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.

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
going to be just “as effective a team” as Nixon and Kissinger in dealing with Moscow. Kissinger of course was listening to all this with evident pleasure.

As we were about to leave the office, Ford stopped for a moment and said that he wanted to let Moscow know one more thing on the first day of his presidency. He was well known in the country for his sharply uncompromising statements as a congressman about the Soviet Union. He could not find the “accurate and elegant wording” for what he wanted to say, but speaking straightforwardly, he said that as president he now would be much more discreet in his public statements: he had now to approach foreign policy with greater responsibility.

I told the president that my government would undoubtedly welcome his intention to continue improving our relations. All in all, I came away with a favorable impression of the new president. Although he was a novice at foreign policy, I felt he already possessed some knowledge in that field. I reported to Moscow that Ford seemed ready for a sensible dialogue.

After the meeting, Kissinger invited me into his office and gave me his own personal letter to Gromyko reassuring him about Ford. Whatever Gromyko “might hear or read” during the weeks to come, he said, President Ford intended to follow and expand the policy that had determined relations with the Soviet Union under Nixon. Ford had asked him to stay on and pay special attention to relations with the Soviet Union. He would be a strong president, Kissinger wrote, and would continue to pursue and implement the policies they had formulated last time in Moscow.

I could not help but notice Ford’s personal warmth toward Kissinger and his appreciation of Kissinger’s talents, a feeling that continued much later even through the president’s memoirs. Kissinger remained the incontestable captain of American diplomacy, yet his potential was restricted. Under Ford, domestic policy and campaign strategy—the president faced re-election within two years—prevailed over foreign policy, including Soviet-American relations.

Kissinger also let me in on the rather complicated White House transition. It appeared that Ford was going to replace nearly all his cabinet members, apart from Kissinger himself. Not entirely in jest, Kissinger remarked that for the time being he would suspend his Middle East shuttle diplomacy in order to stay close to Washington for at least two months. Kissinger said Ford was now surrounded by many of his old friends from Congress and the Republican Party leadership. They might be nice people he said, but they had no experience whatsoever in international affairs and concealed this behind “patriotic phraseology” borrowed mainly from the lexicon of the postwar period when the relations with the Soviet Union had been far from normal. As an intelligent person, Ford understood this quite well, and as president he was trying hard to escape from the limited outlook of his friends. Yet their influence was not to be underestimated.

Frankly speaking, at the beginning of the Ford administration my principal hopes were set on Henry Kissinger and his views. By contrast Ford was known to me for his consistently conservative convictions first as a member and then as Republican leader of the House of Representatives. He had been a superhawk on Vietnam. He generally avoided meeting Soviet representatives, made no secret of his highly negative attitude toward the Soviet Union, and on the few occasions when he spoke out, his statements about us usually were openly hostile.

In short, Ford was a typical American congressman-patriot of the Cold War era, and this could not but worry us when he came to power. But as vice president under Nixon his record gave rise to some hope that he might have acquired a better idea of the policy of detente shaped by Nixon and Kissinger. I had spoken with him twice when it began to become obvious that he might succeed Nixon. He told me he believed Congress was mainly ignorant about the Soviet Union and would easily fall victim to the well-organized anti-Soviet campaigns of the sort led by Senator Jackson, which could only be broken by perseverance. He also said he fully supported a policy of negotiation with the Soviet Union, which he had insisted on referring to as “Kissinger’s policy” and not Nixon’s.

Alas, the experience of a vice president is not in itself a guarantee of continuity in policy, and the most enduring proof of this was provided by the complete shift in policy toward the Soviet Union after Harry Truman succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt. Nevertheless many in the Soviet Union (and in other countries as well) were of the opinion that it was the secretary of state who directed the American foreign policy. In real life, this was not always true. President Kennedy had Dean Rusk as his secretary of state. Yet, in the issues of Vietnam, Cuba, and arms control Kennedy listened more to his defense secretary, Robert McNamara. The same was essentially true in the case of President Johnson. Nixon’s secretary of state was William Rogers, whose role was insignificant. Henry Kissinger, the president’s national security adviser, was entrusted by Nixon with directing his foreign policy. Finally appointed secretary of state, Kissinger like John Foster Dulles in his time, played first fiddle in foreign affairs.

I had an impression, and even a subconscious conviction, that the new president was going to let Kissinger direct American foreign policy. This would ensure some stability in our relations, or at least make them more predictable. However, the matter was not that simple. Soviet leaders overestimated America’s readiness to accept detente as a norm in bilateral relations, while the American administration, Kissinger included, was growing dissatis-
fied with the Soviet conception of detente, particularly with regard to the countries of the Third World, where rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was becoming overt. I feared that the increasing contradiction between the Soviet and American approaches to detente could in the end undermine it, although this did not yet worry Moscow, which was firmly convinced of the rightness of its policy.

In the very first days of the new administration both governments deemed it necessary to reaffirm privately to the other their loyalty to the preceding course in their relations. Brezhnev welcomed Ford's first message. Just two days later he asked me to pass to the president his own message expressing his appreciation for Ford's determination to follow the policy of further developing our relations and coming out for a working meeting in the current year. Kissinger told me Ford agreed, and once again a summit was becoming an important reference point in our relations. Ford planned a visit to Japan to chart his own course there, and Kissinger remarked that it would be a good idea to link the president's first meeting with Brezhnev with this trip so it would appear less deliberately staged. This was also important for protocol reasons since the next of the alternating summits had already been scheduled for the following year in the United States.

Ford invited me to the White House once again on August 14. While photos were being taken, the president recalled our relaxed meeting a couple of months before, when my wife and I had invited him as vice president along with Mrs. Ford to an informal dinner at our embassy. We had shown some films about the Soviet Union, including a rather interesting documentary about tigers in the Ussuri taiga in Siberia. Ford later joked that it had been an unplanned introduction to what would be his first encounter with Brezhnev.

After the photographers left, Ford asked, "What do you think about my meeting Brezhnev in that region, say, in Vladivostok?" I replied that the idea deserved serious attention but I had to report it to the general secretary, and Ford remarked he wanted Brezhnev's opinion anyway before things went any further.

How far was it from Moscow to Vladivostok? he wanted to know. When I answered that New York was closer to Moscow than Moscow was to Vladivostok, Ford was amazed by the size of my country and said few Americans could comprehend this. Kissinger, never forgetting his triangular diplomacy, observed that a Soviet-American meeting in Vladivostok would "delight" the Soviet Union's nearest neighbors—the Chinese.

Ford kept to the point: in his view, the first meeting between him and Brezhnev should be devoted to a practical, friendly, but essentially introductory review of the international situation as well as of principal questions of Soviet-American relations, which would not necessarily have to be decided immediately. At the same time he wanted to discuss specific proposals in the field of strategic arms limitation, which would be worked out by officials before the meeting, so they could agree on how to instruct their own delegations for further negotiations. I answered that Brezhnev had already minutely informed Nixon in Moscow of the Soviet side's ideas, and now it was the Americans' turn. Ford was aware of this, but he still wanted Brezhnev to instruct his experts to continue looking for a compromise.

As we parted, Ford said he would like to be invited to another informal dinner at the embassy with his wife, even if it breached presidential protocol, so they could see more documentaries about the Soviet Union and gain a better picture of the country. On a second thought, he pointed to Kissinger, who had married for a second time earlier in the year, and said, "Maybe you could arrange a dinner for six, in honor of the newlyweds."

I passed by the cabinet room on the way out and noticed some changes among the portraits on the walls. Eisenhower's portrait was still there, but Roosevelt and Wilson had been replaced by Lincoln and one Democrat—Harry Truman.

My Dinner with Nelson Rockefeller: The Middle East

Late in August Ford announced his decision to appoint Nelson Rockefeller as his vice president, the post which Ford himself had occupied and which still remained vacant. Kissinger made no secret of his satisfaction with this choice, for Nelson Rockefeller had long been his patron, and he joked that if he ever had to leave his job as secretary of state, he could always count on a position as a secretary to one of the Rockefellers, and anyway, "The pay will be no less."

The congressional hearing on the nomination aroused huge interest, for it provided a unique opportunity to throw some light on a matter of great curiosity to many Americans: How much is a Rockefeller really worth? According to Kissinger, Nelson Rockefeller himself did not know exactly how large his fortune was. His wealth consisted mainly of multitudinous stocks and bonds; enormous real estate holdings in the United States and abroad, the value of which was steadily growing; and a huge art collection, one of a kind and really priceless.

On September 6 I went to meet Rockefeller at a dinner for three, arranged by Kissinger. But Kissinger was delayed at the White House, so Rockefeller and I were left tête-à-tête. As I was ushered in, Rockefeller was talking on the phone with his wife, Happy, asking her in which banks she
kept her money and how much was in each account. He explained to me that when he married her, he never bothered to find out how much money she had, but now he had to provide the information for Congress. About four hundred FBI agents were checking him out by interviewing virtually all of his known acquaintances on the instruction of Congress, because for the first time in American history both the president and vice president had not been elected but appointed following the departure of their predecessors in clouds of scandal.

Rockefeller remarked that this whole “X-ray procedure” was rather unpleasant yet unavoidable in view of nation’s post-Watergate mood with its suspicions of power and the establishment. It could be worse, he added. In 1964, for instance, when he was competing with Barry Goldwater for the Republican presidential nomination, some of the senator’s ardent followers had put something in the drinks at a Rockefeller cocktail party—without Goldwater’s knowledge, he hastened to add. It upset the stomachs of some guests, but fortunately a wave of serious illness was avoided. “Our political customs are sometimes brutish, but you have to be ready for them when you start out on a political career.” Rockefeller told me these and other stories with visible pleasure, as though demonstrating what an old hand he was in American politics.

He admitted having made some anti-Soviet statements, principally as a governor of New York state where he had to reckon with New York City’s big Jewish vote. But he said Moscow could rest assured that he would support President Ford and his old friend Henry Kissinger in developing relations with the Soviet Union. Some of the “more practical” members of his family—hinting at his brother David Rockefeller, president of Chase Manhattan Bank—had already begun doing business with the Soviet Union, he reminded me, so he would “take this good experience into account.” But he said he had asked Kissinger to arrange this meeting with the Soviet ambassador to start off his own relations with the Soviet Union. We briefly touched upon some specific aspects of Soviet-American relations, and it was obvious that his knowledge of them was rather superficial and somewhat stereotyped, although he did his best to sound friendly, trying to demonstrate that as a vice president we would see a “new Rockefeller.”

At this point Kissinger joined us and dinner started. Kissinger began the conversation with a statement that the president and vice president attached great importance to establishing personal contact with representatives of the Soviet government. The new administration, he said, was interested in achieving positive results in Soviet-American relations in order to enter the presidential campaign of 1976 with accomplishments in foreign policy—it did not regard itself as just a “transitional stage” between two presidencies and intended to stay in the White House for at least six years.

Kissinger asked me to brief Rockefeller on Soviet foreign policy and quickly added that I could touch upon the most confidential details of our relations, for he had already briefed Rockefeller himself. I succinctly outlined our approach without any interference from Kissinger until I touched upon the desirability of coordination between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Rockefeller looked inquiringly at Kissinger, who promptly remarked that “Washington’s freedom of action in this field has its limits.”

Kissinger did not elaborate on this in Rockefeller’s presence. But when we lingered after dinner, he returned to the question on his own initiative. He said he wanted to explain his viewpoint strictly off the record, and not just with regard to the Middle East, but in a broader context. In Kissinger’s words, the “limited nature” of Washington’s room for maneuver was largely accounted for by the “jealous and sensitive” reaction of the NATO allies to joint Soviet-American moves. Detente, he said, was undoubtedly influencing the solidarity of both alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and Washington found it much more difficult to control its allies than Moscow. “In this sense detente damages NATO a lot more than it hurts the Socialist bloc headed by the Soviet Union,” the secretary of state observed. It was one of his first open indications of the limits to detente.

Here I must admit that the Soviet Union at the time did not have a clear and independent strategy of its own for reaching a Middle East settlement. Our Arab allies abused our readiness to protect their interests and often used us diplomatically to block any emerging peacemaking initiatives, American or otherwise. All this made constructive cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Middle East very difficult. Basically we both were in favor of the same formula: peace in exchange for the return of the occupied territories. But in this case American diplomacy had the more realistic option of step-by-step accommodation. We followed the Arabs in demanding immediate withdrawal of the Israeli troops while the Arab countries remained vague about recognizing Israel after withdrawal. That was an unrealistic approach.

My Granddaughter and Ford Divide the Globe

On September 7 Ford received three Soviet cosmonauts and three American astronauts who had been training for a docking mission in orbit the following year. Models of the two spacecraft were displayed in the White House,
and Colonel Alexey Leonov volunteered to explain the docking procedure to the president. He did it in decent English.

Wives and children of both space crews were present at the reception. Ford asked to be photographed with them. My five-year-old granddaughter Katia was also there, standing to one side with my wife and myself but dying to pose for the cameras, so her grandmother had to hold her back. Ford neverthess noticed the little girl and asked if she wanted to be photographed with him. Katia bravely answered, "Yes, I want." The president then invited her to choose a place to be photographed in his office. The child walked up to a large colorful globe, as tall as Katia herself, which was standing on the floor. She embraced half of it with her arms and said, "Let's do it here." The president laughed and encompassed the other half saying that they had divided the globe between them. This picture still hangs on the wall of my study, signed by the president of the United States, showing him and a little Russian girl reaching for each other across oceans and continents. I had always hoped the appealing scene would be a symbolic forerunner of future Russian-American cooperation, but that was not to happen for almost twenty years.

After the pictures were taken, Ford invited the cosmonauts, the astronauts, and myself to fly with him in the presidential helicopter to Alexandria, just across the Potomac River from Washington, where he had been living as a congressman for the past quarter-century before moving to the White House.

The town community, firefighters, and police organized a so-called crabnic—a picnic of beer and crabs, a local delicacy. The inhabitants greeted the president and his Soviet guests with loud cheers. All this was televised nationwide.

While flying back to Washington, Ford inquired about my impression of his first days in the White House. I replied that the first thing I noticed was that the American public had clearly calmed down from the agitation and concentration on Watergate and was returning to its everyday life and its problems. I told Ford that, as a president, he had played an important role in this process and expressed my hope that he would soon start playing the same positive role in foreign policy, including Soviet-American relations. Ford observed that my assessment coincided with the objectives he had set for himself as he took office; he confided that as part of clearing the air one of his first acts as a president had been to order the Oval Office cleaned of all listening devices.

Now he said it was time for him to concentrate on foreign affairs. He was looking forward to his working meeting with Brezhnev as a starting point for businesslike cooperation. He emphasized the importance he attached to an agreement on limiting strategic arms, which was essential both for bilateral relations and for his presidential campaign.

On to Vladivostok with Ford

Just as he had with Nixon, Henry Kissinger made a presummit visit to Moscow to prepare for the summit. He was there from October 23 to 27; the summit had been formally set for the following month in Vladivostok. In the middle of his talks with Brezhnev and Gromyko, Ford sent a message to Brezhnev saying, like Nixon before him, that Kissinger had his complete personal trust and was empowered to discuss all summit issues.

The issues of strategic arms limitation were central to the Moscow negotiations with Kissinger, which were based on the understanding reached during Nixon's last visit only a few months before. Both sides exchanged exact figures for their armaments, which permitted an in-depth discussion on an agreement lasting to 1985.

After Kissinger returned, he told the president that at first he had been afraid that no progress was likely on disarmament because of Brezhnev's tough stand. However, on the last day of the meeting Brezhnev advanced a number of suggestions which, in Kissinger's view, deserved thorough study, for those could pave the way to an agreement even if further hard negotiations were needed.

Kissinger and I had detailed discussions on November 13 to 16 to prepare for the meeting. The latest American proposals to prepare the outlines for the SALT II negotiations showed some toughening; the Pentagon had managed to influence the new president, who was not quite familiar with the intricate history of past negotiations on the subject. Kissinger and I also continued discussing the text of the communiqué and of a separate declaration on strategic arms limitation, upon which Ford insisted. We managed to prepare the principal documents for the summit even though some points remained at issue.

Ford was to visit Japan on November 18 to 22 before going on to Vladivostok. The objective of the visit was to bring Japan closer to the United States and rebuild relations after the turn toward China in order to avoid what Kissinger saw as the principal danger, a revival of militant Japanese nationalism. He confided that the U.S. government's own secret analysis showed that Japan could become a leading military power within three to five years by building up a civilian production base that could be converted to military uses—especially in alliance with China—that could also be turned not only against the Soviet Union, but also against the United States.
States. In Moscow this was quickly recognized as a sign that Kissinger could not resist the temptation to play the China card on the eve of the summit and even strengthen it by invoking the specter of the Japanese; but in general Kissinger expressed his conviction that in the long run, the United States and Russia would cooperate against any combined Chinese-Japanese pressure.

The departure ceremony for the president took place on the White House lawn. Ford said good-bye to each of those present, and when he approached me, I noticed he was not wearing a hat; Americans rarely do, even in winter. I told him he had better take a fur hat to Siberia, where even the locals never go out hatless in a climate which is not to be trifled with. Somewhat flustered, Ford said he had no hat and had never worn one in his life. So I took off my fur hat, a classic Russian chapka made of beaver that I had bought in Moscow, and gave it to him as my "Siberian gift." The president tried it on, and it fit. Whenever he went outside in the Soviet Union, he wore that hat and was photographed in it.

The same day I flew to Moscow to catch the government plane taking Brezhnev and Gromyko to Vladivostok. For the first time in my life I perceived the immensity of my own country. While we were airborne, we learned that a snowstorm was raging in the Vladivostok region and landing there was out of question. We had to spend the night in Khabarovsk while a Soviet division in Vladivostok was urgently ordered to clear the local airfield of huge snowdrifts. We landed the next day without incident.

To accommodate the Soviet and the American delegations, a number of cottages had been set aside in a rural community some twenty kilometers from Vladivostok, where the local party leadership used to spend their days off. Brezhnev asked me to go ahead to Ford's cottage and ascertain if everything was "on a proper level." The president's American staff was already there examining the facilities when I arrived. A marine had already been posted to guard the president's bedroom. I decided I had better test his bedroom phone and did so by calling my wife in Washington. It was a very long distance call indeed—halfway round the globe. My wife was pleasantly surprised. Everything in the cottage seemed fine.

On the next day our group, headed by Brezhnev, took a suburban electric train to the military base where Air Force One was to land; normally it served as a base for our interceptor aircraft. Cars then took us to the airfield, where we saw a surreal sight: a vast, treeless field of snow with just a few scattered buildings (all military facilities and hangars were underground). Everything was deep in snow, with only one landing strip cleared during the night. As Ford was getting off the plane, he, too, looked overwhelmed by this white stillness, which brought to mind Jack London's Alaska.

After greetings were exchanged (there were no protocol formalities), everybody got into cars and went to the train waiting for us in a glen. As soon as the train started off, Brezhnev invited Ford to his coach "for a cup of tea" accompanied by some cognac. Both leaders recalled their achievements in sports. Speaking of the weather, Ford complained that in Washington even a light snowfall caused major tieups. The smiling Brezhnev promised him to send Russian snowplows there. Then they retired to their compartments for some rest.

At that moment Brezhnev suffered a seizure. Professor Evgeny Chazov and other doctors managed to control it, but insisted Brezhnev postpone his negotiations with Ford, which were to begin the next day. Brezhnev categorically refused and demanded that nothing be said to anyone, and indeed nothing ever was, in contrast with the way even the minor ailments of a U.S. president are closely monitored and broadly publicized. The negotiations were to get under way the next day as planned. I should add that Brezhnev had been under severe stress: he had flown more than seven thousand miles across Russia to conduct complicated negotiations with the president of the United States, whom he was to meet for the first time. The issues of strategic arms limitation were not entirely agreed on beforehand, which demanded concentration and difficult decisions during the talks. Although no one but his attending physicians knew it, by that time the first signs of Brezhnev's atherosclerosis of the brain also made themselves felt. When Brezhnev left Vladivostok by train en route to Mongolia, he suffered another seizure, lost consciousness, regained it, and continued his trip. Shortly thereafter he made a state visit to France, but the long countdown to his fatal illness had begun.

History rarely has definable turning points but this was one of them. If there was any point at which it could be said that detente had reached its height and then begun its decline, it probably would have been at the very moment of Brezhnev's seizure, for from that moment the summit process was inevitably slowed.

But there were also important political reasons on both sides: an unelected American president operating under political constraints, the problem of Jewish emigration, our confrontations with America in the Third World, and the essentially different views and expectations that Moscow and Washington entertained about detente. All of this accumulated and laid Ford open to political attack. The policy of detente steadily eroded into the following administration of Jimmy Carter, when we will revisit all these factors in detail. But Vladivostok was its high point, and for that Ford deserves credit as well as Brezhnev.

The working meetings at Vladivostok were held in the community's small local clubhouse on November 23–24, 1974. Ford had with him
Kissinger; the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Walter Stoessel; Presidential Aide Donald Rumsfeld; General Brent Scowcroft; and some other advisers. Brezhnev had on his side Gromyko; Georgi Kornienko, the head of American department of the Foreign Ministry; myself; and some of his aides.

The meetings lasted for two days and were intense and heated but genuinely businesslike, and without any of the usual protocol formalities. The whole of the first day was devoted to working out a long-term agreement limiting strategic arms. The discussion was far from easy. Not only were the issues extremely complex, but the American position was greatly influenced by domestic considerations. Several times the American delegation left the negotiation table to refine its position. Kissinger played the leading role in the deliberations because Ford did not yet know all the details. The president, on the other hand, was better able to anticipate the likely problems of defending before Congress the agreements he made. The president preferred not to get involved in long arguments with Brezhnev or Gromyko; he had Kissinger for that. And Ford was not a man with a high sense of humor. He was a solid and decent American who meant business when he understood it. Otherwise he listened to the disputes and quietly smoked his pipe, relying on his common sense to decide.

The Soviet delegation had its problems, too. The American position had toughened somewhat under pressure from the Pentagon during the month since Kissinger's visit to Moscow, and we had to seek new compromises at the negotiating table. Brezhnev made repeated telephone calls to Moscow to coordinate his position with the other leaders. At one point he had a serious dispute with Grechko, the defense minister, who opposed any further concessions and insisted on counting the nuclear arsenals of Britain and France in any SALT agreement, while Brezhnev became convinced during the negotiations that Ford would never concede to this. Military man that he was, Grechko made other excessive demands; they were rejected by Brezhnev with Gromyko's support. Both believed that the excessive claims of the military, if pressed, could ruin the agreement and the Summit as a whole. Grechko yielded only after Brezhnev angrily employed his authority as a general secretary, and did so in strong words.

On the first day the meeting dragged on until midnight. Both sides refused the prearranged dinner and called for sandwiches. There were only two short breaks during the day, used by the Americans to discuss matters between themselves. Despite the cold winter, they would go outside for fear of being overheard by listening devices. During one of these breaks, Brezhnev gave Ford his portrait in wood by a local amateur artist who had never seen the president and used a poor newspaper photo as a model. The portrait hardly resembled Ford—one of the Americans said it looked more like Frank Sinatra—but the artist had put his heart and soul into it, and the president showed his appreciation.

To understand the SALT debate without burdening it with technical detail, it is necessary to understand the fundamental task faced by both governments during the protracted negotiations. They had to agree on limiting their strategic armaments that were from the beginning completely different in both structure and deployment. Since the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administrations, the Americans developed their strategic arsenal on the basis of a so-called strategic triad of nuclear armaments delivered via land, sea, and air. As a continental country without bases abroad, the Soviet Union initially concentrated on developing large land-based missiles. In 1974 the discussion centered on finding a tricky balance between the larger number of Soviet land-based missiles, which were also heavier in terms of throwweight, and the greater quantity of superior American MIRVed missiles, of which the Soviet Union had very few at the time.

Kissinger had worked out a preliminary compromise in Moscow that would have permitted each side to have up to 2,400 units of strategic arms carriers—strategic bombers and ballistic missiles launched from land and undersea, or ICBMs and SLBMs for short. Each side would be entitled to the same number of missiles capable of carrying MIRVed warheads. The number would not exceed 1,300 on each side as of the end of 1985. There remained considerable dispute—which was not solved at Vladivostok—over how to count submarine missiles and launcher aircraft (especially our new TU-22M bomber known in the West as the Backfire), as well as the fighter-bombers assigned to forward positions in Europe and therefore capable of delivering atomic weapons on Soviet soil.

At Vladivostok, Brezhnev proposed the idea of a “framework agreement” for ten years, specifying equal upper levels which neither country could exceed. But each side would have a certain degree of freedom in defining the land, sea, and air structure of its strategic armaments within these numerical limits. Such an agreement would not decrease the level of already existing armaments, but at least it would provide a ceiling. To reach it, each side would be able to choose the mix of missiles that suited its own strategy. On receiving the proposal, the American delegation asked for a recess. The substance and intensity of the talks were increasing.

In the end, a compromise was worked out on the most complex points. It was agreed to fix a ceiling for strategic armaments until 1995: each would be permitted 2,400 strategic arms carriers based on land, sea, or air. Each side could MIRV a maximum of 1,320 of its missiles. This eliminated what in our view had been the principal deficiency of the SALT I agreement we
had concluded with Nixon after four years of negotiations—an inequality in the total numbers of missile carriers. There was also compromise on some other elements, for example, strategic aircraft. This explicitly acknowledged a shift to the principle of numerical equality and equal security, which was of profound diplomatic and military importance to the Soviet Union. At the same time this principle carried potential domestic political trouble for the Ford administration, as some members of the American delegation privately warned us. The American public was not used to the notion of strategic military equality with the Soviet Union.

The discussion of other international issues began at 10 A.M. on the second day of the meeting, which was less tense than the first. There was a useful exchange on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Americans were palpably reluctant to assume definite obligations that could put them at loggerheads with their European allies. The talks also covered the Middle East but produced nothing new. The Americans harped on the complexity of their relations with Israel and their domestic problems.

Only reluctantly did they agree to incorporate into the communiqué some useful phrases on the Middle East about a resumption of the Geneva conference. The communiqué reemphasized the “practical value of Soviet-American summit meetings.” The end of the summit was toasted with a local ginseng vodka with Amur River caviar.

After the meeting was over, Brezhnev drove Ford and Kissinger through Vladivostok to the airport and showed them the sights. The American guests were surprised at the absence of Chinese houses with their distinctive roofs; the style of the domestic architecture was European. The Americans seemed to be under the influence of an active propaganda campaign waged by the Chinese, who then laid claims to extensive parts of the Soviet Far East. The Americans expected to see some characteristic Chinese architecture in the city as a sign of its Chinese past, but nothing could be further from the truth, since the city had been founded by Russians and settled by us for more than a century. Ford admitted that he had believed Vladivostok to be more Asian than Russian, and Kissinger joked that he would be the last man to tell the Chinese about what he had actually seen in the city when he met them next lest he annoy them.

On parting at the airport, Ford gave Brezhnev a wolf skin coat he had received during a stopover in Alaska. He simply took it off before boarding his plane and handed it to Brezhnev, who promptly put it on, to the delight of press photographers. It seemed they parted friends.

Both sides were satisfied with the results of the meeting, even though it was short. On arrival at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington Ford described his meeting with Brezhnev as “very, very good,” and he later would write in his memoirs that the results surpassed all his expectations. Brezhnev, in his report to the Politburo, also assessed the meeting as a success, especially in the terms of understanding reached on strategic arms limitation. He said he believed that his personal contact with President Ford was good and “one could do business with him in the future.”

On December 10, on instruction by our governments, Kissinger and I exchanged confidential memoranda with details of the limitations on strategic arms agreed at Vladivostok. The agreement would be in force from October, 1977, to December, 1985.* Simultaneously Kissinger formally confirmed the president's confidential pledge in Vladivostok that the United States would discontinue using the Rota naval base on the Atlantic coast of Spain as a base for its nuclear submarines after 1983. The existence of this agreement was long suspected in Madrid, but it was never published.

The Vladivostok agreement became a significant starting-point for all subsequent nuclear disarmament talks. Ford and Brezhnev succeeded in reaching agreement on the framework for limitation of strategic offensive missiles, which was a notable achievement considering the turmoil that had been created by Nixon's resignation only four months earlier. Regardless of its technical merits or deficiencies, the Vladivostok summit provided a sense of continuity to the SALT process.

But President Ford soon was caught between strong criticism from both left and right. Opponents of detente accused him of yielding to Soviet pressure and especially attacked the principle of equality in strategic arms and the limits on them. Among those who most actively opposed the results of the summit were Republican right-wingers headed by Ronald Reagan, and Democratic Senator Jackson with his followers. Unfortunately Ford was per-

---

* The key provision read:

The new agreement, based on the principle of equality and equal security of the parties, will incorporate, in particular, the following limitations which will remain in force for the duration of the agreement:

a) For the duration of the new agreement each party will be entitled to the total amount of strategic arms carriers not exceeding 2,400 units. This number includes land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles launchers (ICBM launchers), submarine-launched ballistic missile launchers (SLBM launchers) and heavy bombers if those are armed with bombs or air-to-surface ballistic missiles (ASBM) with a range not exceeding 600 km. If a bomber carries ASBMs with a range exceeding 600 km, each of these missiles shall be counted as one unit and shall be included in the total amount of strategic arms carriers (2,400).

b) Within this limit, each party will be free to determine the composition of the total amount provided for this party's abiding by the agreed ban on building new underground silos.

c) Each party will be limited to not more than 1,320 ICBMs and SLBMs armed with missiles within this total amount each party is free to determine types and numbers of its MIRV'd missiles.
suaded that as the election year got under way, the SALT process should be shelved. But I believe it was not the Vladivostok meeting that brought down Ford's popularity ratings; it was his pardon of Richard Nixon on September 8 which started speculation that he had made a deal with Nixon to promise a pardon in exchange for the presidency. The media then lifted their truce with the new president. All his unfortunate or erroneous remarks were widely publicized, and photographers competed to film him in the most awkward situations and poses, in stumbling and accidental falls even though he was a good athlete. Some opposition newspapers began unfairly calling him an accidental president. All this impaired the president's self-esteem and confidence in his own policy, including detente.

But the boisterous debate about the SALT talks did not help, either. For decades Americans had been told they had nuclear superiority over us, so word that their president had agreed to nuclear parity raised puzzling questions and even worry. Most people could not figure out the new abbreviations used in complex technical discussions, which only added to the confusion. The French word “detente” provoked still more argument. It stands for two quite different things: one is “relaxation of tension,” the other is “trigger.” In Russian we never used this elegant but confusing foreign word. Some Americans even tended to think of detente as entente, which was far from the real situation in Soviet-American relations. All this confusion (real or deliberate) came from differences and contradictions between the Soviet and American concepts of detente. The euphoria surrounding the idea of detente in Nixon's years had faded away.

Jewish Emigration and Detente

Probably no other single question did more to sour the atmosphere of detente than the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Even the Kremlin began to understand it and tried—though inconsistently and hesitantly—to correct the situation right after Ford took office. At our August 14 meeting in the Oval Office, I raised the issue of the legislation to Congress and the White House on lifting trade discrimination against the Soviet Union by granting it most favored nation status. The senator was to persuade that as the election year got under way, the SALT process should be shelved. But I believe it was not the Vladivostok meeting that brought down Ford's popularity ratings; it was his pardon of Richard Nixon on September 8 which started speculation that he had made a deal with Nixon to promise a pardon in exchange for the presidency. The media then lifted their truce with the new president. All his unfortunate or erroneous remarks were widely publicized, and photographers competed to film him in the most awkward situations and poses, in stumbling and accidental falls even though he was a good athlete. Some opposition newspapers began unfairly calling him an accidental president. All this impaired the president's self-esteem and confidence in his own policy, including detente.

But the boisterous debate about the SALT talks did not help, either. For decades Americans had been told they had nuclear superiority over us, so word that their president had agreed to nuclear parity raised puzzling questions and even worry. Most people could not figure out the new abbreviations used in complex technical discussions, which only added to the confusion. The French word “detente” provoked still more argument. It stands for two quite different things: one is “relaxation of tension,” the other is “trigger.” In Russian we never used this elegant but confusing foreign word. Some Americans even tended to think of detente as entente, which was far from the real situation in Soviet-American relations. All this confusion (real or deliberate) came from differences and contradictions between the Soviet and American concepts of detente. The euphoria surrounding the idea of detente in Nixon's years had faded away.

Jewish Emigration and Detente

Probably no other single question did more to sour the atmosphere of detente than the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Even the Kremlin began to understand it and tried—though inconsistently and hesitantly—to correct the situation right after Ford took office. At our August 14 meeting in the Oval Office, I raised the issue of the legislation to Congress and the White House on lifting trade discrimination against the Soviet Union by granting it most favored nation status. The senator was to persuade that as the election year got under way, the SALT process should be shelved. But I believe it was not the Vladivostok meeting that brought down Ford's popularity ratings; it was his pardon of Richard Nixon on September 8 which started speculation that he had made a deal with Nixon to promise a pardon in exchange for the presidency. The media then lifted their truce with the new president. All his unfortunate or erroneous remarks were widely publicized, and photographers competed to film him in the most awkward situations and poses, in stumbling and accidental falls even though he was a good athlete. Some opposition newspapers began unfairly calling him an accidental president. All this impaired the president's self-esteem and confidence in his own policy, including detente.

But the boisterous debate about the SALT talks did not help, either. For decades Americans had been told they had nuclear superiority over us, so word that their president had agreed to nuclear parity raised puzzling questions and even worry. Most people could not figure out the new abbreviations used in complex technical discussions, which only added to the confusion. The French word “detente” provoked still more argument. It stands for two quite different things: one is “relaxation of tension,” the other is “trigger.” In Russian we never used this elegant but confusing foreign word. Some Americans even tended to think of detente as entente, which was far from the real situation in Soviet-American relations. All this confusion (real or deliberate) came from differences and contradictions between the Soviet and American concepts of detente. The euphoria surrounding the idea of detente in Nixon's years had faded away.

Jewish Emigration and Detente

Probably no other single question did more to sour the atmosphere of detente than the question of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Even the Kremlin began to understand it and tried—though inconsistently and hesitantly—to correct the situation right after Ford took office. At our August 14 meeting in the Oval Office, I raised the issue of the legislation to Congress and the White House on lifting trade discrimination against the Soviet Union by granting it most favored nation status. The senator was to persuade that as the election year got under way, the SALT process should be shelved. But I believe it was not the Vladivostok meeting that brought down Ford's popularity ratings; it was his pardon of Richard Nixon on September 8 which started speculation that he had made a deal with Nixon to promise a pardon in exchange for the presidency. The media then lifted their truce with the new president. All his unfortunate or erroneous remarks were widely publicized, and photographers competed to film him in the most awkward situations and poses, in stumbling and accidental falls even though he was a good athlete. Some opposition newspapers began unfairly calling him an accidental president. All this impaired the president's self-esteem and confidence in his own policy, including detente.

But the boisterous debate about the SALT talks did not help, either. For decades Americans had been told they had nuclear superiority over us, so word that their president had agreed to nuclear parity raised puzzling questions and even worry. Most people could not figure out the new abbreviations used in complex technical discussions, which only added to the confusion. The French word “detente” provoked still more argument. It stands for two quite different things: one is “relaxation of tension,” the other is “trigger.” In Russian we never used this elegant but confusing foreign word. Some Americans even tended to think of detente as entente, which was far from the real situation in Soviet-American relations. All this confusion (real or deliberate) came from differences and contradictions between the Soviet and American concepts of detente. The euphoria surrounding the idea of detente in Nixon's years had faded away.
handed him a formal letter stressing that his interpretation as relayed to Jackson was "categorically rejected." This killed our compromise with the administration. But Kissinger told no one outside his closest aides about the letter, hoping to finesse the matter at the summit.

All this merely consolidated my personal conviction that Senator Jackson was not seeking a compromise but preferred to keep the problem unresolved for publicity and his own political future. The administration, although seeking a compromise, still had to take into account pro-Jewish opposition in Congress, so it resorted to all kinds of maneuvers. We were also more or less prepared for a practical compromise but without public acknowledgement which would create the impression that we had yielded under pressure to Senator Jackson and his followers. Emigration continued to aggravate our relations.

On December 18, after the summit, Kissinger and I were having breakfast at the State Department when an aide rushed in and gave him a copy of a censorious Tass statement that had just come over the wires. The article published Gromyko's letter concerning a "Kissinger-Jackson accord." Alluding to the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the trade bill, which would link our emigration policy to trade privileges in the United States, the statement said: "The Soviet ruling circles categorically reject as inadmissible all attempts, whomever those might come from, at interfering in matters which are the exclusive responsibility of the Soviet state."

At first, Kissinger was indignant that Moscow had not notified him it was planning to publish Gromyko's letter and told me that would only complicate the problem of passing the trade bill. I felt I had to interrupt him. I said the trade bill before Congress appeared to be even more discriminatory toward the Soviet Union than the law that was on the books in 1972 when the two governments started their policy of detente. The new law would discriminate against us not only in trade, but in export credits (the Senate passed the Stevenson amendment doing so on September 19). At no point, I continued, had the president or the secretary of state protested against this openly discriminatory legislation, which Nixon had promised to veto.

Kissinger cooled down and dialed Scowcroft, who confirmed everything I had just said. The secretary swore at his being left out of the loop, and slammed down the receiver. Then he called the president and recounted our conversation. As far as I could judge by what Kissinger was saying, Ford admitted that the situation in the Congress had indeed grown unfavorable for Soviet-American trade relations and it was high time for the administration to step in. Only two days remained before Congress would recess for the Christmas holiday. Ford told Kissinger to call a meeting in the White House that same day to discuss what could be done. The president said Congress should not be allowed to continue "tripping up the administration" in the field of Soviet-American relations, and something had to be done when the new Congress convened in the new year.

But it was clear that the administration was unable to do anything in the closing days of the outgoing Congress, which on December 20 passed the trade reform bill with the amendments holding Soviet-American commerce and credits hostage to our emigration policy. The Soviet Union was to be granted most favored nation status only on condition that it changed its emigration policy. That policy would come up for review in eighteen months (or just when Senator Jackson hoped to be running for president). Credits by the U.S. Export-Import Bank and Commodity Credit Corporation were limited to $300 million for four years, and the Soviet Union was refused credits for mineral extraction—which principally affected oil and natural gas development. The law effectively blocked the development of trade and economic relations between our countries for a long time.

The congressional vote was an unpleasant surprise for the leaders of the Soviet Union. They had always underestimated the influence of American public opinion on U.S. foreign policy because they were free from such pressure at home. They could not imagine an American president who was not exactly a supreme ruler. They were shocked, and their reaction was swift and angry. On December 25 Brezhnev sent Ford an indignant letter declaring the trade and credit legislation "fundamentally unacceptable." He added: "It goes without saying that this relieves the Soviet side of its commitments assumed within a package of agreements on trade and credit questions (including an agreement on the repayment of the Lend-Lease debt). Grave damage has thus been inflicted to our trade and economic relations, which by no means encourages Soviet-American relations in other spheres."

Ford signed the bill on January 3, 1975, having little choice to do otherwise because he needed its general authority to conduct trade negotiations with other countries. Moscow made good on its threats to suspend Lend-Lease repayments, a deal that had been reached so amicably between Nixon and Kosygin in that bargaining session three years before. Both sides tried to put the best face on things by declaring publicly that detente would not be affected, but it was.

A footnote to all this was written the following summer when Senator Jackson invited me to breakfast at his home. It was a hot July day. Jackson lived in a small two-story house with deliberately modest furnishings, although it was situated in a prestigious neighborhood. The senator proudly told me that his children were attending an integrated public school, while...
his neighbors' children had been sent to expensive and almost entirely white private schools. He summoned his young children to say hello to the Soviet ambassador. Then we had breakfast for two.

Jackson remarked in jest that the Soviet people probably were frightened by the mention of his name, as if he were some sort of devil with horns. I replied in the same light manner, but I had to tell him that the Soviet people were not easily scared, for they had passed through a very hard school of life, and feared neither devils nor witches wherever they might be found. Our people read his statements on Soviet-American relations and their impression was, frankly speaking, most disapproving.

The senator said he appreciated my frankness, and that was precisely the reason he wanted to talk with me. Then, with some ardor, he started to develop his views. What underlay all his statements was the idea that his approach toward the Soviet Union was not all that different from Presidents Nixon and Ford. But both presidents had to play at politics, while he was more candid in saying things with which both administrations would essentially agree, although their viewpoint would come out in actions rather than words.

Jackson claimed he did not basically oppose a strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union. His criticisms were based on his contention that the Nixon administration “was not honest with Congress” about the 1972 SALT I agreement and had concealed secret arrangements it had made with the Soviet Union. When I asked him to tell me what those secret arrangements supposedly were, he avoided a direct answer. He found the same untruthfulness in Kissinger’s initial concealment of the October 26 letter from Gromyko killing the emigration compromise. Leaders of Congress, including himself, had developed a false impression that Moscow would eventually concede on Soviet emigration if they kept pressing. Eventually, their mistake became obvious, but by then the matter had become so clouded by emotion that it was too late to compromise. The resulting impasse did not benefit anybody. As for Kissinger, Jackson felt that although guided by the best of intentions, he had outmaneuvered himself.

Jackson complained that the word “detente,” used by Moscow to describe its policy toward the United States, was unknown to many Americans, so it was interpreted quite differently, at times even in a negative sense. I told him that we never used this word which was a French translation—launched by someone in the United States—of our word razryadka, meaning “relaxation of tension.” The senator remarked that if it had been formulated that clearly at the very beginning, there would have been hardly a politician in the United States who would have dared to oppose it. I responded by saying that now he knew the precise meaning of what was said in Moscow, he could fearlessly support detente. He smiled but said nothing.

As we parted, he asked me to tell Brezhnev that he was not and never would be guided by hostility toward the Soviet Union. He said he supported the improvement of Soviet-American relations, yet as a member of the opposition, he sometimes had to criticize the administration as a matter of tactics rather than strategy.

Although I could have been wrong, Jackson left me with the impression that he was beginning to see the futility of campaigning for the presidency with only an anti-Soviet plank for his foreign policy platform.

Ford versus Nixon

Nixon’s forced departure inflicted severe damage on the Republican Party. Senator Hugh Scott, the Republican Senate leader, privately admitted to me that the party found itself in a difficult situation. Unless measures were taken to improve domestic conditions, especially the economy, the Republicans would suffer serious losses during the next elections, including the struggle for the White House.

As his party’s Senate leader, Scott met with Ford practically every day. Unfortunately, he went on, in spite of his extensive presidential powers, Ford had not yet displayed sufficient will, courage, and other qualities of a strong national leader for his party and his nation. The Republican leadership and Ford himself, Scott said, had counted on Vice President Rockefeller to bring in “the brightest Wall Street minds” to serve the administration, the more so as Ford’s own attempts to get hold of these people had failed.

Somehow, Ford had not gotten rid of his congressman’s mentality; that is, he had not perceived his extensive opportunities and privileges as a president. To some extent, he even avoided using the power of the presidency in full measure, fearing that his inexperience or some inappropriate application of his powers might damage his political future. All this made Ford excessively cautious in taking important decisions, especially the unpopular ones which were unavoidable in dealing with the economy. The conflicting opinions of his old friends from Congress would only disorient Ford and delay his decisions.

Late in the year, during a private dinner with Kissinger, we made a comparative analysis of the performance of the two presidents, one of whom had passed the presidential baton to the other under unprecedented circumstances.

Kissinger said that, as odd as this might seem, he found it easier to work with Ford during the past few months than with Nixon, with whom he had
worked for more than six years. Nixon was much more proficient in foreign policy, and Nixon would offer his own ideas in this area, which Ford could not. But Nixon’s ideas were not easy to decline if they appeared unacceptable, for he would stubbornly defend them anyway. At times, it would take two to three weeks of delicate maneuvering to bring him to give up some idea.

Unlike Ford, Nixon would not limit himself to considering just one option on an issue, invariably demanding additional data. For example, how might a decision influence other aspects of foreign policy—relations with the Soviet Union, China, India, and so on. In other words, an issue had to be approached from all possible angles, which consumed a lot of time and energy. Ford did not raise side issues or ask questions about complicated interrelationships. He preferred the issue to be clearly formulated and submitted to him with definite recommendations for action. But Ford looked at issues through the prism of domestic policy: How would his decision be received in Congress, in the party, in the nation? Only then would he consider its international implications.

Kissinger said he was trying to induce the president to approach his decisions from both domestic and international viewpoints; that is, Kissinger tried to avoid having domestic considerations determine his actions on each and every foreign policy issue. But the president was much more expert than Kissinger on domestic questions, and in such cases he had the last word, especially in view of impending presidential elections.

In one sense, Ford’s inner convictions made him more conservative than Nixon. Nixon was not essentially a die-hard, although he was known to the public as a conservative anti-communist, Kissinger said. Rather, he had posed as such in order to attain his goals. But when he deemed it necessary, he was ready to depart from his classic line, for example, in his policy toward the Soviet Union and China. But Ford had spent a quarter-century in the House of Representatives, which was much more reactionary and domestically oriented than the Senate. Regrettably, this disposition was supported by his old friends from Congress, who still saw him regularly. Among these was Melvin Laird, who had served Nixon as defense secretary and retained his close ties with military circles.

President Ford was not predisposed against the Soviet Union, but he was apprehensive about “Soviet intentions,” Kissinger said. He did not purposely promote the arms race, but he was devoted to the patriotic idea of a “strong America” and all his convictions sprang from his “internally rather than externally oriented political upbringing.” Lately, however, he become attracted to foreign affairs and started to display greater interest in its details, although his overall competence was still much lower than Nixon’s.

The secretary of state also noted a significant difference in the character of the two presidents. For all his reputation of a man of decision in a crisis, Nixon was essentially rather irresolute and would make up his mind only after agonizing hesitations and sleepless nights. Ford was not like this. He preferred simplified “clear combinations,” tended to take quick decisions and was difficult to dissuade from them afterward. At times, he was even more impulsive than Nixon, although in everyday dealings with people Ford was simpler, more compassionate, and approachable, and was always prepared to listen to his assistants. In general, personal relations played a much greater role for Ford than for Nixon. In this sense, the fact that he had evidently established a good contact with the Soviet leaders in Vladivostok became especially significant.

I realized that however full of dramatic events the past half year had been for the United States, Soviet-American relations had almost miraculously not undergone any serious change. Throughout this unprecedented period of transition, we had somehow managed to navigate a comparatively steady course. Rougher weather was soon to come.