. For example, Irving Hamer, Jr., trustee and coordinator of the CEC, wrote on December 24 that the organization was "shocked and disappointed" in the developments. Hamer mentioned that a Soviet Embassy spokesperson described the obvious reasons that Dr. Fishman may have been denied a visa—

⁹⁴² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 8-11.

⁹⁴³ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 62, p. 385, d. 18, ll. 21-28.

⁹⁴⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1209, ll. 170-74.

his status as an Orthodox Jew, his affiliation with Yeshiva University, Soviet criticism of his work several years earlier—as “insufficient.” Suggesting that “numerous other groups” also had visa problems over the previous months, Hamer declared that this was “extremely detrimental to public US-USSR exchanges,” which had to be based on “equality and reciprocity.” Hamer complained that the credibility and finances of the CEC were at stake, since the CEC relied on public donors, and he lamented the fact that the CEC’s work to publicize the exchange backfired as a result of the Fishman affair and drew negative attention. He wrote, “In the eyes of many, the Soviet Union appears to no longer wish to carry out its agreements in the area of exchanges and, in particular, this exchange, which was made in good faith and heretofore had been carried out with cooperation and to the advantage of both sides.” Moreover, Hamer stated that this sequence of events brought the integrity of the ISAO into question. He concluded ominously, “We have been working hard over the last few years to regularize and expand our relations with you. Yet incidents like this suggest negative implications for the future of our relationships.”⁹⁴⁵

David Bird, chairman of the New England branch of the CEC, echoed the sentiments of the Hamer and the national organization. He assured Stepunin and the ISAO leadership that he was “really glad to be involved with Soviet-American goodwill and understanding” and did his best to produce “interesting and unconventional itineraries” for those delegations visiting New England. That said, Bird noted he was “chagrined and disappointed about the whole Fishman matter.” He asserted that “if a competent professional group is organized to represent its profession on an exchange, and the Soviet government rejects one of the group,

⁹⁴⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1209, ll. 170-74.

that becomes a function of state control.”⁹⁴⁶ In other words, Bird bemoaned the perception of state control over what he felt should be matters handled by social organizations. He felt that, if the US accepted a Soviet delegation of professionals without alterations, the Soviet government should follow suit. In sum, like Hamer, he feared for the future of Soviet-American exchange programs under these conditions.

In internal communiqués to Moscow, Soviet Embassy diplomats defended their state’s actions in the Fishman affair, suggesting that the CEC sought to sabotage the progress made in previous years. In his 1977 report on the USSR-USA Society’s activities after the conclusion of the Helsinki Accords, Stepunin described the Fishman affair as the result of anti-Soviet forces in the US government interfering in cultural programs. He wrote that the CEC, influenced by the American special services, included Dr. Fishman, someone who was a “well-known anti-Soviet” who had been denied a visa multiple times in the past, in the delegation. In response to the Fishman affair, the CEC “blackmailed” the USSR-USA Society, “threatened” a press campaign, flooded the Soviet officials’ mailboxes with letters, and refused to replace Fishman with another delegate.⁹⁴⁷ This memo not only laid the blame for the failed program at the feet of the CEC, but it also suggested that the cultural exchange organization had conspired with dangerous elements of the American government in an attempt to undermine Soviet authority.

The Soviet Embassy’s notes on the Fishman affair do not contain references to the American special services, but they do attempt to defend the embassy from criticism at home while encouraging ties with the CEC. In March 1977, embassy representative Fedosov

⁹⁴⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1213, ll. 208-10.

⁹⁴⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 8-11.

reported on recent work with the CEC to Andrei Ledovskii, the deputy chairman of the Presidium of SSOD and an accomplished diplomat who previously served as a high-ranking official in the Foreign Ministry and as the Soviet ambassador to Burma. He stated that, since the Fishman affair, the CEC leadership not only refused to send the delegation for bilingual education, but also “attempted to organize the mass delivery of protest telegrams to Moscow and the embassy, as well as appearances in the American press.” Fedosov reported that CEC leaders such as Jane Lombard and Grant Pendill “continuously return[ed] to the question of Fishman” in their meetings, demanding “an explanation and an apology” and declaring that they were “unlikely to send a delegation to the USSR this year if the question of Fishman’s trip was not reexamined.” Furthermore, the Soviet representative stated that the CEC was actively cultivating ties with other Soviet organizations, specifically citing its work with the Stanley Foundation and the Center for Defense Information to arrange a trip by the deputy secretary of the Soviet Academy of Science’s Institute of Canada. He noted that the CEC representatives “slipped hints” that it did not “get” that much from SSOD and might look to other Soviet organizations to continue their exchange programs.⁹⁴⁸ Given previous conflicts between the different Soviet bureaucracies over who had control over cultural diplomacy, Fedosov emphasized the need to retain power for SSOD and the Foreign Ministry and restrict organizations like the Academy of Sciences to a secondary role.

Fedosov’s recommendations reflect both his attempt to outwardly deflect criticism and his belief that Soviet officials should put in the necessary work to bring the CEC back into the fold. He concluded that the CEC “hardened its position to a certain extent,” due to “the changing circumstances in the country; the escalation of ideological attacks against the

⁹⁴⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 47-49.

socialist system, in general, and the Soviet Union, in particular; and the mass campaign directed toward US public opinion for the Western interpretation of the Final Act of the Helsinki Accords.” Still, highlighting the positive results of programs with the CEC for Soviet cultural diplomacy, he recommended that SSOD “continue and deepen” its work with the CEC. He suggested that the SSOD leadership meet with Lombard while she visited Moscow in April at the invitation of the Soviet United Nations Association, emphasizing to her that the CEC should move beyond the Fishman affair and embrace the challenge to make a “much greater effort to promote mutual understanding and trust between the American and Soviet publics.”⁹⁴⁹ In other words, he hoped that appealing to the CEC leadership’s passion for détente would revive its interest in USSR programs organized by SSOD. In that way, it would preserve the role of SSOD in organizing exchanges. Fedosov emphasized that the CEC held the blame for the failed exchange, but encouraged the Soviet leadership to move forward in reopening talks with the CEC leadership.

By May 1977, the CEC and Soviet representatives began to talk about future initiatives, and Fedosov continued to frame the situation in a way that presented the Soviet Embassy and the USSR-USA Society in the most positive light possible. He wrote to Stepunin that “having probably perceived the incorrectness of its position with regard to the Fishman affair,” the CEC organization in Boston, which Soviet representatives viewed as more flexible in the wake of the Fishman affair than the New York branch, expressed its readiness to invite five Soviet lecturers on various topics to the US in 1977-78. Fedosov suggested that, given the circumstances, it would be wise to move forward with the lectures

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid.

and revive SSOD's programs with the CEC.⁹⁵⁰ Once again, Fedosov stressed that the disagreement was entirely the fault of the CEC, but he recommended reconnecting with the organization anyway to ensure the continuation of the exchange program.

Thus, poor communication between the cultural and consular divisions of the embassy, as well as disagreement over what sort of delegates were acceptable in an exchange program, led to the scrapping of the program and bad press for the Soviet Union, the CEC, and the prospects for effective cultural exchange between the superpowers. The embassy's cultural representatives sought to ameliorate this situation by deflecting blame. However, sensing the importance of cultural programs with the CEC and the need to protect the USSR-USA Society's prominent role in planning cultural exchanges, cultural representatives at the Soviet Embassy recommended continuing negotiations with the CEC, even when the American organization proved resistant to resuming normal relations in the wake of the Fishman affair. While CEC relations with the embassy did rebound, carrying a significant portion of the cultural exchange burden as official state exchanges slowed in the 1980s, this story exemplifies the limits of cultural détente on a bureaucratic level by providing an important example of how even deep-rooted partnerships like the one that existed between the USSR-USA Society and the CEC faced increasing challenges in the late 1970s as détente collapsed.

Conclusion

During his trip to the US from November 20 to December 4, 1977, Soviet sociologist G.V. Osipov faced a dilemma. He was scheduled to give a lecture at Yale University when

⁹⁵⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 96-98.

he discovered that a series of workers' strikes had erupted on Yale's campus, lasting more than thirteen weeks. In order to get to his lecture hall, members of the CEC would have to support him as he crossed the picket line and protect him from physical injury. Osipov told the head of the CEC that he would not give the lecture so long as the strike continued. The American protested, asking the Soviet sociologist why he came to the US. Osipov shot back that he did not come to the US to "interfere in internal American business," but to give lectures. Still, the trip went ahead, despite Osipov's additional complaints about the conditions provided by the CEC. As with most exchange delegations, the cultural officers at the embassy found themselves serving as translators and facilitators, and Osipov credited Fedosov with advising him during the fight with the CEC and ensuring the program's eventual success: "Fedosov extended constant care and attention to me. He is a highly responsible person. I strongly request that his work be recognized."⁹⁵¹

Cultural affairs officers at the Soviet Embassy played a critical role in facilitating the flood of Soviet-American cultural exchange programs that came in the aftermath of Nixon's trip to Moscow. Having played a central role in organizing delegations, they were responsible for accompanying the visiting Soviet citizens and smoothing over the problems that they inevitably faced, as in Osipov's situation. They toured the country, attempting to convince audiences that were frequently critical of Soviet policy of the potential for détente. Embassy diplomats initiated contact with the American NGOs that seemed best suited for an exchange program with SSOD, and they performed the bulk of negotiations, developing programs that often succeeded in portraying the Soviet Union and détente in a positive light. They faced major obstacles in promoting détente, ranging from the limitations of their own bureaucracy to the developments in politics and the Third World in the mid-1970s that turned

⁹⁵¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1992, ll. 63-68.

many Americans against the normalization of Soviet-American relations. Their work under these less-than-ideal conditions still provided American citizens who were not necessarily friendly to the Soviet Union with additional exposure to the other superpower. Overall, the Soviet Embassy's efforts in expanding cultural relations reflected its desire to support top-level diplomacy by presenting the Soviet Union as a mainstream power and reliable negotiating partner with rational leaders and a population that was open to the world.

CHAPTER 7

SYMPATHY FOR THE RED DEVIL: SOVIET-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP SOCIETIES AND DÉTENTE

This chapter investigates one failed aspect of détente: Soviet cultural authorities' relationships with Soviet-American friendship societies. These groups, formed by pro-Soviet leftist Americans in the interwar era to promote closer ties between the two countries, faced a number of challenges during détente, including empty coffers, dwindling membership numbers, and an inability to attract interest among radical youth or pro-détente activists outside of their ideological base, despite popular interest in détente. Détente brought some new life to their program, particularly after 1975, with increased exchange opportunities and the addition of new regional societies. However, despite progress on paper facilitated by the embassy, the friendship societies did not have a significant impact on Soviet-American relations, as they continued to suffer from many of the same deficiencies faced in previous decades.

While American Cold War-era literature described them as such, friendship societies in this period were not Soviet fronts. Although their members did occasionally receive aid from the USSR in the form of subsidized in-country travel during their visits, free propaganda, and souvenir merchandise to sell at special events, the Russian archives provide no sign of direct funding from Moscow. In fact, the societies were constantly in dire financial straits. Further, although they received advice from the ISAO/USSR-USA Society to develop their programs, the friendship societies contained an independent leadership that

did not take orders from the Kremlin. On the contrary, at times, friendship society leaders expressed ambivalent or even critical opinions about Soviet foreign policy. That said, the national director of the Soviet-American friendship societies acknowledged the importance of the embassy in maintaining an active program, writing that, the more he considered the programs proposed by Moscow, “the more I think that a fruitful outcome can only be possible if Gennady [Fedosov] is part of these deliberations. With him rests the execution of the program here in the States.”⁹⁵² Indeed, the heads of the cultural affairs department at the embassy, as well as their deputies, reported to Moscow on the friendship societies’ activities, negotiated proposals for exchange programs, and provided the friendship societies with the guidance and material support necessary to implement their programs, making them critical to this aspect of cultural relations.

This chapter traces the history of the Soviet-American friendship movement in the US, focusing on how and why the Soviet Union invested resources in the relatively unsuccessful enterprise. It sheds light on efforts by the Soviet Embassy to guide and expand friendship societies’ programs, but suggests that a dearth of enthusiasm from embassy officials helped contribute to their overall lack of effectiveness. In the end, embassy officials preferred to focus their energies on exploiting new opportunities for closer ties with mainstream American cultural organizations. They understood that these efforts yielded a greater positive impact on American public opinion, while the activities of friendship societies undermined their message about the Soviet Union’s position as a mainstream power.

⁹⁵² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, l. 159.

From Madison Square Garden to Prison

An American-Soviet friendship movement began in the United States with the advent of the Friends of the Soviet Union in the 1920s.⁹⁵³ Its overtly radical origins notwithstanding, the movement soon tempered, as professionals who were sympathetic to socialism formed organizations to promote American recognition of the USSR and better relations between the two countries. In 1926, a group of these individuals—led by prominent Americans such as Smith College president William Smith, progressive educational reformer John Dewey, public health activist Lillian Wald, celebrated conductor Leopold Stokowski, and director of the Council of Foreign Relations Stephen P. Duggan—founded the American Society for Cultural Relations with Russia. The society boasted more than 1,000 members by 1929, with branches in several major cities. Changing its name to the New York American-Russian Institute in 1936, it promoted education and mutual understanding between the countries without serving the interest of any particular country or ideology. The society's efforts to remain unaligned helped it avoid controversies and maintain a high degree of professionalism.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵³ Although several historians have examined Soviet cultural diplomacy with the friendship societies during the Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev periods, no one has used archival evidence to provide a detailed analysis of their activities during détente. For Cold War-era literature on friendship societies, see Frederick C. Baghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); Louis Nemzer, "The Soviet Friendship Societies," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1949): 265-84; J. D. Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: American-Soviet Cultural Relations, 1917-1958* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1983); and Clive Rose, *The Soviet Propaganda Network: A Directory of Organisations Serving Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Pinter Publishers, St. Martin's Press, 1988). For more recent historiography, see Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," 193-214; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941*; Michael David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligence Relations in the Interwar Period," *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 1 (2002): 7-32; and Magnusdottir, "Keeping Up Appearances."

⁹⁵⁴ Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 22-23.

If the New York-based American-Russian Institute pursued a relatively neutral stance in dealing with the USSR, other friendship societies expressed a less nuanced endorsement of the Soviet state. In 1932, professors from the University of California and Stanford University, supported by businessmen interested in breaking into the Soviet market, formed the San Francisco American-Russian Institute (ARI), which was unaffiliated with the New York organization. Similar to the New York Institute, the San Francisco ARI worked closely with Soviet cultural organizations, hosting Soviet delegations and sponsoring exhibits on the USSR in San Francisco's galleries and museums. Yet, while the New York Institute operated on the belief that outward neutrality regarding political relations along with an emphasis on developing "objective" knowledge about the Soviet Union through cultural exchanges would produce mutual understanding, the leaders of the San Francisco ARI publicly advocated for closer political relations between the US and USSR.⁹⁵⁵

By 1943, the ARI was led by Dr. Holland Roberts, a former Stanford University professor who held the title of president of the ARI from 1943 until his death in 1976. Roberts, born in Nebraska in 1895, labored as a factory worker, railroad worker, and seasonal farm hand before serving on the Western Front in World War I, according to Soviet sources. Upon his return to civilian life, he enrolled at the University of Chicago, completing advanced degrees in English and Education and attaining the rank of associate professor of Education for English teachers at Stanford University in 1939. Roberts made his mark on the leftist movement in California while serving as president of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1937-38 and 1944. He agitated for the American Federation of Teachers, became a member of the ARI in the 1930s, and campaigned for the freedom of Tom Mooney,

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 51-52.

a socialist leader imprisoned from 1922 to 1939 for his involvement in the San Francisco Preparedness Day Bombing of 1916. These activities marked Roberts as a left-wing radical. In 1944, Stanford refused to renew his contract. Undeterred, Roberts persisted as an active member of the leftist community in San Francisco, joining the California Labor School as its educational director after his dismissal from Stanford. He became director of the school in 1949, remaining in that post until the government closed the school in 1957.⁹⁵⁶

The National Council of American Soviet Friendship (NCASF), an organization with a similarly pro-Soviet orientation, formed in New York in the 1940s. Its roots can be traced to the National Council on Soviet Relations, founded in support of World War II to manage the 1942 Congress of American-Soviet Friendship, which attracted high-profile supporters such as President Franklin Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and Vice President Henry Wallace. Following the success of the congress, several members decided to establish the NCASF as a permanent organization to fight fascism by promoting closer relations between the US and the USSR. The NCASF experienced tremendous growth during the war years, as local affiliates formed across the country, with prominent supporters such as Albert Einstein, Judge Learned Hand, Helen Keller, Charlie Chaplin, Aaron Copland, Benny Goodman, and Rockwell Kent.⁹⁵⁷

During World War II, all three of these groups played a key role in drumming up support for the Soviet-American alliance. “The phone began ringing the day Hitler invaded the USSR and has not stopped,” a New York Institute official noted at the time. The Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and other publications paid

⁹⁵⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1202, ll. 76-77.

⁹⁵⁷ Parks, *Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence*, 65-68.

retainers for its consulting services, and several major universities and corporations, including General Electric and Westinghouse, sought its help in establishing contacts in the Soviet Union. The institute's library, which held over 13,000 volumes and 400 titles of Russian newspapers and periodicals, was described by one historian as "perhaps the public's best source of information on contemporary Soviet affairs during the war." Its language school enrolled as many as 180 students per session.⁹⁵⁸ The San Francisco ARI flew materials donated by architects, musicians, theater workers, and movie cameramen to Moscow using a Lend-Lease plane, while sending 6,000 books to Soviet libraries. It organized a Shostakovich Music Festival, featuring lectures on his life and work, radio broadcasts of his compositions, an exhibit at the San Francisco Public Library, and a 45-minute shortwave broadcast beamed to Moscow featuring his music and greetings from famous American musicians.⁹⁵⁹ The NCASF also sponsored various exhibitions on Soviet art, architecture, and daily life, but its most impressive contributions were a series of mass rallies held in Madison Square Garden in the period from November 1944 to November 1945. The second took place in celebration of V-E Day in May 1945, featuring a performance by famous African-American performer and activist Paul Robeson and messages sent by Henry A. Wallace, Harold Ickes, Eleanor Roosevelt, Soviet Ambassador Andrei Gromyko, and President Harry S. Truman. The third rally in November 1945 included messages from Truman, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Albert Einstein, and a keynote address from Secretary of State Dean Acheson. These gatherings show that even the San Francisco ARI and the NCASF, which took a more pro-Soviet line than the New York

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 68-69.

Institute, received support from mainstream American public figures.

As the wartime alliance fell apart and the Cold War began, the friendship societies' standing in the US quickly declined. Trouble began for the New York Institute and the NCASF in August 1945, when the Hearst Corporation condemned the groups as communist fronts that spread pro-Stalinist propaganda to children through their work in public schools. Soon thereafter, these friendship societies came under attack by an American government suspicious of any organization with ties to the Soviet Union. The New York Institute was hit the hardest, after the US Attorney General's Office listed it as a front organization in 1948 and again in 1949, leading the Internal Revenue Service to revoke its tax-exempt status. Unable to overcome these circumstances, it closed in 1950. The NCASF fared only slightly better. On November 12, 1945—two days before Truman and Eisenhower sent messages of support and Dulles delivered his keynote address at the NCASF's rally at Madison Square Garden—the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) questioned whether the group was loyal to the United States and ordered it to turn over a list of donors and expenditures. The Board of Directors refused, citing the organization's ties to prominent citizens, politicians, and government agencies. The decision set off a chain of events that led to the opening of a formal investigation of the NCASF in 1946. The following year, the US Attorney General's Office added the NCASF to its list of subversive organizations, costing the group its tax-exempt status and severely limiting its ability to function.⁹⁶⁰

Reverend Richard Morford served as the group's executive director during this troubled time. Morford's tenure at the NCASF stretched from 1946 to 1981. Born in Onaway, Michigan, in 1903, Morford graduated from Albion College in 1925 and attended

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 131-32.

Union Theological Seminary in New York. As a Presbyterian minister, he participated in several leftist religious groups, organizing the Albany Area Council of Churches and serving as the pastor for the Friendship House, a church and community center for African Americans and poor whites. In 1950, Morford was declared in contempt of Congress a second time for refusing to submit the NCASF's membership and financial records to HUAC. He served three months in jail. Although the Supreme Court ruled in 1951 that the Attorney General acted illegally by placing the NCASF on the List of Subversive Organizations, the Subversive Activities Control Board maintained its attacks on the group, declaring it a communist front in 1954.⁹⁶¹ Continued government harassment and the Cold War ravaged the friendship societies' support base, and by the late 1960s, only the NCASF in New York and the ARI in San Francisco remained active. Other friendship councils in Chicago and Los Angeles continued to exist on paper, but their activities were extremely restricted.

1969 and the “Moment of Truth”

By 1969, the NCASF had deteriorated significantly, leaving it in considerable debt with shrinking membership rolls and limited opportunities to expand, raise money, or spread its message. In his annual report to the NCASF's Board of Directors in December 1968, Morford proclaimed, “The moment of truth has arrived for the National Council as it faces 1969.” He noted that the NCASF was \$17,500 in debt, owed an additional several thousand dollars to creditors for printing costs, and had no major event on the horizon to bring it out of the red. Reducing the NCASF's personnel and cutting activities had not helped, and only

⁹⁶¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1202, l. 75.

loans from Morford and the other members of the Board of Directors as well as the suspension of salaries to Morford and staff had kept the NCASF afloat.⁹⁶²

While financial difficulties served as the most immediate cause for concern, Morford described three root causes of the NCASF's failure to generate widespread public support. First, he cited apathy toward the NCASF. He noted that people who were sympathetic to the NCASF's mission chose to work independently of it because they believed the group's close relationship with the USSR meant it could not reach as many people as mainstream publishers or cultural organizations. "The image of the National Council in their minds, and they think in the mind of the entire public, is that of a pro-Soviet organization, and this image stands in the way of its effective operations," he explained. This problem came to the fore during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1967. Although 1,500 people attended the festivities in New York, Morford noted, the NCASF could not attract speakers from outside of its own inner circles, making it impossible to broaden its support base in the general public.⁹⁶³

Second, although moderates in favor of détente found the NCASF too ideological or pro-Soviet, Morford observed that the organization also faced difficulties in generating interest among radical youth. The NCASF had to compete with more popular movements, such as Vietnam War opposition groups and the black liberation movement. Radical American students also increasingly turned to China, as many deemed China more revolutionary and therefore preferable to the Soviet Union.⁹⁶⁴ Another dimension of this problem, left unmentioned in Morford's speech, was the advanced age of the NCASF's

⁹⁶² AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 370, d. 16, ll. 12-21.

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid.

leadership. Most of NCASF's active members came from the Old Left, primarily socialists who joined in the 1920s or 30s. By the time of Morford's speech, the active core of leaders was comprised primarily of senior citizens.⁹⁶⁵ This led to difficulties in developing a more active program, as geriatric leaders frequently lacked the energy or health to produce initiatives that could attract younger radicals. Ultimately, for a youth generation in revolt, joining a radical organization dominated by aging fellow travelers was hardly an appealing option.

Third, Morford discussed how the growth in general antipathy toward the USSR, resulting from Soviet foreign policy, led to conflicts within the NCASF that alienated its old supporters. He claimed that the 1967 Arab-Israeli War was particularly troublesome, as the bulk of the NCASF's financial support previously came from New York's Jewish community, which expressed outrage over Soviet support for the Arab states.⁹⁶⁶ Although Morford publicly opposed the 1968 Soviet crackdown in Czechoslovakia, describing it in his yearly newsletter as a "serious wrong,"⁹⁶⁷ the NCASF didn't release an official position. This disillusioned constituents who thought that the NCASF should take a more definitive stand one way or the other.

This lack of support for the friendship society movement was further deepened by the fact that, rather than working together, the two most active friendship societies—the NCASF

⁹⁶⁵ Perhaps the most telling examples of the leadership's age come in its frequent complaints to Soviet officials of health maladies. For example, Morford describes how Aileen, his wife and partner in leading the NCASF, was "limited in action by the arthritis she must endure." See GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 1208, ll. 129, 112. Also, in July 1974, Morford worked with authorities in Moscow to gain permission for Alan Flanigan, a long-time activist in the friendship society in Los Angeles, to travel to the USSR to receive treatment for his terminal cancer. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, ll. 163, 167-68, 185. Morford wrote to the Soviet authorities in 1973 to ask for help in treating Roberts' case of arteritis, which had been "extremely critical" two years earlier and restricted his activities. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, ll. 47, 81-83.

⁹⁶⁶ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 370, d. 16, ll. 12-21.

⁹⁶⁷ AVP RF, f. 192, op. 59, p. 370, d. 16, ll. 22-25

in New York and the ARI in San Francisco—functioned independently. The leaders of both groups saw themselves as the rightful head of the friendship society movement, and they competed for preferential treatment from Moscow and the Soviet Embassy. In sum, with no money in the bank, no ability to gain new support from the general public or radical youth, and increasingly elderly and disillusioned members, the NCASF faced serious threats to its very existence at the start of 1969.

“We Are Together So Briefly”

If Morford hoped to convince Moscow and the Soviet Embassy that the NCASF was in crisis on the eve of détente and required immediate action to organize profitable events and improve the NCASF’s financial standing, he would be greatly disappointed. From 1969 to 1975, the ISAO took advantage of improved Soviet-American relations to focus its resources on expanding ties with mainstream American groups. Soviet officials felt that they would give greater reach to Soviet propaganda efforts than friendship societies, which the public generally distrusted as Soviet fronts. The NCASF, which stood on precarious ground at the start of détente, was placed on the back burner.

Although Morford and other friendship society leaders understood the importance of Moscow’s efforts to collaborate with mainstream organizations, they resented the fact that these new ties frequently led Soviet officials to ignore their societies’ needs. In February 1972, Morford wrote Moscow regarding a newspaper interview in which the ISAO’s vice-chairman of the presidium noted that the ISAO had “good relations” with over one hundred US public organizations, leaving out the NCASF among the seven groups he specifically named. Morford groused, “We would have thought that the National Council of American-

Soviet Friendship might have been counted a ‘partner’ of equal standing with those named.”⁹⁶⁸ Moreover, one embassy official reported back to Moscow after a March 1975 discussion that, although Morford expressed general satisfaction with the ISAO’s expanded relations with mainstream groups, he complained about the resulting lack of attention from Moscow and the embassy. Specifically, he griped that, while the NCASF took the initiative to invite an ISAO youth group to the US, in the end, the YMCA was publicly given the title of “hosts.”⁹⁶⁹ In a follow-up letter to the head of the embassy’s Cultural Relations Department, Morford protested that the exclusion of the National Council from the program “clearly indicates that our Youth Division has been, or is in the process of being, read out of the picture of youth exchange,” and he balked at the lack of attention from the embassy. “We are together so briefly,” he wrote. “Now I am compelled to solicit your reaction by letter, which is most unsatisfactory. I guess I shall have to wait for your coming again to review this matter.”⁹⁷⁰

The NCASF’s failure to establish partnerships with mainstream organizations only compounded this frustration. When discussing the ISAO’s growing work with such groups, Morford frequently noted the “limitations” presented by the NCASF, as its reputation as pro-Soviet or pro-communist prevented it from developing ties with the mainstream organizations courted by Moscow. He assured the Soviet representatives that he was “determined to overcome some of the limitations,” but plans to do so always seemed to fall

⁹⁶⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 103, l. 4.

⁹⁶⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 59-60.

⁹⁷⁰ Letter from Richard Morford to Gennady Fedosov, 25 March 1975, National Council of American Soviet Friendship Records, TAM 134, Box 3, Folder 2, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

through.⁹⁷¹ The YMCA exchange exemplified this problem. Although the YMCA, most likely at the suggestion of the ISAO, invited the NCASF to cooperate in the exchange, Morford complained: “The program for their stay in New York is completely in the hands of the ‘local’ YMCA. There appears to be no place for any functioning on the part of our Youth Division.” Furthermore, while some level of cooperation between the friendship societies and the YMCA existed in Los Angeles, those in San Francisco and Seattle were shut out by the local branches of the YMCA.⁹⁷² Despite exertions of time and energy and the support of the ISAO, the friendship societies could not establish cooperative programs with mainstream American organizations.

While friendship society leaders faced continuing hardships and received little attention from Moscow and the Soviet Embassy in the early years of détente, they worked to expand the NCASF’s program using the means at their disposal. If, in earlier periods, the friendship societies had primarily promoted political goals, they now focused almost entirely on developing cultural understanding and championing détente, disarmament, and the peace movement. To this end, the NCASF commemorated American and Soviet holidays and exchanged professional delegations with the ISAO. The friendship society leaders also created programs to attract American youth. In 1969, the NCASF began to send a yearly delegation of American youth to the Soviet Union, where they toured Moscow, including stops at the metro, a “children’s railroad,” and the Pioneer’s Palace, before attending an international summer camp at Camp Artek on the Black Sea coast.⁹⁷³ Starting in 1971, the

⁹⁷¹ For example, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, l. 159.

⁹⁷² Letter from Richard Morford to Gennady Fedosov, 25 March 1975, National Council of American Soviet Friendship Records, TAM 134, Box 3, Folder 2, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁹⁷³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 102, l. 169.

NCASF sponsored an annual “Holiday Gala” to bring American students to the USSR during their winter breaks for ice skating, dancing, troika rides, “intimate conversation” with Soviet youth in coffee houses, and New Years parties in the apartments of their new Soviet friends.⁹⁷⁴

The NCASF leadership carefully chose the individuals attending these events, specifically targeting groups that seemed most likely to yield future NCASF activists. Many of the children were minorities to facilitate the NCASF’s goal of expanding its access to their communities. Each year, one delegate came from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Intermediate School in Harlem, as the NCASF had close ties with Samuel F. Williams, principal of the predominantly African-American school.⁹⁷⁵ The ARI, primarily concerned with establishing in-roads into California’s Latino and Asian communities, made plans in 1974 to offer scholarships for minorities to attend the camp.⁹⁷⁶ Other delegates won slots due to their working-class background, such as a Minnesota girl whose father was fired from his mining job due to trade union ties and political activism and forced to haul pulpwood to make a living. The NCASF also sought out children with familial ties to the radical Left. Morford specifically mentioned that one child’s mother was an active member of the Communist Party, and the Native American delegate’s parents were militant Indian radicals. Relatives of

⁹⁷⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 103, ll. 73-74.

⁹⁷⁵ For the NCASF’s relationship with Williams and Morford’s optimism that working with Williams could allow the NCASF greater access to New York’s African-American community, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 819, ll. 2-4, 5-7, 8, 15, 16, 48-49, 50. For the NCASF’s commitment, starting in 1972, to send at least one student from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Intermediate School in the Camp Artek delegation, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 819, ll. 78-80.

⁹⁷⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, ll. 32-42. Morford also described the importance of sending an ethnically and geographically diverse delegation in a 1972 interview. See “The US-Soviet Encounter: An Interview with Richard Morford, NCASF,” *New World Review* 40, no. 2 (1972).

NCASF members received preferential treatment, including Morford's grandson, who took part in the Camp Artek trip in 1976.⁹⁷⁷

The NCASF experienced only mixed success in using such programs to expand its reach to young people in the 1970s. One delegate said, "I don't think the trip convinced me about socialism any more than I was already," but "I certainly did learn a bunch of stuff." He concluded, "Another reason I am elated about the trip is now when someone wrongly criticizes the USSR I can say, 'No! The people don't fear their government.' Maybe they'll say, 'How do you know,' and then with a snicker, 'I suppose you've been there or something.' Of course I can answer 'Yep.'"⁹⁷⁸ Others, though, did not express the same level of excitement. Carletta Jackson, a sophomore at San Francisco State University, traveled to Baku as a member of an American delegation to the third annual America-Soviet Young People's Conference. Jackson, an African-American, described a trip to a local museum, which featured an exhibit on Angela Davis, the prominent African-American communist and activist who was put on trial for murder in the early 1970s. She noted pictures of Davis and Lenin displayed side-by-side, with photographs and reports from the trial, and she stated that the Azerbaijanis expressed interest in Davis "because they think we (blacks) are carrying on some kind of heavy revolution here," adding that she "didn't know about that." While Jackson criticized the US—expressing some interest in socialism, saying "with so much poverty in this country, freedom of speech is often an abstract notion"—she

⁹⁷⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1208, ll. 30-35. In an apparent attempt to justify the selection of his grandson (who grew up in a small town in Wisconsin) to the delegation, Morford said: "He does not know of the struggles of a working-class family like the one in Minnesota. He has had no association with Black boys and girls; there are no Black families living in this town. How wonderful that now he will live in a camp with the Black children of his own delegation not to speak of all the Black children from Africa he will meet. This boy will learn much about the Black struggle for independence and freedom before the summer is over. This boy thinks of himself as a typical USA boy. In many respects he is."

⁹⁷⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 102, l. 169.

concluded, “It wasn’t heaven there either.”⁹⁷⁹ Overall, of the ten to twenty young people per group per year that the NCASF sent to Camp Artek, the Holiday Gala, and other events, few became active members of the NCASF and some came away with mixed impressions of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, as former diplomat Yale Richmond writes, by the 1970s, the Soviet Embassy grew unhappy with the quality of meetings arranged by the local chapters of the NCASF for Soviet delegations. As a result, they asked the State Department to help it take over the friendship societies' former responsibilities by scheduling appointments between the Soviet delegations and mainstream American organizations.⁹⁸⁰ The embassy's shift in attention to mainstream organizations left the friendship societies struggling to assemble a successful exchange program.

Planning Regional Expansion

In response to an increasingly chilly reaction from mainstream organizations beginning in the mid-1970s, embassy representatives paid more attention to expanding the ISAO's program with the NCASF. The stage was already set, as the old Chicago and Los Angeles societies renewed their activities in the early 1970s and allies of the ARI established friendship societies in Washington State in 1972 and San Diego in 1974.⁹⁸¹ Discussions for expansion of the NCASF first appear in a comprehensive report written for the ISAO in late

⁹⁷⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, l. 3.

⁹⁸⁰ Richmond, *US-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-86: Who Wins?*, 87.

⁹⁸¹ For Chicago, see letter from Lester Wickstrom, Chairman of the Chicago Committee for American-Soviet Friendship, to Alexei Stepunin, August 24, 1975. GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 25. For Los Angeles, see letter from Leo A. Koski, Chair of the US-USSR Association of Friendship and Cultural Relations in Los Angeles, to Stepunin and Gennady Fedosov, the ISAO Representative in the US, October 4, 1974. GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, l. 216. The founding of the friendship societies in San Diego and Washington State will be covered later in this chapter.

1973, when Morford broached the idea of “attempt[ing] local organizing efforts,” with Boston, Philadelphia, and Detroit listed as immediate targets.⁹⁸² In March 1975, embassy representative Vladimir F. Zharkov brought up the potential expansion of the NCASF when finalizing exchange plans for 1975 with Morford. Zharkov suggested that they consider adding some cities to the plans of Soviet tour groups that had not been visited in recent years, including places that did not have friendship society branches. Morford agreed, proposing Denver, Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit, New Orleans, Des Moines, Minneapolis, and Atlanta, arguing that the NCASF had connections in several of these locations, especially Minneapolis and Detroit. In his report to Moscow, Zharkov noted that trips to these cities would also be helpful in fulfilling the plan to establish new “sister cities” in the US or agreements among cities in different countries for cultural and economic ties.⁹⁸³ Thus the expansion of the NCASF came as the Soviet Embassy pushed for tour groups to travel to new areas in the US as an alternative to the rotation of New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago that had been typical in previous years.

Morford and the ISAO representatives acted on their plan to expand the friendship societies’ programs and geographic reach later in 1975, with the friendship societies’ celebration of Victory Day. They arranged a stage show that featured Soviet film actors portraying war heroes, two top dancers from the Bolshoi Theater performing an Adagio from *Spartacus*, an array of Soviet speakers that included a general, and several American public figures. Although he had trouble getting the media to cover the show, Morford reported that more than 2,400 of the 2,800 seats in Carnegie Hall were filled, a vast improvement over

⁹⁸² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 819, ll. 133-44.

⁹⁸³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 59-60.

recent efforts.⁹⁸⁴ The acts were repeated for the friendship societies in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and the ISAO sent members of the delegation to visit Minneapolis and St. Paul. There, Morford assembled a group of sympathetic Americans with connections to the NCASF and, following their meetings with the delegation, they established the Minnesota Council of American-Soviet Friendship.⁹⁸⁵ This began an expansion process, driven by Morford and the ISAO's representatives at the Soviet Embassy, which led to new friendship societies in Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and St. Petersburg, Florida. By 1979, the NCASF claimed that nineteen friendship societies operated on US soil, with nine more in development.

In a May 1977 letter, Morford outlined some of the general circumstances he viewed as ideal for establishing a new regional affiliate of the NCASF, using the Oregon Council of American-Soviet Friendship as a model. First, Morford emphasized the importance of exploiting existing connections with prominent social figures in the target city. In Portland's case, the NCASF had long-established ties with Reverend Mark Chamberlin, who previously led the Oregon Chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action, an unofficial social education and action group of the United Methodist Church. Although Morford was a Presbyterian minister, his background was in the Methodist Church, and he served on the Executive Committee of the Methodist Federation, headquartered in New York. Morford corresponded with Chamberlin, not only about the Methodist Federation but also regarding the promotion of Soviet-American relations, and Chamberlin occasionally donated money to

⁹⁸⁴ For Morford's reports on the May 1975 celebration, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d.818, ll. 64-67, 68-69, and 70-71.

⁹⁸⁵ See Morford's description of his work to establish a friendship society in Minneapolis. GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, ll. 68-69. John Baker of the Washington State Council claims that he had a role in organizing the Minnesota Council. See his letter to Mayor Richard E. Olsen, March 21, 1975. GARF f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, ll. 8-10.

the NCASF. When the NCASF began making plans to expand into Portland in early 1977, Morford contacted Chamberlin, acknowledging his recent contribution to the NCASF and asking him to reach out to the community to identify people sympathetic to the friendship movement's cause. Morford also suggested that Chamberlin contact a number of individuals whom he knew rather well, including members of the NCASF who had moved to the West Coast, children of NCASF members, and graduate students who were known friends of the NCASF.⁹⁸⁶ Thus Morford employed preexisting connections with prominent figures in potential regions for expansion, allowing the agents on the ground to pool together people sympathetic to the cause of better Soviet-American relations.

Second, Morford promoted the gradual development of the fledgling society by avoiding overreliance on well-known pro-Soviet leftists. In Portland, Morford asked Chamberlin "whether they thought there could be a fairly broad basis for organization in Portland" and whether they could "reach out into the wider community and attract people and bring about their involvement in the Movement who are not necessarily progressive and not necessarily of the Left." Chamberlin responded by contacting members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the World Affairs Council, as well as university professors and high school teachers who had traveled to the Soviet Union. Chamberlin contacted two leaders of the local Communist Party, who enthusiastically supported the establishment of a friendship society in Portland. The leaders intended to use the opening of a new leftist bookstore in Portland as an opportunity to hold an organizing meeting for the new friendship council. Morford intervened, stressing to Chamberlin the

⁹⁸⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 56-61. Morford also notes that Holland Roberts attended several conferences and workshops held by the Methodist Federation, representing the ARI and befriending Chamberlin. Although the leaders of the friendship council centered in Seattle had ties with the Portland region, Morford encouraged them to focus on developing their own organization rather than concerning themselves with expansion.

need for a broader base of support to start the society, with representatives from the organizations previously contacted by Chamberlin as well as trade union leaders, youth, African-Americans, and other minorities. As a result, Chamberlin convinced the two communists to put the official pronouncement on hold.⁹⁸⁷ Young schoolteachers Bill and Sara Tattam eventually assumed leading roles in the organization. Embassy representative Metelkin observed that Bill possessed organizational skills and the ability to relate to people – strengths that would aid in the development of the society.⁹⁸⁸

Third, Morford underscored the importance of Soviet involvement in energizing new regional societies. He reported the development of the Portland organization to the Soviet Embassy and Moscow, and the Soviet leadership “took the cue very well,” altering the schedule of the second Soviet delegation of 1977 to include a trip to Portland “to help us with this organizing effort.” This energized Chamberlin, who assembled a reception committee comprising businessmen, an insurance agent, a few teachers, and a transportation expert with ties to the African-American community, many of whom stayed on as members of the permanent committee for the new Oregon council. They developed ties with local lawyers and medical professionals, who provided a counterpart to the lawyers and doctors visiting with the Soviet group. They also contacted the city government to plan a meeting between local officials and the Soviet visitors.⁹⁸⁹ In this sense, a visit by a Soviet delegation and support from the Soviet Embassy could energize the potential constituents identified by the NCASF’s allies on the ground, motivating potential leaders to broaden contacts with the

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 81-84.

⁹⁸⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 56-61.

community and build organizational bodies that would become the basis for the future management of the council.

Finally, Morford argued that the NCASF's national leadership should provide guidance to the fledgling council, while avoiding the impression of being overbearing. Morford traveled to Portland during the delegation's stay, but he did not want to interfere with the time that the Portlanders spent with the Soviet representatives. Rather, he planned to attend only a luncheon and an evening meeting with the group of people selected by Chamberlin and other local leaders who would serve as the basis for the permanent council. When it came to declaring the official formation of the organization, Morford emphasized that he would not "push it down their throats," since "they won't want anybody from New York telling them what to do." However, since no one in the fledgling society had experience running a friendship council, Morford planned to discuss "the tremendous possibilities there are program-wise for promoting American-Soviet friendship in their area." He concluded, "Perhaps I can excite them with all these possibilities."⁹⁹⁰

The Greater Boston Committee of American-Soviet Friendship

To explore the development of new regional friendship councils, I offer case studies of the two early additions, in San Diego and the state of Washington, as well as two post-1975 additions, in Boston and Sacramento. I discuss them not in chronological order, but from most to least successful, starting with Boston and San Diego, and concluding with Washington and Sacramento. The Greater Boston Committee of American-Soviet Friendship was founded in April 1976, following several months of preparatory work by

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Morford and the embassy.⁹⁹¹ Embassy representative Metelkin, who attended the organizational meeting of the committee on April 29, described how the group organized a Russian film festival in just six weeks. About 1,500 people, including students from Yale University and Boston University, attended the festival, allowing the committee to build a strong base of support in the student community.⁹⁹² Moreover, a Soviet delegation visited Boston in April 1976, generating excitement and prompting the creation of a reception committee, under the auspices of Morford, which served as the basis for the future permanent committee.⁹⁹³

Vali Buland served as the secretary-treasurer of the Greater Boston Committee from its inception, proving to be one of the most competent regional leaders in the NCASF during détente. In contrast to the elderly fellow travelers who led the NCASF, the ARI, and many of the regional societies, Buland was only twenty-three years old. She graduated from college with a B.A. in Political Science the previous June. Soviet records suggest that she belonged to the local chapter of the Young Workers Liberation League, a Communist Party youth

⁹⁹¹ While this work is not as well documented as that of the Oregon Society, there are indications that it was just as thorough. Fedosov lists the formation of a Boston council in the 1976 plans for the SSOD representatives at the embassy. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 130-31. On February 19, Morford felt comfortable enough with the progress that he told Stepunin that the Boston organization would be prepared to host a delegation by April. Morford also highlighted his personal role in laying the foundation for the friendship society. See GARF, R-9576, op. 20, d. 1207, ll. 45-46. Morford wrote to the head of the Washington, D.C., friendship society on September 15, 1975, indicating that plans for a Boston council would be launched in the next few months. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1208, ll. 134-35. Embassy representative Metelkin reported on the April 29 organizational meeting of the Greater Boston Committee, noting that the preparatory work had begun about two months earlier, with the NCASF and local leaders of the CP USA in the lead. Given the other documents, though, it seems that plans for the Greater Boston Committee were in development for a longer period of time. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 132-33.

⁹⁹² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 132-133.

⁹⁹³ Fedosov proposed that the delegation be sent to Boston to help with the formation of the committee in a memo to Stepunin on February 18. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 22-23. ISAO secretary Molchanov wrote about the reception committee and the excitement generated by the visit in his report on the trip. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 1-3.

organization.⁹⁹⁴ Unlike many of her contemporaries, Buland was a full-time employee of the NCASF with a paid salary, allowing her to dedicate her attention to the development of Soviet-American relations.⁹⁹⁵ According to Soviet reports, Buland displayed tremendous energy in quickly putting together a comprehensive program. She attracted local youth to the committee's activities, as evidenced by the Russian film festival before the official establishment of the society.⁹⁹⁶

Soviet observers also took note of Buland. Following the organizational meeting, Metelkin stated that "she makes a good impression," and when Buland traveled to Moscow for the first time with a delegation of regional NCASF representatives, Stepunin reported to Morford: "Your delegation was a rather good one. Specially [sic] I liked the girl from Boston, she seems to be a devoted person to the Course and undershands [sic] the problems deeply."⁹⁹⁷ Fedosov observed that the successful launch of the Greater Boston Committee took place primarily due to the serious approach taken by Buland in recruiting cadres.⁹⁹⁸ Buland's dynamic personality served as a dramatic contrast to the septua- and octogenarian fellow travelers who led other societies.

Buland's work had immediate and long-lasting effects on the Greater Boston Committee. Fedosov visited Boston in November 1976, less than seven months after the

⁹⁹⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 132-133.

⁹⁹⁵ Molchanov and Fedosov both mention Buland's employment status in their reports. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 1-3, and GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-215.

⁹⁹⁶ ISAR Secretary Molchanov took specific note of the large numbers of young people at the organizational meeting, claiming that this demonstrated that the other societies were doing "insufficient work" to appeal to youth. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 1-3.

⁹⁹⁷ For Metelkin's report, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 132-133. For Stepunin's letter to Morford, see GARF f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1208, ll. 130-31.

⁹⁹⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-15.

establishment of the society, to meet with the leaders of the Greater Boston Committee and discuss important questions related to its activities. He claimed that the committee “energetically” pursued its agenda, largely due to Buland’s full-time employment as secretary-treasurer, holding regular meetings, showing Soviet films, and organizing exhibits of photographs, children’s art, and graphic arts. Moreover, the Boston Committee gathered in support of détente, featuring representatives from different strata of New England society, including local university students. The committee had 400 members at the time, with 80 who regularly paid dues. The following year, the committee had plans to expand to 1,000 members, and Fedosov noted that they sought aid from the USSR-USA Society in developing Russian language courses.⁹⁹⁹ By the fall of 1976, the Greater Boston Committee released a newsletter, advertising a meeting on September 23 in which State Representative Mel King and Dr. Mark Solomon of Simmons College spoke about “What Détente Means to Us.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Unlike most friendship societies, which took several years to develop a continuous program, the Boston Committee quickly implemented an ambitious array of activities and aggressively pursued new members.

Fedosov also described the Greater Boston Committee’s advantage in recruiting new members while suggesting ways to extend membership beyond traditional leftist circles. On the one hand, he pointed to the leadership of the Greater Boston Committee’s strong connection to leftist circles.¹⁰⁰¹ Indeed, Metelkin’s report states that around 50 percent of the people present at the council’s organizational meeting in April 1976 were members of the CP

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 115-16.

¹⁰⁰¹ Ibid.

USA, a higher percentage than in the friendship societies of most other cities.¹⁰⁰² On the other hand, Fedosov pointed to the necessity as well as the possibility of expanding the Greater Boston Committee beyond the bounds of the leftist movement. In his remarks to the leadership, he “emphasized the importance of escaping isolation, carrying on work with the intelligentsia and establishing contacts with different American organizations that advocate the development of Soviet-American relations.” Fedosov stressed that the committee should work to bring prominent American scholars into the fold, even suggesting that they search among the twenty Nobel Prize laureates living in the Boston area to see if any would serve as honorary president. Fedosov felt this sort of expansion was possible, owing to existing ties with local labor unions and academic institutions, as several members of the Board of Directors taught at local universities.¹⁰⁰³ These recommendations represent an attempt by Fedosov to push the fledgling friendship societies in a more mainstream direction, away from their traditional reliance on leftist support that hampered their efforts to influence politicians and garner support from moderate Americans.

While the Greater Boston Committee’s work impressed Fedosov, its most dramatic contribution to the friendship movement came in 1977. The genesis for this program seems to have come from Fedosov, who, as Morford put it in a letter to Stepunin, visited regional councils throughout the country in late 1976 through early 1977, “indicating in no uncertain terms his expectations of considerably expanded programs.”¹⁰⁰⁴ Fedosov reported that,

¹⁰⁰² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 132-33.

¹⁰⁰³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-15.

¹⁰⁰⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, l. 12. In this letter, Morford also describes how Fedosov urged him to push the councils toward a more comprehensive program. As a result, for the first time in years, Morford hired regular part-time help to deal with increasing correspondence, and he visited many of the same councils as Fedosov in late 1976-early 1977, making similar suggestions for a stepped up program. On March 8, Morford

during his November 1976 visit to Boston, he proposed a spring festival of Soviet culture as part of a year-long celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The festival would include various informational booths, Soviet films, the sale of literature and souvenirs, and presentations from Soviet delegations or artists traveling through Boston.¹⁰⁰⁵ Following a ten-day trip to the Soviet Union designed to energize young leaders of regional societies, Buland wrote to Stepunin on December 29, announcing the Boston Committee's intentions to make the festival the highlight of their first year of activities.¹⁰⁰⁶ The theme would be "Détente, Peace, Trade and Understanding." In addition to the earlier suggestions made by Fedosov, Buland expressed a desire to incorporate a seminar on trade and cultural entertainment, with Soviet journalists and trade representatives from the embassy available to meet with local businessmen and journalists. She listed a variety of themes that the festival would cover, including the nationalities question, women, youth, tourism, language instruction, development in Siberia, the 1980 Olympics, and Soviet achievements in culture, medicine, science, and space exploration.¹⁰⁰⁷

In her letter, Buland emphasized that the Boston Committee would follow Fedosov's guidance, making outreach to the broader community a critical component of the spring

again wrote to Stepunin, explaining that Fedosov had read him "a list of expectancies" for the expanded program, potentially sent from Moscow. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 23-25.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Describing the trip, Buland wrote to Stepunin: "The wonderful experiences that I had in my 10 day visit to the S.U. have remained an inspiration to me and by extension to our society. We have gained new understanding and new ideas for our work and I of course had a real vacation in the process." See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 5, 9. Fedosov proposed that representatives from the three newest regional councils, including Buland, be sent in the delegation to the Soviet Union. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 179-80. Morford mentioned to Stepunin that he agreed with this proposal, since the older societies had been represented in a delegation the previous fall. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1207, l. 118. The Soviet report on the trip spoke of Buland positively. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 816, ll. 78-81. Stepunin echoed these sentiments in a follow-up note to Morford. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1208, ll. 130-31.

¹⁰⁰⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 5, 9.

festival. She stated that the committee planned to hold the festival at one of the local universities to allow students easy access to the exhibits. Furthermore, she mentioned an endeavor to arrange a sister-school relationship between high schools in Boston and the Soviet Union, highlighting her efforts to sponsor a relationship between the Pushkin Institute and the Russian departments of local high schools and colleges, which would be bolstered by a Pushkin Institute exhibit at the festival. Buland emphasized, “All our activities are being coordinated with the embassy in Washington.”¹⁰⁰⁸

Indeed, as in all other major events carried out by the friendship societies, the embassy played a key role in supporting the spring festival. The embassy served as the Boston Committee’s best advocate in petitioning the USSR-USA Society for materials for the festival. For example, on January 21, 1977, Fedosov wrote to the USSR-USA Society leadership, requesting exhibits on Soviet photography, children’s art, folk art, stamps, posters, Soviet books published in English, American books translated and published in the USSR, literature on the Soviet Union and the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and an art exhibition “America through the eyes of Soviet artists.” Fedosov asked for a series of Soviet films and various souvenirs and other items, totaling 250 to 300 rubles, to be sold at a gift stand. He argued that these materials, along with a delegation that included lecturers and three or four artists, would be necessary for the success of the festival, and he stressed that they could be used throughout the year by other societies celebrating the anniversary of the revolution.¹⁰⁰⁹ The embassy also supplied the Greater Boston Committee with materials it

¹⁰⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 4-6. The USSR-USA Society made a significant commitment to fulfilling these requests. The leadership’s initial response indicates its promise to send a significant contribution, but not as many exhibits as Fedosov requested. It included three photo exhibits on the themes recommended by Fedosov, a folk arts exhibit, and exhibits on stamps, records, and art books for sale. The USSR-USA Society also promised that a delegation would visit Boston during the festival. However, a few

already had in Washington. By March 7, Fedosov had passed along eight photo collections, a graphic arts exhibit, posters, and various other materials that the Cultural Department had on hand. Moreover, Novosti Press Agency's representatives in the US agreed to provide one or two high-quality photo exhibits, and that trade representatives at the embassy planned to send an array of photographs and advertisements to the festival.¹⁰¹⁰ Morford wrote Moscow that the Greater Boston Committee pursued the festival without any money of its own, indicating that, without the embassy's material support, the festival could not have gone forward.¹⁰¹¹

In addition to material aid, the embassy provided critical advice and encouragement in helping the Greater Boston Committee put together the most effective event possible. Fedosov kept tabs on the Greater Boston Committee's activities, ensuring that they went as planned. On February 16, Morford explained to Stepunin that, following Buland's recent visit to New York, when she complained of problems with launching the festival, Morford directed her to "get herself down to Washington, pronto," as per Fedosov's instructions, to work out details with him and the trade representative at the embassy.¹⁰¹² Three weeks later, in a follow-up letter, Morford wrote that Buland and another Boston representative took the trip to Washington to discuss the festival. Fedosov "promised them a considerable amount of help," handing over several exhibitions and agreeing to provide further counsel during his lecture engagements in Boston later that month, when, Morford noted, Fedosov planned "to

weeks later, the USSR-USA Society wrote to Vali Buland, suggesting that there would be additional exhibitions on youth, preparations for the 1980 Olympics, and construction in Siberia. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, l. 7.

¹⁰¹⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 33-35.

¹⁰¹¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 23-25.

¹⁰¹² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 14-15.

push Vali Buland still harder.” He concluded that, as a result of the embassy’s support for the festival, “I think they will have something big and quite useful there that will get public attention,” both in terms of attendance and local media coverage. Inspired by the plans for Boston, Morford began to explore the possibilities for expanding the festivals to other cities, initially embarking on “serious discussions” with the friendship society in Chicago to hold a festival with movies, an exhibition, and public meetings, and reserving Milwaukee as a backup.¹⁰¹³ In sum, the embassy frequently wrote to the USSR-USA Society to update the leadership on progress in planning the festival, and it constantly pushed the Greater Boston Committee and the NCASF to expand the festival’s program and outreach by providing all available material aid.

Both NCASF and Soviet reports cast the spring festival as successful. Following months of planning, festivals were held in Boston, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Chicago, and New York.¹⁰¹⁴ Morford made note of the Greater Boston Committee’s use of the festival to expand its outreach. State Senator William Owen, the mayor of Cambridge, and Dr. Ewart Guinier, the first head of Harvard University’s Department of Afro-American Studies, made appearances at the festival, demonstrating the Greater Boston Committee’s ability to expand its activities into the broader community. In the same vein, Morford highlighted the Greater Boston Committee’s newfound partnership with the Harriet Tubman Center, established at the festival, which he described as “a first solid step” in developing roots in the African-American community.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 23-25.

¹⁰¹⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1598, ll. 7-16.

¹⁰¹⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 84-88.

Soviet officials also considered the events successful, since they facilitated the activities of the friendship societies and expanded membership rolls.¹⁰¹⁶ Milwaukee, in particular, adapted the Greater Boston Committee's plans, hosting embassy trade representative O. E. Tishchenko, who presented on Soviet-American trade relations and the benefits they allocated to the American worker. Although "local Zionist organizations" attempted to disrupt the event, it continued with limited interruption, and local media covered the event positively, with representatives from the Soviet Embassy giving interviews for TV, radio, and newspapers.¹⁰¹⁷ The Minnesota Council showed four Soviet films as part of its spring festival, the first Soviet films shown in the region in five years. However, Fedosov suggests that the local press "intentionally ignored" the festival, due to the anti-Soviet political climate in the country.¹⁰¹⁸ Thus, the Greater Boston Committee, with support from the Soviet Embassy and the NCASF, developed an effective program for the spring festival that was successfully copied by other regional societies.

Despite Buland's efforts, the Greater Boston Committee shared several of the weaknesses of other friendship societies. First, it lacked the financial resources necessary to sustain its activities. Fedosov admitted that, from its establishment, the Greater Boston Committee received extensive financial support from the NCASF.¹⁰¹⁹ For example, since Buland was unemployed at the founding of the Greater Boston Committee, the NCASF hired her as a full-time employee.¹⁰²⁰ In late 1976, Will Keenan, chairman of the Greater Boston

¹⁰¹⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1598, ll. 7-16.

¹⁰¹⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 159-61.

¹⁰¹⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 107-8.

¹⁰¹⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-15.

¹⁰²⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1204, ll. 1-3.

Committee, complained to Moscow of money problems. Keenan requested a photo exhibit, noting that they hoped to charge money for the entrance, and he emphasized, “Money is our biggest problem. Anything we do must not lose money.”¹⁰²¹ By the following year, the Greater Boston Committee paid Buland’s salary on its own, but its financial situation had not improved and the leadership attempted to pursue spring festival plans without spending any money. This was quite a feat.¹⁰²² Morford summarized the Greater Boston Committee’s difficulties when describing their spring festival plans:

The problem of finance is not an easy one to solve. Boston has accumulated a fairly impressive record of activities since they first began with the reception of the Soviet Delegation last May. A record on which they ought to be able to raise funds in the wider Boston area but they do not seem to be able to receive much and are having difficulty in maintaining Vali’s services. This is very distressing.¹⁰²³

Even though it had enacted a more active program than most other regional societies, the Greater Boston Committee found itself unable to increase its income, leaving it dangerously close to bankruptcy and losing Buland.

Second, Soviet authorities in Moscow did not always respond to the committee’s ambitious plans. In her December 29 letter, Buland informed Stepunin of plans to send a local artist to the USSR for an exhibition of his works.¹⁰²⁴ Buland forwarded the official letter on January 9, indicating that George Gabin, a member of the Greater Boston Committee, would lead the delegation of three artists. She suggested that they travel to the Soviet Union for a month during one of the academic breaks, meeting with counterparts and

¹⁰²¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, l. 117. Deputy Secretary General of the USSR-USA Society Gorin responded that they would forward the “Country and People” photo exhibit.

¹⁰²² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 23-25.

¹⁰²³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 14-15.

¹⁰²⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 5, 9.

students, displaying their works, and preparing articles on the experience to be published upon their return home. The artists would pay for their own transportation, but would require aid in shipping their works to the Soviet Union.¹⁰²⁵ Morford, apparently enthusiastic about the plan, wrote to the USSR-USA Society on February 16, requesting that the USSR-USA Society respond to Buland's letter as soon as possible.¹⁰²⁶ Despite Morford's interest and the economical and well-planned nature of the proposal, the USSR-USA Society, in a February 18 response, said the artist exchange was "impossible" as "our 1977 plan of exchange is overloaded and is very extensive in connection with the 60th Anniversary."¹⁰²⁷ The USSR-USA Society could not or chose not to tackle many of the programs proposed by the Greater Boston Committee.

Finally, despite its larger membership rolls, the Greater Boston Committee could not produce cooperative programs with most mainstream organizations due to its reputation as a pro-Soviet organization. For example, following the Fishman affair in December 1976, when the Soviet Embassy experienced a falling out with the national leadership of the Citizen Exchange Corps, the cultural affairs representatives at the Soviet Embassy frequently attempted to work with the CEC's regional office in Boston, which they felt took "a more constructive position" on Soviet-American exchanges.¹⁰²⁸ Despite their impression that the Boston office was more accommodating, the Soviet representatives could not convince its administrators to work with the Greater Boston Committee. Fedosov raised the question of

¹⁰²⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, l. 8.

¹⁰²⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 14-15.

¹⁰²⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, l. 12.

¹⁰²⁸ Fedosov describes this approach in a May 1977 memo to Stepunin. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 96-98. He notes the Boston office's relative independence from the national leadership before the Fishman affair in a November 1976 report. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-15.

cooperation with both parties during his 1976 visit. While the CEC office did not reject the proposal outright, the leadership suggested that they would pursue joint programs only with great reluctance.¹⁰²⁹ Then, in March 1977, Fedosov attempted to convince officials from the Boston office to get involved in the spring festival planned by the Greater Boston Committee. Although Buland stated that some members of the CEC's Boston office participated on their own, Fedosov reported that they "categorically refused to cooperate with the local friendship society [on an official basis] . . . because they could not support a 'pro-communist' and 'political' organization."¹⁰³⁰ Similarly, the Greater Boston Committee asked the mayor of Boston to participate in the 1977 spring festival. He then contacted the State Department, which told him to avoid the spring festival, as it was organized by a "pro-Soviet" organization.¹⁰³¹

In spite of these weaknesses, the Greater Boston Committee continued to have one of the most active friendship societies during *détente*. Buland remained secretary-treasurer, and in 1978, the committee received permission to use a 200-seat conference room once a month in the newly-built McCormack Building in downtown Boston. The committee used this space to expand its program. In January, it hosted a meeting on Soviet medicine that included reports presented by American doctors who visited the USSR under the auspices of the USSR-USA Society. In March, the Greater Boston Committee planned a seminar on Soviet women, with aid from embassy diplomats. The spring festival became an annual event for the friendship societies, and in May, as part of the festival, the committee scheduled an evening on the theme of "The History of Soviet-American Relations," focusing on the

¹⁰²⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1205, ll. 211-15.

¹⁰³⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 47-49.

¹⁰³¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 8-11.

anniversary of the 1972 Moscow Summit.¹⁰³² Other regional societies never matched this high level of activity, leaving the Boston group as the most successful example of the NCASF's expansion efforts in the mid-1970s.

The San Diego Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union

Although the San Diego Society for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union could not compete with the Greater Boston Committee's membership numbers or level of activity, it represents another relatively successful regional society. Dr. Harry C. Steinmetz, founder of the San Diego Society, received degrees in psychology from Purdue University, the University of Maryland, the University of Southern California, and the University of California at Berkeley, and he accepted a teaching position at San Diego State College in 1930. Active in local politics, Steinmetz ran on a socialistic platform for mayor in 1935 and Congress in 1948, but failed to win office. He worked as an officer in labor organizations and participated in local protests. First in 1936, and then in the late 1940s and early 1950s, conservative elements in San Diego attacked Steinmetz for his radicalism, and in 1954, Steinmetz was dismissed from his job at the university for refusing to divulge to HUAC whether he belonged to the Communist Party. He spent the following years practicing psychology in San Diego and Los Angeles, traveling through Europe, and teaching in Canada, Michigan, and Georgia, before retiring to San Diego in the late 1960s.¹⁰³³ Another septuagenarian leader of the friendship movement, Steinmetz served as president of the San

¹⁰³² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1994, ll. 221-22.

¹⁰³³ Steinmetz found himself at the center of a public discussion regarding academic freedom during this time period, as the California legislature introduced a new law specifically designed to purge state universities of communists. See Paul J. Eisloeffel, "The Cold War and Harry Steinmetz: A Case of Loyalty and Legislation," *The Journal of San Diego History* 35, no. 4 (Fall 1989).

Diego Society from its founding on February 10, 1974, until his death on February 15, 1981, at the age of 82.¹⁰³⁴

From the start, the San Diego Society confronted several challenges that nearly crippled its activities. One of the main problems faced by regional societies involved a lack of direct communication with Moscow or the Soviet Embassy. For instance, in 1974, Stepunin wrote a letter to Roberts, requesting information on the activities of the regional friendship societies in Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. Specifically, he asked Roberts to include contact information, indicating that the ISAO did not even have their addresses on file to start a direct correspondence.¹⁰³⁵ Roberts responded with details on the leadership and activities of the regional friendship societies, including San Diego, describing Steinmetz, a person whom Roberts had known for over twenty-five years, as a “capable thinker” devoted to the cause of Soviet-American friendship and peace.¹⁰³⁶ Simultaneously, Steinmetz wrote to Moscow, announcing the formation of the San Diego Society, and Moscow responded with congratulations, promises to look into his material requests, and directions to contact their representatives at the Soviet Embassy for additional guidance.¹⁰³⁷

¹⁰³⁴ Steinmetz had planned to develop a friendship society in San Diego for several years. Steinmetz mentions these designs in a note to Fedosov during a trip to Russia on May 7, 1972, regarding plans to bring an academic colleague to Moscow who “could be very valuable” in forming a friendship society in San Diego upon Steinmetz’s return to the US. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 105, l. 34. In a July 1975 letter to Moscow, he mentioned that he had been communicating with the ISAO about San Diego for four years. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 60. Some evidence suggests that Steinmetz previously had been associated with the friendship society in Los Angeles. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 9, d. 107, l. 58.

¹⁰³⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, l. 95.

¹⁰³⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, ll. 127-28. There is a slight disparity in the documents regarding the number of years that Roberts and Steinmetz had worked together. While Roberts tells Stepunin that he has “known his work for more than twenty-five years,” Steinmetz indicates in a separate letter that Roberts has been his “good friend for 40 years.” See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 469, l. 6.

¹⁰³⁷ For Steinmetz’s notification of the foundation of the San Diego Society, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 469, l. 6. For Stepunin’s response to this letter, sent to the correct address, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, l. 135.

Soviet authorities paid such little attention to Steinmetz, likely because San Diego remained a closed city to Soviet visitors, that the ISAO mailed literature to the San Diego Society at the wrong address for several years. Apparently, rather than sending the materials to Steinmetz's home address on Union Street, Soviet authorities forwarded his packages to a certain A.G. Steinmetz of University Avenue, a commercial travel agent in San Diego with no connection to the friendship society. On July 30, 1975—eighteen months after the founding of the San Diego Society—Steinmetz composed an exasperated response to Stepunin, stressing that he had written Moscow over a dozen times during the past four years to correct this mistake. Furthermore, Steinmetz reported the mix up to the embassy, the consulate in San Francisco, Morford, Roberts, and representatives from Soviet publishers stationed in Moscow and Washington. He even sent messages with Soviet travelers who promised to forward them to the appropriate officials, but to no avail. Steinmetz described Moscow's indifference to correcting this mistake as "increasingly embarrassing." Regarding the ISAO's lack of responsiveness in arranging cultural exchanges, he concludes: "I am devoted as I always have been to peace, détente, and cultural exchanges, and if, in the future, I receive no answers to the above, perhaps I should address my inquiries to Mr. L. I. Brezhnev."¹⁰³⁸

Even when representatives at the ISAO sent letters to the correct address, the long turnaround time frustrated Steinmetz. Throughout 1975, Steinmetz complained several times about this problem. In late December 1974, Steinmetz contacted the ISAO and embassy representatives to discuss plans for an upcoming tour of the USSR for the San Diego Youth Symphony Orchestra. He notes that "unless you answer our letters, the friendship business

¹⁰³⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, ll. 60, 67. Steinmetz specifies that the list of publications accidentally sent to the travel agency includes *Moscow News*, *New Times*, and *Sport in the USSR*.

droops, we become discouraged, and no generous hospitality can take place.”¹⁰³⁹ The response to this letter—dated March 18—did not reach Steinmetz until April 3, and on April 5, Steinmetz wrote back, asking that his “Moscow Chaperone” let him know when his letter arrives and pleading that he not wait “nearly four months” to get back to him.¹⁰⁴⁰ In summer 1975, Steinmetz complained again that he had seen “very little evidence that my letters to you are read by any one” and reemphasizing his belief that “the success of détente depends a lot upon satisfactory communication.”¹⁰⁴¹ The ISAO replied in September, assuring Steinmetz that they read his letters and greatly appreciated his work to improve Soviet-American relations. Steinmetz remained skeptical.¹⁰⁴²

Following the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, Steinmetz authored a comprehensive report to the Soviet General Consul in San Francisco, outlining the San Diego Society’s activities and sharply criticizing the lack of support received from Soviet authorities. Beginning with assurances of his “faith in the future of your socialism since 1917,” he emphasized that the primary problem they faced “is with our Soviet friends,” as they did not respond to letters, answer questions, send sufficient information about upcoming delegations, or provide the friendship societies with appropriate answers to the burning questions about the Soviet Union that dominated the public discourse. He concluded:

I never criticize my Soviet friends to Americans, but to you I must confess utter bafflement by a seeming lack in your friendship societies and agencies of secretarial help. Détente begins and ends in communication, but you seem unprepared for it. Really I think your whole public relations program, if you have one aside from your vast publishing houses, needs overhauling. I’d like to recommend a weekend in some

¹⁰³⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 822, l. 27.

¹⁰⁴⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 65.

¹⁰⁴¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 23.

¹⁰⁴² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 46.

dacha in the woods of Baltimore or near San Francisco of a half dozen Soviet PR folk and a half dozen Americans.¹⁰⁴³

The General Consul passed this scathing critique on to the ISAO leadership, but the ISAO took no action to placate Steinmetz. Rather, it seems that Steinmetz cut down on his letters to Moscow, instead focusing his energy on developing his program with limited aid from Morford and the embassy.

Remarkably given this lack of support, Steinmetz built a relatively successful friendship society in San Diego. With literature and movies from the embassy and the ARI, Steinmetz sketched out plans in July 1975 for a center with a small store and an area to watch Soviet films, and he hoped to put together several peace activities.¹⁰⁴⁴ He also released his fourth newsletter, an unusual feat for friendship societies at this time. It contained updates on the San Diego Society's activities, and it offered literature for sale, including, "The Ghost Behind Solzhenitsyn," a pamphlet that promised to reveal the secrets of "this cancerous & paranoid chap," available for ten cents.¹⁰⁴⁵ By 1977, Morford described the San Diego Society as "one of the most accomplished outfits at this point," noting that Steinmetz had three or four women assisting him in producing a program that had significant outreach. Morford seemed surprised that the San Diego Society had developed so quickly and that the council received coverage from a local university's campus newspaper, as they solicited signatures for a petition to President Jimmy Carter in favor of strengthening détente and ending the arms race.¹⁰⁴⁶ Soviet observers noticed this growth, as well. Following the 1978

¹⁰⁴³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 51-52.

¹⁰⁴⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, l. 79.

¹⁰⁴⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, l. 12.

¹⁰⁴⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll.14-15.

celebration of the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, a representative from the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco stated that the San Diego Society now had seventy-five members, with fifty people in attendance at the party.¹⁰⁴⁷ According to the embassy, on March 25, 1978, Steinmetz opened a permanent center for the San Diego Society, complete with a library, two rooms for holding meetings and rallies, twice-weekly classes in Russian language, and monthly meetings of the friendship society. At least one of its activists worked at the center every day, ensuring that anyone who stopped by could meet with someone to learn about the activities of the council.¹⁰⁴⁸ While it did not have the same drawing power as the Greater Boston Committee or the more established societies in New York and San Francisco, the San Diego Society's growth was unexpected.

Like other friendship society leaders, Steinmetz was concerned that the San Diego Society should include more mainstream backers of détente, though he seemed more critical of leftist participation. As he wrote to the General Consul in San Francisco:

In devotion to USA-USSR relations I am maintaining only a friendly fellow-traveler relationship with the CP USA because although sought since 1958, I have received no constructive guidance from it, because this devotion seems to me to require maintenance of a most representative and not minority character, and because locally the CP leadership is primitive, infantile, and isolated.¹⁰⁴⁹

Thus, Steinmetz expressed concerns that the CP USA's leadership could not aid the friendship movement. Moreover, allying with the CP USA would hinder efforts to give a more mainstream face to the friendship society, thereby preventing it from increasing its membership rolls and influence. Above all, Steinmetz understood the expansion goals set by Morford and the embassy and, rather than forming an organization stocked with a few

¹⁰⁴⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1994, ll. 66-67.

¹⁰⁴⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1994, l. 139.

¹⁰⁴⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 51-52.

ideologically-friendly fellow travelers, he hoped to create a group with mass appeal. The San Diego Society's expansion succeeded, in part, due to such efforts to reach out to the community, though it differed greatly from the Greater Boston Committee, which had more participation from members of the CP USA.

Friendship Societies in Washington State and Sacramento

While the Greater Boston Committee and the San Diego Society represent examples of relatively successful regional societies, the Washington Institute for Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union had much more trouble in establishing a regular and active program. Frank L. Batterson and John Baker founded the Washington Institute in March 1972, with support and guidance from Holland Roberts and the ARI, after a visit to the Soviet Union. Batterson, a former Peace and Freedom Party candidate for Congress and a World War II veteran who lost a leg and spent fifteen months in a Nazi prison camp, assumed the presidency of the new organization, and Baker served as secretary.¹⁰⁵⁰ Particularly in its early years, the organization's activities mostly centered on driving Baker's Dodge station wagon to San Francisco, filling it with 1,000 pounds of literature from the ARI and driving it back to Washington for distribution. In a 1974 letter to the ISAO leadership, Baker explained that they had taken six such trips to San Francisco thus far, delivering literature to 90 percent of the high schools, colleges, universities, and public libraries in the state from September 1972 to May 1973. Baker asserted that, starting in September 1973, they received

¹⁰⁵⁰ For details on the founding of the Washington Institute, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 822, ll. 171-72. For Roberts' role in founding the Washington Institute, see also GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 468, ll. 127-28. For more on Batterson, see his profile in the 1966 Washington State Official Voters Pamphlet, available online at http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/docs/osos/voterspamphlet66_77/voterspamphlet_1966_dist21_2007_000229.pdf (Accessed 19 March 2010). Batterson won 1,105 of the 124,180 votes cast for the Second District Congressional seat, or about 0.89% of the vote, running largely on an anti-Vietnam War platform. The results can be found at http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electioninfo/1966election.pdf (Accessed 19 March 2010). Unfortunately, less biographical information is available for Baker.

new, larger packages from San Francisco, and they were dutifully taking these packages to the same institutions as before, with plans to finish by summer 1973.¹⁰⁵¹

Baker noted in a letter to the Republican Mayor Richard E. Olson of Des Moines, Iowa, that they “invaded” Oregon in 1974, expanding their activities to cover most of Oregon’s colleges and universities and about two-thirds of the high schools. He emphasized that they traveled about 25,000 miles a year in his station wagon to distribute literature, with additional miles put on Batterson’s camper, which they used for travel and accommodations on longer trips. As part of this push for distribution, they had received more than 400 titles by mail from the Soviet Embassy, including subscriptions to publications such as *Soviet Life*, *Moscow News*, and magazines from Kiev and other Soviet cities.¹⁰⁵²

Despite their ability to distribute a large amount of propaganda, the weaknesses in the Washington Institute’s model started to make themselves apparent. At the founding of the organization, Batterson and Baker were sixty-three and seventy-three years old, respectively, and they had not aged well, leaving them incapable of doing much more than delivering literature and showing the occasional film. Moreover, in 1975, Batterson began making changes to the Institute’s structure that alienated Baker and weakened the organization. First, in 1975, following a conference of friendship societies in Moscow, Batterson decided to rebrand the organization as the Washington Council of Soviet-American Friendship,

¹⁰⁵¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 822, ll. 171-72.

¹⁰⁵² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, ll. 8-10. In the letter, Baker expresses his pleasure upon hearing about Olson’s recent trip to the USSR and his determination to build friendship and trade. Baker apparently attempted to recruit the mayor to serve as the head of a new friendship council, emphasizing that the literature and “bric a brac” comes free from the Soviet Embassy. He concluded, “I believe you could do wonders with Friendship Societies.” There is no evidence that Olson responded to Baker’s advances.

indicating a move away from the ARI, toward a closer relationship with the NCASF.¹⁰⁵³

This appears to be part of a broader centralization effort that took place in the mid-1970s, with the expansion of the NCASF.

On July 24, Baker sent a letter to both the Soviet Embassy and the ARI, indicating that the Washington Council was disbanding and would no longer require shipments of literature.¹⁰⁵⁴ Roberts wrote to Batterson on July 31, expressing concern over the “disturbing letter,” emphasizing that there “should be no step backward in your good work and a consistent effort to move forward in the favorable climate of opinion which is now developing.”¹⁰⁵⁵ Batterson responded, indicating that the Washington Council was not dissolving. Rather, Baker had resigned as secretary over a disagreement regarding the Washington Council’s office space.¹⁰⁵⁶ On August 14, Roberts wrote again, expressing concern over reports from Seattle about the split between Batterson and Baker and reminding Batterson: “Unity is the word as we all know. Détente is the aim. Victory lies ahead.”¹⁰⁵⁷

¹⁰⁵³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 4. In this letter, Batterson proclaims, “The world will never be able to repay the Soviet Union for what it is doing for world peace and mankind, with some of us this struggle has been going on for most of our lives, the great teachings of Lenin left us with guidance and a love for people that gives us courage to face the struggle ahead. But today we see more clearly the path ahead. With the Soviet Union leading the way, we cannot fail.” This kind of flowery praise for the Soviet Union sometimes appeared in letters from the regional friendship societies, but rarely in the letters from Morford or Roberts.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Baker wanted the group to maintain its headquarters in the Smith Tower. Batterson and the Board of Directors decided to close the office in favor of moving into Batterson’s home to avoid the expensive rent and the need to sign in and out of the building, which some members of the Board regarded as a form of “intimidation. Roberts references this letter in his response to Batterson. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 22. It is also cited in the report by A. Metelkin, SSOD representative at the Soviet Embassy on August 7. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 163-164. Batterson mentions Baker’s attempts to cut off literature shipments to the Washington Council in his response to Roberts. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 62.

¹⁰⁵⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 22. Roberts also wrote to Baker on July 31, before the circumstances of Baker’s resignation became clear, encouraging him to find a new Board of Directors to set up a new center. Still, Roberts cautioned: “I do not understand why you have resigned as secretary. Wouldn’t it be better to stay on and fight through for a central office, rather than to lose contact?” See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, l. 71.

¹⁰⁵⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 62.

¹⁰⁵⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, l. 73.

The circumstances of the schism remained unclear in Washington until the Soviet Embassy took charge of the situation, contacting both Batterson and Baker to clear things up. Embassy representative Metelkin confirmed that the office relocation had caused the split. Baker saw the abandonment of the office as proof of the imperative need to reorganize the society, since it was represented by a diffuse Board of Directors who carried out no work, undermining the activities of the council. Batterson, however, stressed the financial difficulties of the council in explaining its decision. Although he did not understand Baker's decision to resign, he speculated that it had something to do with Baker's advanced age and unfortunate circumstances in his personal and family life. Given these great disparities in the interpretations provided by Baker and Batterson, the report concludes, "One gets the impression that Baker's decision to leave the society is also connected to difficulties in his relationship with Batterson."¹⁰⁵⁸ Batterson hinted at the validity of this theory, telling Roberts, "I don't want to get into personalities, unless I have to," before explaining that he sided with the board against Baker in the decision to move the offices.¹⁰⁵⁹ Indeed, personal conflicts developed over the three years of travel together seem to have overcome Batterson and Baker's common ideology and desire to pursue improved Soviet-American relations. Metelkin's encouragement of reconciliation between the two men did not bear fruit. Their partnership, which at the very least served as an effective means of distributing pro-détente literature in the greater Seattle area, came to a close.

Baker's resignation from the Washington Council coincided with a number of tragedies in his personal life. Apparently, Baker had formed a taxi company with his son and

¹⁰⁵⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 817, ll. 163-64.

¹⁰⁵⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 62.

daughter-in-law and, when the business began to collapse, his son and daughter-in-law fled, leaving him with a stack of bills and forcing him into bankruptcy. Around the same time, he separated with his wife, and Baker was left in dire financial straits without the support of his family or the fellow travelers at the friendship society that he helped found.¹⁰⁶⁰ Roberts described his condition at this time as a sort of “neurosis,” as he “is always expecting some one to hit him again.”¹⁰⁶¹ Baker eventually relocated to San Diego, though his relationship with the local friendship society seems unclear, as he attempted to work as a “field man,” paying his own expenses and independently distributing literature.¹⁰⁶² In a letter to Morford, Roberts writes that he and Steinmetz tried to “help [Baker] understand that the USSR works through organizations rather than individuals but he doesn’t seem to grasp the fact and tries to work as a loner.” Moreover, Roberts described Baker’s behavior as erratic, stating that he would arrive in San Francisco to pick up literature without warning, resulting in smaller bundles. Roberts expressed hope that “time and patience may bring him around,” but underscored that Morford should take a more active role in reining in Baker’s activities, as “he looks to you for leadership and I am sure you can help him.”¹⁰⁶³ The embassy disconnected from the situation, allowing Morford and Roberts to deal with the rogue Baker.

While the Washington Council continued to exist without Baker’s activities, its program remained limited. Given his disability, Batterson could not do the physical work necessary to haul large packages of literature, thereby ending the council’s efforts to stock

¹⁰⁶⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, ll. 74-75.

¹⁰⁶¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 60, 42, 40.

¹⁰⁶² Baker describes his plans to Roberts in an August 1975 letter. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, ll. 74-75. Baker wrote a letter to the Los Angeles Times on October 2, 1975, listing his address as San Diego. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, l. 17.

¹⁰⁶³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 60, 42, 40.

libraries in the Northwest with Soviet literature.¹⁰⁶⁴ More importantly, the office location presented a problem for years, as the Washington Council moved from the Smith Tower, a skyscraper in downtown Seattle, to Frank Batterson's cottage in Everett, a small city with a population of around 50,000 people. This limited the council's access to potential members, as well as its ability to develop a comprehensive program. By late 1975, the Washington Council moved back to Seattle.¹⁰⁶⁵ This move, however, did not bolster the Washington Council's program, as Morford reported in 1977:

It was a small setup, providing one room in which perhaps twenty-five to thirty people could sit down—jammed close together—to view the movies that they intended to show. Another portion of the room provided a little office space. But before I had arrived, they had discovered that this new location was precisely, 'nowhere.' Not a location to which anybody was likely to come even on invitation to view movies.

Morford explained that the Washington Council promised to seek out new headquarters closer to the University of Washington, where they would be able to attract support from students, but from December to March, he lamented, "they have been doing very little."¹⁰⁶⁶ Moreover, the event seemed to widen the rift between Morford and the Washington Council and, in a follow-up report, Morford remarked that the leaders of the Washington Council "have been somewhat on the outs with me since I tried to push them too hard at an earlier time this year concerning their own program which wasn't very large."¹⁰⁶⁷ Batterson ignored Morford's advice and did not relocate the office.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Baker mentions this problem in a letter to Roberts. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, ll. 74-75. Roberts confirms that the literature pickups have ended in a 1976 letter to Morford. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 60, 42, 40.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Batterson informed Stepunin and Fedosov of the Washington Council's new offices on October 4, 1975. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 818, l. 49.

¹⁰⁶⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 16-17.

¹⁰⁶⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1602, ll. 56-61.

The failures of the Washington Council were further exacerbated by its inability to stave off competition from other groups in sponsoring Soviet delegations that visited Seattle. The 1978 delegation, for example, featured challenges to the Washington Council from both mainstream organizations and more moderate leftist groups. Representatives from the Soviet Embassy designated People to People, a mainstream cultural exchange organization, as the principal hosts of the delegation in Seattle without consulting with the NCASF. In a March 21 letter to Morford, Batterson expressed dismay at having been “shunted off to the side” in activities with the delegation by People to People. “Now, we of course have no objections to the Soviet delegations being sponsored by broader organizations,” he wrote. “But until we ourselves have broadened out a great deal more than we so far have been able to, we are apt to take a beating, if we have to ‘compete’ for Soviet delegations with the elite of bourgeoisie [sic] society.”¹⁰⁶⁸ Thus, in having to battle with mainstream organizations for attention from Soviet delegations, the Washington Council failed to attract support from people other than the old fellow travelers that currently sponsored its program.

Following the delegation’s visit to Seattle, Batterson complained to Morford about his group’s treatment at the hands of the People’s Coalition of Peace and Justice, a broad alliance of leftist antiwar, antipoverty, pro-labor, and antiracism groups founded in 1970. He claimed that the Washington Council invited the People’s Coalition to join them in sponsoring an evening with the Soviet delegation. The People’s Coalition seems to have done most of the preparatory work for the visit, booking a venue and advertising the event. At first, the People’s Coalition did not mention the Washington Council in its publicity for the delegation and, after much prodding from Batterson, it added the Washington Council only as a

¹⁰⁶⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1995, l. 29.

“supporting organization,” not a co-sponsor. The leader of the People’s Coalition also refused to allow Batterson to address the public reception, and she “curtly told [Batterson] that she would cancel the whole thing” if he continued to push for an opportunity to speak. Batterson explained, “The reason given for the strange stand they took was that, among some of the broadly-based peace-groups they are associated with, we are looked upon as being too far to the left. . . . So our problems on this particular occasion was not so much with the traditional right as with the former left!”¹⁰⁶⁹

Morford submitted Batterson’s complaints to Moscow and asked that they review the case, emphasizing that mainstream organizations such as People to People tried to avoid working with friendship societies, since they regarded them as pro-Soviet and communist. The regional societies, in turn, regarded People to People as “nabobs” who refused to accept the rank-and-file people from “the ‘movement.’” He declared, “Our people have always believed that they are the hosts when Society USSR-USA send a Mission,” and he disparaged the ways in which the Soviet Embassy gave People to People authority to serve as the principal hosts of the delegation without consulting with the NCASF. Morford concluded, however, by seemingly justifying the approach taken by the Soviet Embassy and Moscow in prioritizing mainstream groups over friendship societies: “In any event I quite accept the position of the Cultural Division in Washington and, presumably, of you in the Moscow society: namely, that there are limits and it is important, therefore, to have the cooperation of other groups in various cities that are accepted in official and broader circles.”¹⁰⁷⁰ In other words, at least in his messages to Soviet leaders, Morford recognized

¹⁰⁶⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1995, ll. 27-28.

¹⁰⁷⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1995, ll. 55-59.

the limitations of friendship societies in garnering widespread public support, and he understood that, at times, friendship councils would have to play second fiddle to mainstream organizations in sponsoring Soviet delegations. If the Soviet Embassy was changing direction, he argued, it could at least offer an explanation to longtime fellow travelers.

Overall, the Washington Council never garnered much support or backing from the New York leadership or the representatives at the Soviet Embassy, and when Roberts's health began to decline in 1975, the Washington Council lost its strongest ally. Moreover, Batterson and Baker never put together a comprehensive program to attract any kind of public interest. Their advanced age contributed to this difficulty, as petty squabbles over the direction of the council and personal conflicts, exacerbated by Baker's personal problems, tore apart their partnership. Finally, the problems associated with the office crippled the Washington Council's activities. Unable to afford rent in central Seattle, they settled for an office in a poor location, without the facilities or exposure necessary to build an effective program or public support. Competition from other organizations and a lack of aid from the embassy only served to exacerbate these weaknesses.

The most dramatic failures in the NCASF's expansion came on the rare occasions when NCASF and the USSR-USA Society representatives were not critical in selecting potential new friendship societies. In 1976, they allowed an interested group to form the Sacramento Society for US-Soviet Friendship, quickly listing it in their reports as a new friendship society.¹⁰⁷¹ Shortly thereafter, the founder and president of the Sacramento society began mailing the USSR-USA Society representative propaganda for the One World Family Commune, a religious cult that believes, among other things, that "the Liberty Bell

¹⁰⁷¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 12-15.

was cracked and recracked by the Lord's space ship."¹⁰⁷² The founder and president of the friendship society sent a cover letter with this propaganda indicating her desire to schedule a delegation to visit the USSR and meet with "our brothers and sisters of the world communist movement."¹⁰⁷³ Evidently realizing that they had permitted a UFO cult to be registered as a friendship society, the USSR-USA Society representatives did not respond to the One World Family's messages, and Sacramento was not cited as a friendship society in future reports.

A number of general observations can be made following these case studies. First, despite Cold War-era claims that the friendship societies were Soviet fronts dominated by the CP USA, these societies show that Communist Party involvement varied by region. If the Greater Boston Committee built a relatively successful organization with a strong core of Party members, then the San Diego Society accomplished a similar feat without heavy Party representation. Second, while the older generation still dominated the national organization, regional expansion allowed younger friends of the Soviet Union—such as Buland in Boston, the Tattams in Portland, and others—to assume prominent roles. This proved important later in the 1970s, when the younger generation sought additional influence in shaping the national agenda. Third, the personality of regional leaders played a dramatic role in shaping each society's fate. On the one hand, in Boston and San Diego, where energetic and engaged people directed friendship societies, they experienced general growth, even in closed cities such as San Diego. On the other hand, in the state of Washington, where Batterson and Baker did not develop a comprehensive program and fought over personal issues, the friendship society struggled to attract members. Fourth, support from Moscow, the Soviet

¹⁰⁷² GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, ll. 107-12.

¹⁰⁷³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1206, l. 113.

Embassy, and the NCASF or the ARI proved decisive, as each regional society required external support to survive. When sufficient assistance came from Soviet authorities, as seen during the Greater Boston Committee's spring festival, the friendship societies could produce programs with popular appeal, at least in leftist circles. When support was more intermittent, though, as in most cases, the programs generally failed or struggled. Finally, despite the expansion efforts undertaken by the NCASF and the Soviet Embassy in the mid-1970s, the regional societies continued to face debilitating roadblocks to achieving stability and effectiveness. Even Boston, which undertook the most expansive program of any regional society, could not break even financially, and none of the societies could establish working relationships with mainstream organizations that could attract supporters from outside of their traditional base.

“Tired Old Communists and Fellow Travelers”

During this period of expansion, the NCASF experienced many of the same difficulties that had impeded its work in previous years. For example, despite efforts to reduce the limitations of the NCASF, the organization remained isolated, unable to develop ties between the friendship societies and mainstream groups. As the 1976-1978 plan for the US Department of SSOD stated:

Whereas the American societies for friendship with the USSR have limited access to the US public because of the authorities' prevailing hostile relations toward them as pro-Soviet and pro-communist organizations, the USA Department and the ISAO, through the SSOD representatives in the US, will directly develop their business ties and contacts with a variety of other American organizations that support the expansion and improvement of US relations with the USSR and détente.

The report lists the CEC as an ideal candidate for developing ties with the friendship societies.¹⁰⁷⁴ As seen with the relations between the Greater Boston Committee and the Boston offices of the CEC and the Washington Council and People-to-People, this endeavor did not prove to be successful. A report the following year cited these difficulties, lamenting, “The State Department and other official American agencies, despite the fact that the label of ‘subversive organizations’ was removed several years ago, continue to relate to them with great suspicion and constantly interfere with their work, intimidating those Americans who want to participate in their activities.”¹⁰⁷⁵

An exchange between Morford and Fred Warner Neal, head of the American Committee on US-Soviet Relations, a neutral organization of prominent Americans that lobbied in favor of détente, further reveals the divide between the NCASF and mainstream organizations. On May 17, 1977, Morford wrote to Neal regarding an article he penned, “The Salvagers of Détente.” Although Morford complained of Neal’s description of friendship society members as “tired old communists” and “fellow travelers,” he nonetheless praised Neal’s work, writing, “these are minor considerations in a very fine article.” Noting that he has followed the American Committee’s activities “with appreciation,” Morford praised Neal’s efforts to “employ [his] influence with the authorities in Washington on the side of détente.” He highlighted the NCASF’s recent petitions to President Carter to pursue arms limitations, emphasizing that the NCASF took a moderate position by asking that “concessions be made on both sides.” Morford expressed a desire to meet Neal “one of these days” and proclaimed, “The way is open for an even stronger influence on the part of those

¹⁰⁷⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1991, ll. 7-11.

¹⁰⁷⁵ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 8-11.

enrolled in your Committee and I hope you will pursue what you can do best more aggressively. . . . Please do everything you can to push forward the work of the American Committee on US-Soviet Relations. It could count mightily.” Throughout the letter, Morford describes how each organization should do “its part” to make “a constructive contribution” to détente, indicating his understanding that the NCASF and the American Committee worked in separate spheres toward the similar goal of promoting détente.¹⁰⁷⁶

While Neal’s response, written on May 25, is friendly in tone, it contains a clear message that cooperation between the American Committee and the NCASF would be impossible. Neal assured Morford that he was not among the “tired old communists” mentioned in the article, and he described the NCASF’s work as “very positive,” claiming that he was “pleased” to work toward the same objectives as Morford. Neal discussed the “very harsh pragmatism” that guided his actions, even leading him “to the point of supporting Nixon.” Citing his close relationship with several members of the NCASF Board of Directors, he wrote that it has been “a source of unhappiness” to him that “because of the hard political realities” he has “been forced to eschew collaboration” with the NCASF. He continued, “I read your letter correctly, you can appreciate the considerations which lead to this decision. To the extent that we can have any influence at all, the name of the game—our game—must be ‘super-respectability.’ I may be wrong in this evaluation but given the deep and pervasive cold war psychology in the country, I don’t think so.”¹⁰⁷⁷ In other words, Neal

¹⁰⁷⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 78-79. Morford forwarded this exchange to Stepanin on June 9 with a cover letter that states, “Members of the Board have seen the article and have expressed the opinion that there should be some reply to Mr. Neal” regarding the description of friendship society members. Morford indicated that he did not plan to respond, most likely due to his approval of the rest of the article’s message as well as his understanding of Neal’s difficult position. For the cover letter, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, l. 112.

¹⁰⁷⁷ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 80-81.

could not consider cooperation with the NCASF for fear that it would destroy the American Committee's neutral public image.

On June 9, Morford forwarded this exchange to Moscow, and his comments in the cover letter indicate his understanding of Neal's predicament. A number of NCASF members had written him, asking, "What do you say to the appraisal of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship in this article?" In particular, several members of the Board of Directors read the article and demanded that Morford draft a public response. He informed Moscow: "I have not permitted myself any written replies to these queries. And I have no intention of circulating this letter exchange." In other words, Morford did not want to publicly criticize Neal's article due to his sympathy for Neal's position as a "neutral" party and his belief in the importance of Neal's work. He also could not show the letter exchange to the other members of the NCASF, as they would have criticized him for allowing Neal to slam the NCASF without public reprisal in the name of preserving the reputation of an organization that did not share the same ideological approach as the friendship societies. Thus Morford demonstrated his understanding and acceptance of the NCASF's primary limitation: the inability to develop meaningful partnerships with mainstream organizations due to its reputation as a pro-Soviet or procommunist organization.

Furthermore, the expansion of the friendship councils only escalated the rivalry between Morford and Roberts, leading to a power struggle that eventually displaced Morford. When Alexei Stepunin, who formerly served as the SSOD representative at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., took control of daily operations of the ISAO as Secretary General in 1973, Morford wrote to him:

I know your apprehension about the San Francisco Institute. And on November 7, in conversation in Washington, [embassy representative] Gennady [Fedosov] spoke to

the point, too, and told me how anxious he was to push San Francisco along and yet how delicately the matter had to be handled with Holland [Roberts]. Gennady did not tell me that he was going to San Francisco almost immediately but now I am told he was in San Francisco only three days ago. So if he has given strong nudge to Holland, what more can I do. Nevertheless I do feel a strong sense of responsibility concerning the three West Coast groups and Chicago and I think you want me to prosecute this responsibility.”¹⁰⁷⁸

Although the source of Stepunin’s “apprehension” of the ARI is not made clear in the available materials, Morford’s statement highlights his fear that with the expansion of the friendship councils—especially outside of the East Coast—the ARI would use its increased influence to gain preferential status over the NCASF in deciding the direction of the friendship movement.

These sentiments reappeared in 1975, when Morford forwarded a letter from Roberts to the ISAO that mentioned an upcoming meeting between friendship society representatives and Soviet delegates. In a handwritten attachment to the letter, Morford wrote to the ISAO: “Very good to be helpful—one society to another. Yet there is some implication: let us get together as regional societies—Holland’s idea of a ‘federation’—apart from the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship. Holland nurtures this idea.”¹⁰⁷⁹ In other words, Morford had concerns that the NCASF’s influence over the friendship movement and its ability to shape relations with Moscow would be diluted by the expansion of the friendship councils in the mid-1970s, and that Roberts would use the regional societies to seize control of the movement. Roberts’s work to organize the new councils—especially in Washington and San Diego—did nothing to calm Morford’s fears.

¹⁰⁷⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 139, ll. 155-56.

¹⁰⁷⁹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, l. 77. Roberts’ mimeographed letter contains reports on the ARI’s work with the friendship societies in Seattle and Minnesota, promising, “We will keep you informed as we help them in their work.” It also notes that the ARI kept up correspondence with the regional societies in advance of the September meeting, which is what prompted Morford to write to Moscow. See GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 821, l. 78.

With Roberts's declining health and eventual death in October 1976, Morford took control and led the councils for a few years until the regional heads of friendship societies banded together to limit his authority. Generational and geographical concerns drove this conflict, as the younger regional leaders hoped to gain some control over the development of the national program from the elders in New York. Early signs of trouble emerged by 1976, when the regional heads of the friendship councils, using their positions on the Board of Directors of the NCASF, began calling for a national convention of friendship societies with the aim to vote for a radical reorganization along more democratic lines, giving the regional societies greater authority to shape the national program.¹⁰⁸⁰ In September 1977, a national conference met, voting to make the Board of Directors an elected body and establishing an Executive Committee to oversee the NCASF's activities. The following year, Morford explained the new system to the USSR-USA Society, noting, "the Societies now really run the show here." Emphasizing the prominent role of the Executive Committee in setting the NCASF's agenda, Morford informed the USSR-USA Society: "Do not sell me short! I, too, assert leadership, in most instances decisively, but it cannot be as 'high-handed' (to quote the critics) as it was. The truth is that I cooperate with the 'bosses' at every point. They do not intend to give me full rein as did the old Board who agreed to whatever I proposed and then said 'You do it!'"¹⁰⁸¹

The practical consequences of this reorganization were felt when a special committee was formed, including Morford and three representatives from the regional societies, to develop a platform for a new exchange agreement with the Soviet Union in 1978. Morford

¹⁰⁸⁰ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, ll. 129-30. In July 1977, several friendship society leaders met in San Francisco to solidify plans for the September conference. They agreed on some of the measures that would be enacted two months later. For the Soviet report, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1601, ll. 184-87.

¹⁰⁸¹ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1995, ll. 55-59.

stated that the regional representatives used this opportunity to express “vociferous and unwarranted criticism” of recent Good Will Missions, resulting in a meeting with Fedosov, who attempted to resolve the dispute.¹⁰⁸² This clash again revealed itself in August 1978, when the four representatives traveled to Moscow to conclude the 1978-1980 agreement on exchanges. Expressing frustration with the regional representatives and characterizing the negotiations as “rather tense,” the Soviet report states that the regional representatives demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the nature of the USSR-USA Society-NCASF partnership, insisting that programs reserved for technical exchanges with the US be included in their cultural exchange agreement. Technical exchanges traditionally were organized through other American organizations, with the NCASF strictly handling cultural exchanges. In addition, the other Americans in the delegation repeatedly attempted to prevent Morford from assuming a prominent role in talks with the Soviet leadership. The Soviet report states that they “tried in every possible way to belittle the experience, knowledge, and abilities of Morford.” When Soviet authorities nonetheless treated Morford as the leader of the group, the other Americans repeatedly pointed out that the delegation consisted of four equal members. When negotiations ended, the other delegates demanded that all four representatives be allowed to sign the agreement, leaving the USSR-USA Society in an extremely awkward position, as only the Moscow leadership, and not representatives from other Soviet cities, would be present at the ceremony. The report concludes, “The SSOD leadership attempted to point out their improper conduct. However, they did not heed the advice, and in one of the most heated moments of the discussion of the program, they even

¹⁰⁸² Ibid.

threatened that they would not sign the agreement. Expect long and painstaking work when dealing with the new members of the leadership of the American friendship societies.”¹⁰⁸³

Morford’s position in the NCASF did not improve following the signing of the new joint program. In January 1980, the Board of Directors appointed a new Executive Committee to administer the NCASF’s activities, this one more powerful than any with which Morford had previously worked. Soon after, the Board of Directors formed a special committee to choose Morford’s replacement as executive director.¹⁰⁸⁴ On October 27, 1980, Morford wrote a letter to the Board of Directors introducing his replacement, Alan Craft Thomson, an ordained minister of the United Presbyterian Church with a doctorate in Theology from Union Theological Seminary. Morford expressed some reservations about Thomson, who was currently directing the final campaign efforts of Joelle Fishman, a candidate for Congress from New Haven who ran on the Communist Party ticket. Always conscious of the negative consequences of NCASF’s image as a procommunist organization, he wrote, “Personally I cannot be happy about this in terms of National Council concerns, but perhaps publicity will not extend much beyond New Haven borders or the left press.” Although it does not appear that Morford was thrilled with the choice of Thomson, he explained that Thomson would serve as his “special assistant” for about a month to learn the ropes. In January 1981, Morford stepped down as executive director.¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁸³ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1994, ll. 52-56.

¹⁰⁸⁴ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 2766, ll. 47-48.

¹⁰⁸⁵ For the development of democratic management of the NCASF, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1603, l. 129-30; and f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1995, l. 55-59. For the replacement of Morford, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 2767, l. 142-44.

Conclusion

As the USSR-USA Society's 1977 annual report to the SSOD leadership concludes:

The membership of the US friendship societies is small, the social base is narrow, few prominent Americans participate in its work, and the material base is weak. This is primarily due to the fact that the US Government is still clearly adverse to them as pro-communist organizations. The leadership of the friendship societies belongs to the absolute oldest generation of friends of the Soviet Union. They do not have enough energy or initiative, and they are often unnecessarily cautious. Their work suffers from all of these things."¹⁰⁸⁶

Thus, despite the campaign to expand the friendship societies in the mid-1970s, they remained unprofitable, unable to attract new members, and dominated by an inflexible, elderly cohort. The removal of Morford in January 1981 allowed a new generation to take the reins of the friendship movement. This might have resulted in a period of renewal with a younger, more active leadership, but these events coincided with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, which crippled cultural relations through the early Reagan years.¹⁰⁸⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, Soviet cultural diplomats portrayed the USSR as a dependable Great Power and a safe and reliable negotiating partner. In this sense, the existence of Soviet-American friendship societies, with their perceived—and frequently real—connections to the Communist Party, undermined this message. This put Soviet diplomats in the difficult position of presenting a “mainstream” image of the Soviet Union while maintaining close ties to a potentially subversive set of organizations. Considering the relative unpopularity of the friendship societies by the 1970s, as well as their ineffectiveness, why did Soviet authorities not simply abandon them?

¹⁰⁸⁶ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1600, ll. 12-15.

¹⁰⁸⁷ On the sharp downturn in cultural exchanges following Afghanistan, see GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 2765, ll. 21-29; and GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 2766, ll. 39-42.

Internal Soviet reports show that the friendship societies primarily served to distribute information about the Soviet Union. As the 1976-78 plan states, the societies “represent an essential and permanent channel of disseminating accurate information about Soviet reality to the American public, because they stand firmly for the improvement of Soviet-American relations and the strengthening of the process of détente.” The report discusses the importance of stocking the NCASF’s libraries, film collections, audio recordings, and resources for teaching the Russian language.¹⁰⁸⁸ The NCASF provided an American mouthpiece that Soviet diplomats could depend upon to deliver the Soviet messages of the day in exactly the manner that they would prefer. Although the establishment of permanent libraries, safe from potential negative shifts in Soviet-American relations, may offer a partial reason for the maintenance of the friendship societies, it does not provide a complete explanation. For example, as evidenced in the previous chapter, by the 1970s Soviet diplomats came to the conclusion that discussions with mainstream audiences were more effective at improving the Soviet Union’s image than speeches to the wholly-friendly crowds offered by the friendship societies. In this sense, maintaining a permanent source of ineffective propaganda seems less crucial than exploiting a more unpredictable, but effective, method of public relations.

There are several additional factors that help explain continued aid to the friendship societies. First, they provided welcoming committees to greet Soviet delegations throughout the country. The expansion of the regional societies roughly corresponded with the dozens of new cities visited by Soviet delegations throughout the 1970s. Large groups of Americans greeting Soviet visitors in cities around the country provided opportunities for propaganda, both at home and abroad, and impressed visiting Soviet delegations. Similarly, the

¹⁰⁸⁸ GARF, f. R-9576, op. 20, d. 1991, ll. 7-11.

continuation of the friendship societies allowed Soviet authorities the opportunity to invite American delegates to international conferences of friendship societies, which served as a valuable source of propaganda. Second, there were limited opportunities for these officials to travel to the US in the 1970s. Maintaining the friendship societies allowed for SSOD and friendship society leaders to keep the channels open for their own travel opportunities to the other country. Finally, bureaucratic momentum extended the friendship societies' lifespan. Soviet authorities had spent the previous fifty years keeping friendship societies afloat, with many of the same leaders that served in the NCASF through the end of détente, and at a certain point, it became difficult to cut loose ideological allies who had worked tirelessly for improved Soviet-American relations, even going to prison for the cause. Owing to this history of partnership with the friendship societies, Soviet diplomats worked to make them relevant once again, even if they realized the futile nature of the endeavor.

Although the leaders of the friendship societies hoped to make a major contribution to détente, ultimately, they were not up to the task. The Soviet Union, sensing this weakness, saw them as a secondary option, relying on them only when avenues for mainstream cultural programs narrowed. With such lukewarm backing, the friendship societies could not resolve the issues that hindered their efforts prior to détente, despite their expansion into new metropolitan areas. In the end, studying the Soviet Embassy's management of the friendship societies sheds light on the priorities held by Soviet diplomats in the field of cultural relations, as they sought to dispel the Soviet Union's image as a radical and dangerous threat to American society, instead suggesting that the Soviet Union was a mainstream power that the American public could trust.

CONCLUSION

On January 29, 1981, following Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration, Dobrynin drove to Foggy Bottom to meet Secretary of State Alexander Haig for their first official talks. During Kissinger and Vance's tenures at the State Department, Dobrynin entered at the public gate if it was an official meeting. More frequently, though, the meetings were held in secret, and Dobrynin had special permission to park in the State Department's private garage. His aide called the State Department in advance for clarification about where to enter, and the secretary told him that it would be "as usual." Dobrynin's car approached the private garage, but was turned around by a security guard, who informed him that his private parking privileges had been canceled. Haig described this incident, which received significant attention from the press, as a "misunderstanding," blaming it on an assistant who should have told Dobrynin about the "new procedure" in advance. Dobrynin was skeptical: "It was by then clear to me that all this had been a staged political show. It did not increase my confidence in the new secretary of state."¹⁰⁸⁹

During the Reagan years, the backchannel system that Dobrynin cultivated over the previous eighteen years collapsed, with no hope for a revival through Reagan's first term. Dobrynin attempted to make contact with National Security Advisor Richard Allen, the man nominally in charge of Soviet affairs in the Reagan administration, but he directed the Soviet

¹⁰⁸⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 485-86.

ambassador to regular State Department channels.¹⁰⁹⁰ Allen's successors, William P. Clark and Robert C. McFarlane, followed this precedent and deferred to the State Department, as well, and Richard Pipes, the White House Soviet expert, refused to meet with Dobrynin or any other Soviet diplomat.¹⁰⁹¹ Dobrynin attempted to open a dialogue with longtime friends in the Reagan administration, including Undersecretary of State William J. Stoessel, whom Dobrynin had known since 1952, when he was a counselor at the Soviet Embassy. Stoessel sympathized with Dobrynin, but informed him that, given the administration's mood, professional diplomats would have to follow orders from above and wait before reengaging in negotiations to improve Soviet-American relations. Sometimes, when he ran into administration officials at parties, they would blame the state of relations on the Soviet side, with Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger sarcastically saying that they did not want to plan a summit only to have the Soviet Union invade Poland a few months later, referring to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan coming on the heels of Carter and Brezhnev's meeting in Vienna. Still bitter about the Reagan administration's initial approach to Soviet-American relations, Dobrynin complained, "Weinberger impressed me sadly with his primitive approach to our relations and his incompetence, something characteristic of the whole Reagan administration at that time."¹⁰⁹²

Shut out from the halls of power, Dobrynin resorted to meeting Haig periodically and complaining bitterly to friends such as Averell Harriman. Five months after Reagan's inauguration, Dobrynin was so frustrated that he asked Harriman for his opinion of the potential for a Democrat to unseat the president in the 1984 presidential election. Dobrynin

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid., 482.

¹⁰⁹¹ Kalb, "The Dobrynin Factor."

¹⁰⁹² Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 487-90.

complained that the administration was “consciously very unfriendly,” and he described Haig as “badly prepared and badly informed.” Dobrynin seemed exasperated that the White House would employ Pipes, who gave advice that Dobrynin evaluated as “completely erroneous.”¹⁰⁹³ The following year, Dobrynin told Harriman that US-Soviet relations were as bad as they had been at any other time during his twenty years as ambassador, and in his opinion, they would get only worse.¹⁰⁹⁴ Small steps to improve relations began in 1983, when new Secretary of State George Shultz received permission from Reagan to start a series of private discussions with Dobrynin to explore the possibilities for changing the dynamic of the Soviet-American relationship. Still, Reagan remained reluctant to use the confidential channel, and while Dobrynin and Shultz worked to relieve tensions, progress stalled until after Dobrynin left the embassy in 1986 to take over the International Department in Moscow.¹⁰⁹⁵

Soviet cultural relations were also dealt a blow after Afghanistan. The Carter and Reagan administrations allowed the 1973 Cultural Exchange Agreement to expire after 1979, placing the burden for exchanges in the private sphere, where some organizations, such as the CEC, continued to press for improved relations.¹⁰⁹⁶ Many found it difficult, though, to argue for increased cultural ties in such a political environment. Raymond Garthoff writes that, during this period, the burden was on advocates for closer cultural ties to explain why a program still should be pursued, not on those who felt it should be canceled. Those who

¹⁰⁹³ Memorandum of Harriman-Dobrynin Conversation, June 29, 1981, Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Memorandum of Harriman-Dobrynin Conversation, March 23, 1982, Box 998, Folder 1, W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 515-21; 603.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Richmond, *US-Soviet Cultural Exchanges, 1958-86: Who Wins?*, 14.

normally advocated for these programs either were sincerely angry at the Soviet invasion or fearful of being called soft on communism. As such, no one spoke up in favor of going forward with the planned exhibition of paintings from the Hermitage in the National Gallery of Art. Garthoff concludes, “Not only did the [Carter] administration go overboard in tossing almost everything movable onto the sacrificial bonfire of sanctions, but it tied the whole to the obviously unattainable maximum aim of getting the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan.”¹⁰⁹⁷

In many ways, the old Pullman house represented the older style of diplomacy, never so masterfully used as under Dobrynin, in which the ambassador had a personal approach and a central role in shaping relations. During the tsarist period, the building hosted the ambassador, one counselor, two secretaries, a driver, and some servants. When Dobrynin arrived, the embassy had a staff of one hundred, making it necessary to rent out space in other buildings to fulfill housing and office demand. Almost immediately after he arrived in Washington, Dobrynin began searching for an appropriate site for a new building.¹⁰⁹⁸ Finally, the Nixon administration offered the Soviet government a parcel of federal property, and the Soviet government followed with an offer for property for a new American Embassy in Moscow. Construction began, but the discovery of listening devices in the half-built American Embassy resulted in both structures being unused until the 1990s.¹⁰⁹⁹ Since 1994, when the new Russian Embassy complex opened, the former embassy building has served as

¹⁰⁹⁷ Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 1065-66.

¹⁰⁹⁸ The Soviet Embassy’s lawyers and real estate agency sued opponents of a potential property twice, failing on both occasions, and one potential purchase was vetoed by the CIA, claiming that the location was too close to its headquarters.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 55-56; 122-24. Recent evidence suggests that, during construction of the Soviet Embassy, American intelligence agents dug a tunnel under the new embassy for the purposes of spying on the Soviet side. James Risen and Lowell Bergman, "US Thinks Agent Revealed Tunnel at Soviet Embassy," *New York Times*, March 4, 2001.

the residence of the Russian ambassador to the US. On a broader level, the transfer represented the end of the Dobrynin era, in which, for nearly three decades, Dobrynin's name had been synonymous with the embassy.

This dissertation has examined the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., during détente, the embassy's most productive period, when it functioned as the center of negotiations for strategic arms limitations, trade deals, and cultural exchange programs, all of which played a central role in the improvement of relations in the 1970s. Without the embassy, which housed officials who could "translate" between the two systems, coordinating action in both the Soviet bureaucracy and the American government or private organizations, little could have been achieved on any level. Dobrynin needed to explain American actions to Soviet leaders who did not understand democratic governance and believed that the president could single-handedly govern all aspects of foreign policy, as well as Soviet decisions to an American government that too often viewed the Kremlin as a monolith driven by ideology to conquer the world. Similarly, cultural diplomats such as Nesterov and Fedosov had to put a human face on Soviet-style socialism, joking with crowds who viewed them as spokesmen for a country that they had been taught to fear.

A representative of the "pragmatist" generation of Foreign Ministry officials, Dobrynin believed that private diplomacy, supported by a friendly personal relationship with the other party, could achieve breakthroughs in relations that could not be attained in formal talks. Dobrynin's central aim to strengthen the Soviet position on the world stage, and he considered a friendlier relationship with the US to be the most essential component of reaching that goal. As a result, he brought a new culture to the embassy that encouraged Soviet diplomats to engage with American society. These individuals, changed so much by

their experiences that many had difficulty reintegrating into Soviet society, brought a perspective to Soviet-American relations that was less ideological and more practical. Eventually, as Robert English has argued, several of the diplomats trained at the “Dobrynin school” became torchbearers for the “new thinking,” the foreign policy initiative of the Gorbachev years that did not aim merely to end East-West hostilities, but to push the Soviet Union to join the liberal international community from which it had been separated for the majority of the Soviet period.¹¹⁰⁰ Détente also gave these diplomats important experience in connecting with Western officials that would prove crucial in the latter half of the 1980s, as they endeavored to achieve rapprochement on a permanent basis.

Much has been made by historians about whether the backchannel was the most appropriate or effective means for conducting top-level diplomacy in this period. Backchannel diplomacy was a slow, but effective process, taking years to produce real results. At times, the backchannel, which was ostensibly designed to simplify negotiations, complicated the process, with Dobrynin and Kissinger struggling to protect the confidentiality of backchannel talks and managing the complex process of a two-tiered negotiating system. Kissinger and Dobrynin found success administering the backchannel because, particularly from 1971 to 1973, they developed a personalized diplomatic language based on flattery and bonding that aided the negotiating process. While certain aspects of this language were certainly contrived or manipulative, when faced with moments of crisis or potential breakthrough, Kissinger and Dobrynin could draw on their relationship, using this language to find common ground or push toward a resolution. After 1973, when the October War tested Dobrynin’s trust in Kissinger and when a variety of domestic concerns began to

¹¹⁰⁰ English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 5-6; 150-57.

eat away at Kissinger's authority, this process was challenged. Moreover, with a diminished confidential channel, less commitment from the respective national leaderships to détente, and without this sort of personal connection, Dobrynin had a harder time producing successful partnerships with Vance, Brzezinski, and Reagan's foreign policy advisors.

Moreover, rather than providing Soviet and American policymakers with significant new insight into the attitudes and operations of the other party, the backchannel tended to reinforce previously held cultural stereotypes that impeded progress in improving superpower relations. For example, with Kissinger's repeated assurances to Dobrynin that all American policy could be directed through the White House, top Soviet policymakers remained convinced that a determined executive branch could overwhelm domestic opposition in the US and return the superpower relationship to its World War II glory days. They were unprepared for the calamity of Watergate, and had difficulty understanding how Congress could reign in Kissinger's freedom to maneuver during the Ford administration. Similarly, despite Dobrynin's repeated warnings about the complexity of the Soviet policymaking apparatus, Kissinger and his successors in the Carter administration struggled to accept that Soviet policy was not monolithic in nature, seeking evidence of a grand strategy even when Soviet maneuvers were driven by more immediate concerns.

The embassy's place in the history of détente also reveals some of the divisions that crept into the Soviet foreign policy apparatus by the 1970s. The disparity between the Foreign Ministry and the International Department in outlook is striking, and it explains many of the difficulties faced by Dobrynin in the late 1970s. As a representative from the Foreign Ministry, Dobrynin came from a bureaucratic culture that paid little attention to the developing world. Its leader, Gromyko, largely concerned himself with Great Power politics,

deferring on questions in other regions to the International Department and his rival Ponomarev. With little coordination between these bureaucracies, the Soviet government had a difficult time identifying the sort of “grand strategy” anticipated by American leaders, who interpreted each Soviet move in Africa as a sign of a socialist conspiracy to smash American interests. The top Soviet leadership at first did not understand how supplying weapons and advisors to revolutionaries in the developing world could damage détente, and then grew indignant at a perceived American double standard. Dobrynin was left in the awkward position of defending Soviet maneuvers that he did not necessarily agree with in conversations with American diplomats, and trying to explain to an increasingly aggravated Soviet elite why the US found these actions so upsetting. Furthermore, given the rift between Moscow and the embassy, the Soviet ambassador rarely received information about these decisions before they occurred, and, as a result, the Soviet Union’s foremost expert on the American political scene could not advise the Soviet leadership on the potential impact of its actions.

These rifts played out in other aspects of the embassy’s work as well. The Defense Ministry and the military held secret all information on Soviet strategic arms, even as the Foreign Ministry negotiated SALT. As a result, the embassy received minimal data from Moscow on the composition of Soviet forces, and Dobrynin had to rely on American research on Soviet stockpiles and weapons capabilities in backchannel talks. Furthermore, the Defense Ministry and the military stood as constant roadblocks in negotiations, as they opposed limiting Soviet arms and attempted to thwart progress in the Politburo. While Brezhnev gathered enough top-level support to overcome these naysayers and conclude SALT I and II, their influence was felt at every stage in negotiations. Thus the Soviet

government's intentions in entering détente remain difficult to pin down, as various groups in the Soviet bureaucracy had different and sometimes conflicting ideas about what détente would entail. If the Americanists hoped to stabilize the superpower relationship and solidify the Soviet Union's claim to superpower status, then the International Department worked to spread communist revolution to the developing world, and the Defense Ministry tried to limit arms control to retain its budget and standing in the Politburo.

In this sense, studying détente from the Soviet perspective reiterates the elusiveness of the term. If Garthoff persuasively argued that détente ultimately failed because the Soviet and American sides had different understandings of what it would entail, this dissertation underscores how conflicting voices in the Soviet government complicated the process of determining Soviet goals and strategies in this new period of negotiations with the West. Not only did Soviet and American authorities have difficulty identifying a definition of détente that they both could agree upon, but various constituencies in each government struggled to form a consensus about what détente would mean. American historians have long understood that this problem existed in the US, with officials such as Kissinger, Jackson, Vance, Brzezinski, and Nitze all approaching the era of summitry and superpower agreements with different agendas and separate ideas of what the US should aim to accomplish in Soviet-American talks. The Soviet side remained largely unexplored beyond the top leadership, though, and this dissertation serves to discuss how one institution in the Soviet bureaucracy experienced these Soviet struggles to define détente.

The case study of the embassy's Cultural Department reveals how lower-level diplomats understood their work to promote détente. The embassy leadership and its bosses in Moscow tasked them with depicting the Soviet Union as a reliable power and dependable

negotiating partner. The Soviet Union shared cultural roots and had common interests with the United States, and, as superpowers, they could learn from each other and cooperate on the world stage. Most importantly, perhaps, these cultural diplomats interacted with groups of Americans by telling jokes, shaking hands, and following up on their encounters with letters and personal diplomacy. When the opportunity presented itself during détente, they shifted their gaze toward mainstream cultural exchanges instead of the more traditional exchange programs with ideologically-compatible friendship societies, understanding that a successful event with a mainstream group that was not composed of mostly pro-Soviet elements would have a greater impact than a fete with leftist organizations that did not expand Soviet outreach to new groups.

Overall, the embassy represented one of the most unusual and most essential components of détente. Few, if any, ambassadors in the postwar era had the power that Dobrynin wielded in this period to shape policy, and the Soviet Embassy in Washington had an institutional culture that allowed for greater interaction with American society. The pursuit of improved Soviet-American relations required a uniquely skilled diplomat like Dobrynin, who had more experience in the US than any other Soviet official. Dobrynin made a lasting impression on superpower relations during détente, and his legacy, in the form of the diplomats who served in Washington under his watch, continues to be felt in Russian foreign policy today.

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