VII. The Fall of Richard Nixon

Nixon's Last Friend

The Soviet leadership could not help noticing that the Arab-Israeli War was being waged against the background of Nixon's growing domestic difficulties over Watergate. I got an inside view from Senator Fulbright at the end of October, after the firing of Archibald Cox as Watergate special prosecutor. He remarked that Nixon was in a state of permanent agitation, which he explained by the unprecedented attacks on the president's character in the mass media.

We began receiving more and more information about the president's Watergate troubles, not least from Nixon himself, who communicated them to Brezhnev via the conversation I had with him at Camp David. But many Soviet leaders including Brezhnev believed that the scandal was being used against Nixon by opponents of detente. Nixon's conversation and message opened a unique personal exchange with Brezhnev that has never before been chronicled. As Watergate turned against the president, Brezhnev proved himself Nixon's staunch friend and supporter, probably the last he had among the leaders of great nations, including his own. Alone and under siege, Nixon reciprocated.

A man of impulsive sentimentality, Brezhnev was impressed by what Nixon had conveyed through me, and on November 10 he sent a sympathetic private reply. It concluded: “I should like from the depths of my heart to wish you energy and success in overcoming all kinds of difficulties, the causes of which are not easily seen at a distance. Understandably, our wishes of success are essentially concerned with the sphere of developing Soviet-American relations. Our determination to proceed with the radical improvement of Soviet-American relations has not diminished on account of the Middle East developments.”

Four days later I met the president at his invitation. He was in a good spirits, but looked rather haggard, clearly affected by the Watergate scandal. He said he had read Brezhnev's letter carefully and was preparing a reply, but meanwhile he asked me to relay his thanks to the general secretary for being the only foreign leader—including America's own allies—who had been able to find human words of cheer amidst his difficulties. He told me such kindness would not easily be forgotten and would I, please, inform Brezhnev that he was full of determination, in spite of their recent disagreements, to continue developing and consolidating our relations.

Nixon continued these themes when I visited him again in the White House on December 13 at his invitation. The private conversation was unusual both in content and form in that he was extraordinarily frank about domestic questions. He said he attached much importance to developments in the “troubled Middle East” and the prospects of the forthcoming Geneva peace conference. He explained that he thought much about the region, not only for its international implications, but since Israel and its supporters were very influential in American political life.

Surprisingly, Nixon then went on to criticize Israel's policy. He argued that Israel actually did not want to end the state of war with the Arabs and indeed the Cold War in general. He said Israel and the American Jewish community were anxious to prevent any improvement in Soviet-American relations and wanted to take advantage of permanent confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Nixon said he had come to these conclusions only recently, because he had not even imagined at first that Israel could have such long-term aspirations. But the result, he said was “Israel's intransigence” about a Middle East settlement, which was encouraged in every way by the politically influential Jewish lobby in America, which in turn helped shape American foreign policy. As a result, the United States found itself gradually in a situation where its course ran counter to the whole world: the Arabs, the Soviet Union, and nearly all its allies in Western Europe as well as Japan.

The president went on to say that was one reason he was determined to seek a settlement in the Middle East. He knew he would inevitably face trouble with Israel and its champions in the United States. But he said he was ready to embark on that road, since he had done quite a bit for Israel and still believed that as a small state surrounded by its enemies, it needed help. He stressed that he did not owe anything to the Jewish vote, as he said most Jews had always voted against him. Therefore he could afford to take a more balanced stand in the forthcoming negotiations. He was also clearly vexed by the hostile campaign against him over Watergate by the mass media. The president said that the American media were run “essentially by the same Jewish circles,” which, he insisted, were against him and showed no gratitude for all he had done for Israel. In fact he used even stronger language than that.

He then made a curious remark about Kissinger. He paid deserved tribute to his intelligence and service and pointed out that his Jewish
the president was convinced that Kissinger was working along the right lines.

Nixon told me rather emotionally that he considered addressing the nation frankly to turn the tables on Israel and its American lobby (something he never did). He also complained that the lobby, represented in its congressional fight against the Soviet Union by Senator Jackson, was hampering his government's efforts to grant the Soviet Union equal trade status. Finally he told me to give no credence to the hue and cry in the American media about his possible resignation or impeachment. He said he would stay in the White House until the end of his term, he was a persistent person, and he would be as good as his word—make no mistake about it.

My overall impression was that his criticism of Israel and the Jewish community grew out of his identifying them with the mass media, whose attacks on Watergate and issues of policy he resented strongly and emotionally as the end approached.

On December 26 I visited President Nixon again with a response from Brezhnev. By then our meetings with the president were becoming almost a regular fixture; through me both leaders carried on what amounted to a confidential correspondence that has never before been disclosed.

Brezhnev thanked Nixon "for the spirit of sincerity and straightforwardness, absolutely necessary for our contacts." He stressed that much in what the president had said about the Middle East and his policy toward Israel coincided with the view of the Soviet leadership and that both countries had to search jointly for a solution in order to avert a new outbreak of hostilities. As to the deadlock over trade in Congress, Brezhnev pointed out that "we are no beggars; this is a mutual affair." In conclusion, Brezhnev referred to Nixon's remarks about Watergate by stating: "Thank you for your firm decision to stay."

When I turned the conversation to ideas for improving Soviet-American relations, Nixon responded that he would do all in his power during the remaining three and one-half years of his presidency "to make the course worked out at the two summits remain irreversible." He conceded that he faced many American critics: pro-Israeli organizations, the mass media, the liberals, the congressional opposition, among others. They had various ambitions and goals of their own, but were acting jointly as a coalition to launch fierce attacks on his policies of detente.

"Paradoxically, many of them opposed the Cold War and favored better relations with the Soviet Union," he said, and the same turnaround applied to the America's West European allies, who had previously pressed the United States to minimize the risks of Soviet-American confrontation. But now that all this had been largely achieved, they have made a U-turn criticizing the White House for "collusion with the Russians" and supposed attempts to establish "a hegemony of the two superpowers."

As far as I know, Nixon did not inform anybody about the substance of our two last conversations and kept his entourage in the dark. Nor did he mention them in his memoirs. But I reported them to Moscow. They were unique in the entire history of Soviet-American relations.

The irony of the situation was that during this period Nixon seemed to be as frank, direct, and even cynical in conversations with his old communist enemies as he was with friends, if not more so. I think the old cold warrior finally became friendlier toward the Soviet Union in the deepening Watergate isolation. The good personal contacts and deepening relationship he developed with Brezhnev also helped. After all, we are all human.

Ramblings in the White House

On January 17, I invited Vice President Gerald Ford to dinner at my embassy. He conceded that Nixon was in a difficult position, but seemed likely in the end to hold his ground. Ford, who had served as Republican leader in the House, told me that Nixon had asked him to use his connections to help push through the administration's programs and meanwhile monitor congressional sentiment about Watergate. The vice president did not beat around the bush about his own political ambitions; he told me he liked the idea of running for president some day, but it was too soon to talk about that.

Nevertheless, he was already thinking about presidential prerogatives in foreign policy and told me that if he were to be president "by the chance of fate" Kissinger would be his secretary of state. Ford had a high opinion of Kissinger who was careful to keep him personally informed about foreign policy. The vice president said he fully supported the policy of negotiation rather than confrontation with the Soviet Union, and he believed a considerable part of the American people did, too. He kept referring to "Kissinger's policy" rather than Nixon's when talking about foreign affairs, although he spoke quite respectfully about the president.

The closest members of Nixon's entourage, including Kissinger himself, persistently echoed the president's own words that he would not resign. Kissinger writes in his memoirs that up until July of 1974—one month before Nixon actually resigned—he had "sought to banish the hitherto unthinkable idea" of the president's resignation. But I first heard him talk about
it more than six months earlier, at the end of January 1974. He confirmed that in several private conversations, Ford had already asked him to continue as secretary of state if he succeeded Nixon as president. Kissinger therefore could not foresee any serious changes in American foreign policy under Ford, especially with respect to the Soviet Union.

Kissinger told me the situation was already very grave, and he was beginning to reckon with the probability of the president's departure, something he would not have previously believed. The secretary of state was losing confidence in the ability of the White House to defend the president against the array of charges facing him. His main handicap was the lack of one resolute individual to shape a strategic plan of defense and subordinate all the actions of the administration to it without the distractions of new developments, which came daily. Six or seven lawyers and several aides consulted with the president regularly, and their activity was directed by Nixon himself, who Kissinger said was prone to emotion, leading him to take rash decisions out of irritation.

Congress sensed this collapse of White House morale and consequent weakness and became more headstrong in foreign policy, which added to the factors impeding Soviet-American relations. This was particularly reflected by legislation to continue trade discrimination against us; the sapping of administration strength made it impossible to change this policy. Meanwhile the country's anti-Soviet forces gained in cohesion and increased their activities.

Kissinger's own position and influence were undermined as his leader's position weakened, and he directed much effort toward single-handedly trying to untangle the problems of the Middle East by shuttling back and forth among the capitals of that region. This placed him far from Washington and Watergate. He refused to bring in the Soviet Union through the framework of the Geneva peace conference, taking advantage of Egypt's new pro-American orientation and our own inflexible policies in the region.

All this annoyed Moscow and exacerbated Soviet-American relations, although Moscow should also be blamed for insisting on its counterproductive policy of refusing to restore diplomatic relations with Israel and categorically refusing to have any direct contacts with the Israeli side. If we had an even-handed policy, we could have played a more active and successful role. Far from helping to improve relations was the stubborn, doctrinaire and even foolish position of the Soviet leadership concerning human rights, and especially emigration, which permitted our opponents to turn the Congress into the principal American forum and bulwark of sentiment against us.

Inside the Nixon administration itself, those who had long been suspicious of detente were emboldened to carve out their own positions. On January 10, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, long a personal critic of Kissinger's ideas and methods, advanced a new doctrine of limited nuclear war to redirect American strategic weapons from civilian to military targets in the Soviet Union. The Soviet military command greeted the decision with concern. Ostensibly designed to spare the civilian population, it was actually meant to legitimize a knockout blow to the other side's military potential on the first strike. With one side thus deprived of the capacity to retaliate against enemy missiles and bombers before they had been launched—a return blow against empty missile silos and airfields would of course be purposeless—the strategic balance would vanish. This military balance helped underpin the diplomatic balance implied by detente. But the new doctrine was actually meant to legitimize a strategic nuclear war and, indeed, to increase the strategic nuclear threat to the Soviet Union, since the United States had more MIRVed missiles.

Schlesinger insisted that his plan for retargeting the U.S. strategic triad of missiles, bombers, and nuclear submarines was not meant to gain a first-strike advantage. But that was exactly how it was received in the Kremlin, to say nothing of the way it contradicted the recently concluded agreement on the prevention of nuclear war. The very discussion of the question of strategic nuclear exchanges was timed by the Pentagon to coincide with the beginning of the SALT II negotiations and the preparations for the third summit in Moscow in June. We regarded it as nothing less than an attempt to chill detente and to demonstrate that the influential people in the administration were not excessively interested in further restricting nuclear arms and improving Soviet-American relations.

Some American historians believe that in the period before and during the third summit, the Soviet leadership began to consider seriously whether Nixon was worth negotiating with any longer because of his domestic troubles. This is wrong. Of course, Moscow knew about the growing Watergate scandal and the attacks on detente. But the Politburo in the final analysis preferred to deal with a president who happened to favor better Soviet-American relations, and who still had the authority and will to negotiate and conclude agreements with foreign countries. Nothing could be gained by waiting for a new president with a less known character and views. "Strike while the iron is hot" says the old proverb, in Russian as well as English. Although communist doctrine does not recognize that policy is based on personalities, there was a curious personal chemistry between Brezhnev and Nixon which was felt until the end of the administration.
Summit Preparations Again

At the end of January, Kissinger and I started to discuss preparations for Nixon's next visit to the Soviet Union. He summarized the president's approach to the summit with Brezhnev. Nixon believed there was not enough time to prepare a full-fledged agreement on limiting strategic weapons. But he still wanted that agreement to be the main topic of the Moscow summit. Therefore, the president suggested preparing a more limited document which would extend the period of the 1972 interim agreement for several years and limit the number of MIRV warheads on both sides. Meanwhile negotiations on a comprehensive SALT agreement would go on, and Kissinger provided some estimates to illustrate the American proposals. Of course, some international and bilateral issues were to be discussed too, as usual.

I found Nixon's approach reasonable, so I promised to recommend it to Moscow. As we prepared through the confidential channel for Kissinger's presummit visit (which by now had become almost routine), Nixon followed it up in March with a letter to Brezhnev, the highlight of which was the president's pledge to commit himself to detente as an irreversible policy. He commented on the agenda—SALT, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Middle East, and bilateral cooperation—and added a handwritten postscript: only the day before he had met with Soviet space experts in Houston and found them "excellent people." He noted that one result of the first summit had been plans for a joint (Nixon underlined the word) space flight, and "that might be our purpose in other fields, too." When Brezhnev replied two days later agreeing to the agenda, what pleased him most was Nixon's support of the irreversibility of detente, a Brezhnev thesis. To my mind, Nixon was playing a bit on Brezhnev's own hopes, because Watergate was already casting its shadow on everything. His close colleagues were being sentenced to prison, Judge John Sirica declared there was ample evidence of Nixon's involvement, and congressional hearings began May 6.

In his personal dealings with Moscow Kissinger used a negotiating technique that usually worked well for both sides. Kissinger knew full well that neither Brezhnev nor Gromyko would be able to react immediately to any of his proposals during a meeting with him because they had to refer them to the Politburo. This of course would make for protracted negotiations, and his time in Moscow was limited. Well before his departure from Washington he would normally outline some of the basic American positions to me, so Moscow had time to discuss them. By informing us privately in advance he knew he was giving us a basis for discussion, which then would usually have taken place within the Soviet leadership by the time he arrived. That enabled Brezhnev and Gromyko to start negotiating with him without losing much time and to prepare beforehand their own counterproposals and eventual compromise.

Gromyko employed quite a different method. A man with a mania for secrecy, he never showed his hand (even to our delegation) until the beginning of negotiations. He would always prepare for a thorough dialogue in an unhurried way. He did not like the far-flung and mobile diplomacy to which the secretary of state was committed. Besides, having been ceded great negotiating powers by Nixon, Kissinger could work in a faster and more flexible way, and that made it easier for him to outwit Gromyko tactically. Apart from deep differences in their diverse characters, Kissinger had to agree his moves with only one man, Nixon. Gromyko on the contrary had to check with the entire Politburo; Brezhnev alone would not assume responsibility for decisions about our relations with the United States. Hence Gromyko's great caution in his negotiations with American officials.

But this time, because of the administration's concentration on Watergate, Kissinger was not as well prepared as usual for his presummit visit to Moscow. Kissinger also had devoted much energy and time to his Middle East "shuttle diplomacy," to the neglect of his brief on SALT. At home he faced a rising campaign against any agreements with the Soviets whatever, orchestrated largely by Senator Jackson and James Schlesinger.

Kissinger was in Moscow from March 24 to 28 and devoted a considerable part of his meetings with Brezhnev and Gromyko to SALT, which was still a provisional agreement expiring in 1977. Kissinger wanted it extended a few years, and we had no objection to extending it to the end of the decade; this new agreement could be signed at the summit. But Brezhnev rejected the essential part of the American proposal on limiting missile throwweights which, if accepted, would deprive the Soviet Union of the main advantage of our biggest missiles, the SS-18s, and inevitably lead to overall American missile superiority. I think Kissinger understood this quite well. As a result no compromise was reached, but both sides agreed that there still was a chance to come to terms at the working meeting of high-level officials at the end of the year.

The conversation in Moscow with Kissinger about a Middle East settlement was difficult, even sharp, and produced no results. "The United States," said Gromyko in his summary for the Politburo, "is 100 percent behind Israel, and the influence and dominance of Zionism are evident at every step." On other issues, there was a more constructive and businesslike dialogue.
Watergate, the White House, and the Kremlin

Following Kissinger's visit to Moscow there was an intensive exchange during April between Kissinger and me and then, on April 29 in Geneva, between Kissinger and Gromyko on the limitations of strategic arms. The talks were very complicated. The debate was essentially over the quantitative levels and types of missiles, including MIRVed missiles.

Moscow, meanwhile, cautiously watched the deterioration of Nixon's domestic position. It became increasingly evident that Nixon was becoming oblivious to matters of foreign policy, and that Watergate was taking an ugly turn. But 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. Our embassy tried to explain to our leaders that Nixon was being accused of violating American laws and the Constitution. But Moscow did not (or would not) understand how the president of the United States could be prosecuted for what it viewed as such a "small matter." The minds of the Soviet rulers simply could not grasp the situation, because they never even thought possible such a thing as the criminal prosecution of the highest authority. In any case, Moscow did not believe until the last moment that Nixon could be forced to resign. The embassy, I should admit, was cautious in its predictions concerning Nixon's resignation, but it recognized the general possibility.

With their summit meeting only about a month away, Brezhnev decided to boost Nixon's morale. On May 28, I met President Nixon in the White House to convey Brezhnev's message. We talked in private, without interpreters, and I read out the cable from Moscow. The message began with ritual optimism about the results of the summit, then turned to its real purpose, which was to share his thoughts and those of his colleagues with Nixon, "man to man." The cable admitted that the Kremlin did not really understand what Watergate meant, but "we still can see that there are forces that are apparently rather powerful and that they are up in arms against you." It lauded him for nevertheless giving his attention to foreign affairs and Soviet-American relations in particular and concluded:

This is the only way to act 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. We are stating this on the basis of our good relations and our confidence in the success of the new meeting. Meanwhile, we are looking forward to the arrival of your secretary of state at the end of May to complete preparations for our June summit as arranged.

Such an extraordinary message from a Soviet leader to an American president was unprecedented in the history of our relations, and it has never been published before. It was nothing short of a gesture of moral support for President Nixon in his hour of need—and the gesture came from Moscow, of all places.

Nixon was clearly moved by the message. After a moment's silence he asked me to relay his thanks to Brezhnev for his kind words, which he regarded as entirely sincere. He also told me to inform the general secretary that he was "completely healthy, both physically and emotionally," ready to rebuff all attacks by his adversaries, and certain of a favorable outcome.

Nixon went on to say that in his view, historians might yet start talking about a "Brezhnev-Nixon doctrine" as the basis for Soviet-American relations. Although never officially formalized or proclaimed, he said that such a doctrine did in fact exist, and it meant that the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States, rather than stand in confrontation to each other, sought to do their utmost for their two great peoples to work jointly for one great goal, the cause of peace on earth. That was the main legacy the president hoped to leave upon his departure from the White House in 1976, Nixon stressed, and it would be produced in close cooperation with the Soviet leadership and Brezhnev personally. The president seemed palpably buoyed by the fact that in the clouds of Watergate there was a chink of light broadening in foreign policy, particularly in American-Soviet relations. He even cheered up.

On June 4, some three weeks before the summit, I had a long conversation with Kissinger to prepare for Nixon's visit to Moscow. We expected to complete a rather broad range of agreements that had been set in motion at the preceding two summits, but the shadow of Watergate nevertheless fell over our conversations. The White House badly wanted to minimize any criticism of the president from the right in connection with the summit. Kissinger was reluctant to involve himself too deeply and publicly so as not to expose himself to criticism and be drawn, one way or another, into the political whirlpool of Watergate.

By weakening Nixon, Watergate had strengthened the forces opposed to detente. They made it virtually impossible for Nixon and Kissinger to conduct serious negotiations in Moscow on a new SALT agreement. Besides, inside the administration itself there was a heated debate on how to compare
Soviet and American nuclear arsenals, as their structure was asymmetrical. The Pentagon remained the main obstacle.

On June 8, Kissinger told me that he had held private meetings about our emigration policy and its links to liberalized Soviet-American trade with Senators Jackson, Jacob Javits of New York, and Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut—both Javits and Ribicoff were Jews with important constituencies of Jewish voters. He showed me a draft of a letter to Jackson explaining the administration’s position on the link and seeking a compromise in order to push through congressional approval of most favored nation treatment for us. What leapt to my eye was a passage saying that the Nixon administration had “reason to believe that at least 45,000 people will be allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union every year.” I voiced my doubts over the advisability of giving a precise figure in the letter. But Kissinger said that Gromyko had raised no objections to the figure when he cited it at their recent meeting in Cyprus and asked me to check back urgently with Gromyko. He added that he managed to beat Jackson down to 45,000 from his excessive demand of 100,000 emigrants a year. But Jackson was still dissatisfied. It was obvious that this question would vex our relations for a long time.

The Last Summit

President Nixon flew to Moscow on June 27. As on the previous occasion, the negotiations were held mostly in the Kremlin where the official documents were signed. Then Brezhnev and Nixon flew to the Crimea for a couple of days of informal conversations in Oreanda, near Yalta, where Brezhnev had his summer residence. The Oreanda meeting was arranged like the San Clemente meeting.

My own trip to the Crimea had a touch of adventure to it. Our official departure was scheduled for 4 P.M., one hour after the Kremlin talks were supposed to end. So I decided to take advantage of the break and pick up some personal effects from home. But Brezhnev did not keep to the schedule and called for Nixon at his Kremlin apartment right after the talks. They proceeded directly to Vnukovo airport. By the time I reached the airport, all the participants in the negotiations had already flown to the Crimea on board our plane. I was left out in the cold, while Brezhnev, as I was told, was aloft wondering where I was.

Fortunately, Nixon’s own plane was still at the airport awaiting takeoff to follow the president and his entourage to the Crimea. The American crew knew me and agreed to give me a lift. Thus, I was flown comfortably from Moscow to Sympheropol in the presidential plane, which I had all to myself. Since the president’s Boeing 707 flew faster than Brezhnev’s TU-104, we got to the Crimea first, and both Brezhnev and Gromyko were quite surprised to find me welcoming them at the airport. Their mystification ended only when I explained. Such things happen to diplomats whose life is open to adventure, as long as they maintain the presence of mind to seize opportunities when they arise.

The Yalta discussions focused on SALT in the presence of Gromyko and Kissinger, as well as the two ambassadors, Walter Stoessel of the United States and myself. The conversations between Brezhnev and Nixon took place on the shore of a warm and calm sea, where two government dachas stood. In this sense, the meetings consolidated the personal relationship established between the two leaders over the preceding years, which unfortunately was not to last much longer.

At the summit meeting proper in Moscow, most of the questions and especially the formal agreements were discussed by Gromyko and Kissinger, who was the driving force of the American delegation. As we proceeded through the agenda, Brezhnev would read out introductory statements on the issues and then interject comments during the ensuing discussion between the foreign minister and the secretary of state. SALT was the sole issue Brezhnev discussed actively, because he was quite familiar with it. But the general secretary did not know the details of other matters, though he sought to impress us otherwise by pretending to be actively interested. Kosygin conducted the discussion on economic matters for our side with his usual expertise.

There is no escaping the fact that the shadow of Watergate dominated Nixon’s conduct; the scandal was to drive him from office in slightly more than a month. He was reserved. Once he cited incorrect figures during the SALT discussion and had to be corrected by Brezhnev. In general he let Kissinger conduct the major portion of the talks and discussions, although he would tersely state the American position at crucial moments. But most of the time he appeared brooding, absorbed in his thoughts.

But in contrast to the view of some American historians and officials—including Kissinger himself who later wrote that the Soviet leadership cut Nixon loose to “cut their losses”—I can testify that neither Watergate nor the prospect of impeachment had any appreciable effect on the conduct of our leaders, including Brezhnev. They were as interested as before in developing and promoting the process of detente and arms control, although they were conscious of the president’s dwindling power. They supported Nixon because he continued to endorse detente, even though they were worried about the implications of his political decline. Nixon was right when he wrote in his memoirs: “In my judgment my Watergate problems and the impeachment hearings did not play a major part at Summit III. Our intelligence . . . beforehand—and my distinct impression while in the Soviet Union—was that
Brezhnev had decided to go all out for detente and place all his chips on my survival and my ultimate ability to deliver on what I promised.*

It is true that the Kremlin still could not believe in the possibility of Nixon's precipitous departure from the political scene. Brezhnev even told him in private he was confident that the president would stay in office until the end of his term. He did not exclude the possibility of another meeting with Nixon in that same year. I do not know what made Brezhnev so sure. In all probability, he was trying to boost Nixon's morale. My personal view was that Nixon would have to step down in several months, while Gromyko believed that he would hold out for about a year. In any case, neither Brezhnev nor Gromyko tried to distance themselves from Nixon, and they sought to demonstrate the Soviet leadership's invariable commitment to detente, no matter who might be president of the United States.

The summit's principal although predictable failure was the lack of appreciable progress on strategic arms limitation. Watergate not only undid Nixon's presidency but also destroyed any chances during the visit of a breakthrough on SALT II. But despite Watergate Nixon proposed and Brezhnev accepted an interim summit meeting in a third country late in the same year in order to make another attempt at reaching an agreement on SALT. (And all this was done only one month before Nixon's resignation!)

Several useful agreements were signed in Moscow: on limiting the number of underground nuclear tests and their power to 150 kilotons; reducing the number of antiballistic missile defense systems from two to one for each country; banning environmental warfare such as changing the weather; setting out rules for the replacement, dismantling, or destruction of strategic weapons.

As a whole the summit was successful enough in continuing the constructive development of relations between the two countries, and we discussed a host of problems including foreign policy issues such as Europe, the Middle East, Indochina, and the role of the United Nations. Agreements were concluded in bilateral areas such as energy, construction, artificial heart and transplant research, space cooperation, transport, environmental protection, cultural exchange, and opening new consulates in New York and Kiev.

During the official dinner given by Nixon in honor of Brezhnev in the American Embassy, they sat at the same table, and Brezhnev raised the sensitive issue of China. He warned that China was a threat to peace and urged the conclusion of a nonaggression treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States to dissuade the Chinese from any attempts to embroil the two powers in conflict. Brezhnev had repeatedly raised this since 1970, but Nixon was always evasive. Surprisingly, this time Nixon told Kissinger on the spot to pursue the idea in confidential negotiations with me for the planned interim summit. But Kissinger later on quietly killed the idea. Our diplomacy did not pursue it either.

The joint communiqué, signed in Moscow on July 3, declared that both leaders would “continue active contact and consultation.” Brezhnev accepted Nixon's invitation to visit the United States in 1975. The communiqué stressed the need for a new SALT agreement covering quantitative and qualitative strategic arms limitations. There was an agreement on signing a world convention on chemical weapons and the earliest possible convocation of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation.

These documents were useful during the next administration of Gerald Ford, helping it to chart our relations during its first year. The third summit as a whole further institutionalized the process of detente and sustained its momentum, however modestly. And even though Nixon was under heavy fire at home and was about to leave, the Soviet leadership communicated a rather optimistic confidential summary to the socialist countries' leaders assessing the results of his visit. Sounding as if the Soviet leadership was anticipating a long period of cooperation, the message said: “We see the main political result of this summit and talks held with the president of the United States in the further consolidation of the United States on the course of peaceful coexistence. Nixon has confirmed the desire of the American side to maintain its course toward better U.S.-Soviet relations and global detente.”

**Nixon's Last Days**

After the Moscow meeting our relationship with official Washington continued on its regular routine as if nothing were about to happen. Almost to his final day in the White House, Nixon was occupying himself with Soviet-American relations. It is hard to say whether it was a kind of a psychological opening, a last ray of light in the gloom that was closing in on him, or whether he was still hoping for a favorable outcome.

On July 9, Scowcroft asked me to convey Nixon's thanks to Brezhnev for his hospitality and their frank discussions in the Soviet Union. Following up one aspect of the talks in Oreanda, he asked for more data on Jewish emigration for Nixon's use in discussing Soviet trade with congressional leaders. We provided it, but by that time the administration was in no position to have any meaningful dialogue with Congress.

On July 15, I discussed with Kissinger the steps we would take to implement the summit decisions and drew up a detailed schedule as if

Watergate had never existed. We concentrated mostly on arranging the next stage of the SALT talks in Geneva in September. He hoped to come to Moscow to discuss the package around October.

In our tour d’horizon that followed, I expressed the opinion that the most recent period of Soviet-American relations had been damaged by the lack of any purposeful, thought-out program on the part of the administration. This evidently was a principal result of Watergate, which had come to be a national disaster of sorts, and of the general public confusion over U.S.-Soviet relations resulting from the lack of a clearly articulated set of goals.

Kissinger agreed that indeed all these factors combined to paralyze the administration and the effective implementation of its foreign policy. He remarked that there were some lessons to be drawn from the past year: idealistic approaches and gross public pressure had not improved Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, which had dwindled abruptly and only aggravated our relations still more. The fierce attacks by conservatives on the nuclear arms talks, far from strengthening America’s security, had mainly led to greater military expenditures. This crusade against detente had serious international implications and created a domestic debate which not only had failed to clarify the purposes of U.S. policy but produced greater confusion nationwide. Indeed, we agreed that policy could not be founded only on a negative basis, without struggling for something positive; and the country was entangled in contradictions, while the administration’s authority had been collapsing disastrously.

On this sad note we concluded our rather pessimistic conversation, which proved to be my last meeting with any high-ranking official of the Nixon administration. The White House was almost totally absorbed by the Watergate crisis which was speedily coming to its climax.

Nixon’s final appearance on national television on August 8, when he announced his resignation, and the farewell meeting with his White House staff before his helicopter took off from the White House lawn was, undoubtedly, one of the most dramatic moments in the postwar history of America.

To the Soviet leadership such a precipitous collapse after Nixon’s visit to Moscow still came as an unpleasant surprise. While such an outcome was evident from the course of events, there was perplexity in the minds of the Kremlin leaders, who were at a loss to understand the mechanics of how a powerful president could be forced into resignation by public pressure and an intricate judicial procedure based on the American Constitution—all because of what they saw as a minor breach of conduct. Soviet history knew no parallel.

Brezhnev reacted to the events by sending a private message on to the outgoing president:

On behalf of myself and my colleagues I should like to express kind feelings with regard to the fruitful cooperation and the spirit of mutual understanding that marked our joint efforts aimed at improving Soviet-American relations and normalizing the international situation. All that has been done over the last year in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States is highly appreciated in our country, in the USA, and the whole world. These truly great achievements cannot be regarded otherwise by all those who really care for peace and the future of mankind. I would also like you to know that we have received with satisfaction President Ford’s statement of his intention to continue the course in our relations aimed at their further broadening and deepening.

As to the Soviet Union, we are determined to further the cause of developing the relations of peace and cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States, the cause we have started together with you. We have also communicated that to President Ford.

Our best wishes to you, your wife and the whole family.

Sincerely,

L. Brezhnev

August 10, 1974

Nixon sent a return message to Brezhnev. [Reverse translation from the Russian.]

Leaving my Presidential position, I am sending you my personal farewell. I am going with a feeling of pride at how much you and I have done to transform relations between our countries, thus winning great achievements for the cause of world peace.

I know that President Ford believes as much as I do that nothing is more important in foreign policy than further consolidation of the growing ties of friendship between the United States and the Soviet Union. He will do all in his power to achieve that goal.

I am sending you my best wishes for a prosperous future for you personally and for the great people of the Soviet Union.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Nixon

August 12, 1974
So ended a unique correspondence between the heads of two different worlds.

Another president had left the White House, but under conditions unprecedented in American history. He was a man of contradictory views, convictions, and actions. His attitude toward the Soviet Union was mixed, but, together with his resourceful assistant, Henry Kissinger, he played a positive role in stabilizing and developing Soviet-American relations. But the direction they tried to set for American foreign policy in the Cold War lacked consistency and was subject to changes and collisions, which, together with the conservatism and inflexibility of the Soviet leadership, led to a new upsurge in the opposition to detente.

THE FORD PRESIDENCY, 1974–1977

I. Searching for the Real Gerald Ford

Starting Out with the New President

Despite the constitutional upheavals caused by Watergate, the transition from Richard Nixon to Gerald Ford was successful, and with it the continuation of the policy of Soviet-American detente. This reached its high point under Ford at his first summit with Leonid Brezhnev at Vladivostok four months after Ford assumed the presidency. There in a snowbound setting they settled on the outlines of an agreement to limit the growth of strategic nuclear weapons. But a zenith also implies a nadir, and thereafter detente went into an inexorable decline for reasons ranging from Brezhnev’s health to Ford’s domestic political difficulties.

Only hours after Ford took the oath of office on August 9, 1974, Henry Kissinger invited me to the White House and showed me directly to the Oval Office. It was the new president’s first official communication with a foreign representative. Ford seemed elated although somewhat unaccustomed to his new situation. But as we had met before and knew each other pretty well, our conversation was not too formal.

Ford sent a personal message to Brezhnev unequivocally stating his determination to continue Nixon’s policy of improving relations with the Soviet Union. Nixon had given him a long farewell talk on foreign affairs the previous day, minutely informing the incoming president about his discussions with Brezhnev in Moscow and the commitments they implied. The new president reaffirmed his invitation for Brezhnev to visit the United States the following year and was also prepared to meet him before then on “neutral territory” if the meeting was well prepared. The idea had already been raised in Moscow, and Kissinger had christened it a “mini-summit.” Ford turned for corroboration to Kissinger, who confirmed Ford’s words with a smile.

The president said he had known Kissinger for many years, ever since this Harvard professor had invited “a rank-and-file Congressman Ford” to speak to his students on the role of Congress in foreign policy. They understood each other well, Ford continued, and he appreciated Kissinger’s views on the primary importance for the United States of its relations with the Soviet Union. Therefore he wanted us to know that he and Kissinger were