II. The Erosion of Detente

Thunder on the Right

Gerald Ford's first full year in office was a troubled one. The recession was part of the most severe economic crisis of the postwar world, a direct result of the quadrupling of oil prices after the Middle East War of 1973. In the United States it was exacerbated by the weakening of political institutions, by the Watergate scandal, and the erosion of public trust in government. Not least was the impact of the final defeat of American arms in Indochina, which delivered a severe blow to the militaristic cult of America as a country that "had never lost a war," even though the withdrawal from Vietnam to some extent untied its hands to act in other areas.

But Ford failed to boost his political prestige in the country significantly, although he managed to free himself and his administration from Nixon's shadow. Electoral politics caught him in a crossfire between Democratic opposition and the right wing of his own Republican Party and its principal standard-bearer, Ronald Reagan, who publicly claimed that the United States was getting a raw deal out of detente while the Soviet Union reaped all the dividends.

Soviet-American relations were by this time based on a broad foundation of compromise during three years of summit meetings. Previously concluded bilateral treaties, agreements, and exchanges were still in force and functioning rather smoothly. Congress sent its first official delegation to the Soviet Union. The docking of a Soviet Soyuz and American Apollo spacecraft, broadcast live on television by agreement between our two governments, clearly demonstrated the potential for Soviet-American cooperation in science and technology—and much more.

Nothing like the live Soyuz launching had ever been shown before by our television to the Soviet public—let alone the rest of the world. I must admit that I was in a state of nervous excitement as the broadcast was beamed into the State Department conference hall on July 17 before a large American audience. There was the president, the secretary of state, other cabinet members, members of Congress, media, and all the rest. "What if something goes wrong?" I thought. But nothing went wrong, and everybody in the hall relaxed.

The Ford administration was basically following the course of detente it had inherited, although Ford supplemented it with his own thesis of a "strong America" and with the Kissinger doctrine of maintaining a balance of forces as a keystone of American international strategy, especially within the triangle of Washington-Moscow-Beijing. But the pressure on Ford's right, to say nothing of the ideological habits developed during a generation of the Cold War, proved too overwhelming against what was essentially a weak administration that had to struggle to maintain its legitimacy until it could be elected by popular mandate. And that very electoral process opened the way to unite the disparate forces opposing detente: the Jewish vote, the trade union leadership, conservatives of every stripe, and the media connected with all of them.

The White House soon found itself restrained in any major new agreements with the Soviet Union that might cause controversy in the election campaign. The president, as yet unelected, suffered from a virtual inferiority complex. He had to reckon with Congress and pressure from the Pentagon and CIA, which did not favor compromises with the Soviet Union, especially on strategic weapons. He gradually swung to the right as the Republican convention drew closer and took up the Reagan line by introducing into the administration's lexicon the thesis of "the inadmissibility of one-sided detente." In a speech to Congress April 11 he vowed that he was not going to allow detente to turn into "a license for fishing in troubled waters. . . . Detente must be a two-way process."

The Fall of Saigon

From the very start, the Ford administration was confronted by the abrupt deterioration of its position and that of its allies in Southeast Asia. Soon after Ford took office, he sent the South Vietnamese dictator Nguyen Van Thieu a confidential message promising him adequate American support. Until the very last moment the Republican administration tried to maintain the pro-American regimes in Saigon and Phnom Penh. But this ended in fiasco. America's protégés in Cambodia capitulated on April 17, and on April 30 Saigon surrendered.

In the critical days of Saigon's downfall, which was turning into a flight by the Americans, Ford turned to Moscow for help. On April 19 Kissinger passed me a "highly urgent message" to Brezhnev appealing to the Soviet government to help obtain a temporary cease-fire to save lives through "an uninterrupted evacuation" of the remaining Americans and their remaining
loyal South Vietnamese protégés. He confirmed that all the Americans were at last getting out, explained that this was essentially a request for Brezhnev's good offices in "finally ending the whole Vietnam tragedy," and that the president was not asking anyone else's help, including that of the Chinese.

On April 24 Brezhnev replied that the Vietnamese had informed him they would not impede the speedy evacuation of American citizens from Saigon and had no intention of damaging the prestige of the United States. They would proceed from the Paris agreement. Ford received this reply with relief.

Two days passed without event, and on April 26 I received another urgent message from Ford for Moscow: the North Vietnamese had resumed shelling Saigon Airport and the buildings around the American Embassy in Saigon. Contrary to Hanoi's assurances, Kissinger said excitedly, its actions constituted a direct, premeditated blow to the prestige of the administration and to the president himself, for they were aimed at demonstrating that the Americans were leaving under direct North Vietnamese pressure. I drew Kissinger's attention to the criticism in the Congress and in the media of the too prolonged withdrawal of the Americans from Saigon. The North Vietnamese advanced to the city, but they did not prevent the final evacuation from the American Embassy by helicopters.

Later there was a final exchange of messages through Moscow between Washington and Hanoi. On May 28 I gave Brent Scowcroft an oral confidential message from Hanoi saying that "the leadership of Vietnam favors the establishment of good relations with the United States." On Moscow's recommendation, the message from Hanoi said: "There is no animosity toward the United States in Vietnam and they seek the same from the American side." A few weeks later, Scowcroft gave me the American reply saying Washington also favored good relations, that there was no hostility in principle toward Vietnam, and that the United States proposed to proceed on this basis in all relations between the two nations.

This exchange, which has never been published before, was the last official page of the Vietnam tragedy.

One can only guess how frustrated Kissinger must have felt at that moment. After all, it was he who had negotiated the Paris peace accords that were supposed to permit the United States to end the war in Vietnam without at least the appearance of defeat. When we met at a reception just after Ford had announced the final U.S. departure from Vietnam, he was in a dismal mood. He declared with obvious regret that "the North Vietnamese are very lucky indeed" that Congress had formally legislated against any American military interference in Indochina, and that there was currently widespread disagreement in the United States on many issues, which "prevents the country from displaying its will." Had it not been for Watergate and the consequent sharp decline in Ford's popularity, he said, North Vietnam would not have gotten away so easily with violating its agreement with the United States.

It was obvious that Kissinger still looked back on Nixon's time with nostalgia, especially the initial period when American foreign policy had been planned and implemented by the White House without any particular regard to public opinion about Vietnam.

The Helsinki Conference and Its Aftermath

The final stage of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe took place on July 30 and August 1, 1975, in Helsinki, Finland. It was the most representative meeting of the heads of European states since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, only this time the United States and Canada were also there. Thirty-five countries took part in the conference. The United States had initially been demonstratively indifferent in the belief that it had nothing to gain. But then an East-West agreement on the status of West Berlin was signed, and the Soviet Union expressed its readiness to start talks in Vienna about a mutual reduction of our European forces. With this favorable turn of events, preparations for the Helsinki conference had begun in 1973.

The fundamental documents signed in Helsinki contained the participants' commitments in three key areas, or "three baskets," as they were called in the Helsinki jargon: security, economic cooperation, and humanitarian cooperation. The third basket included the important issues of human rights, freedom of movement, and the exchange of ideas. From the very outset of the negotiations, the Soviet leadership was interested only in the first two baskets and laid principal stress on recognition of the postwar boundaries of Europe dividing it into East and West. At the same time the Soviet Union did all it could to diminish the significance of the third basket, for it still believed humanitarian issues to be domestic matters. The West, on the contrary, rightfully considered them to be important international issues on which Moscow had to assume certain obligations. Otherwise, the Western states would refuse to agree on the rest. This dispute continued until the very opening of the conference.

The Kremlin's attitude toward the third basket had been affected by the psychology of the negotiations. The proposed text was prepared during several months of heated debates among the delegations—word by word, phrase by phrase. The Soviet foreign ministry could not have asked the Politburo's approval for every one of them. Gromyko from time to time in-
formed Brezhnev and others in the Politburo of the progress of the negotiations, but they paid little attention to the complex phraseology. To them, it all looked like the routine work of diplomacy.

But when the treaty was ready and the third basket emerged in its entirety before the members of Politburo, they were stunned. As opening day drew closer, the Politburo engaged in heated debates over the documents Brezhnev was to sign on behalf of the Soviet government—not much about the first or second baskets, but about the third. Many in the Politburo (Podgorny, Suslov, Kosygin, and Andropov) had grave doubts about assuming international commitments that could open the way to foreign interference in our political life. Many Soviet ambassadors expressed doubts because they correctly anticipated difficult international disputes later on. Moscow had to take a fundamental decision with serious domestic consequences because of the liberalization process implied by Helsinki.

Gromyko had to become the main defender of the agreement that his ministry had worked out, and eventually his compromise viewpoint prevailed. He argued that the main goal for the Soviet Union for many years had been the general recognition of the postwar boundaries and the existing political map of Europe, which would amount to a major political and propaganda victory for Moscow. Furthermore, the second basket, he argued, would open up prospects for economic cooperation with the West. As for putting the humanitarian commitments into force, Gromyko argued that would still be up to the Soviet government, and it alone would decide what did and did not constitute interference in our domestic affairs. “We are masters in our own house,” Gromyko said. The majority of the Politburo bought this argument. Thus, from the very start, the Politburo’s acceptance of the Helsinki humanitarian principles implied some noncompliance.

Brezhnev played the decisive role in supporting Gromyko. His principal personal motive was his ambitious desire to participate in signing important international acts before such a broad, representative forum as the Helsinki Conference. He could easily assess the potential publicity he would gain—above all, in his own country—when the Soviet public learned of the final settlement of the postwar boundaries for which they had sacrificed so much. As to the humanitarian issues, these could be mentioned at home just vaguely, without much publicity. He thought this would not bring much trouble inside our country. But he was wrong. The condition of Soviet dissidents certainly did not change overnight, but they were definitely encouraged by this historic document. Its very publication in Pravda gave it the weight of an official document. It gradually became a manifesto of the dissident and liberal movement, a development totally beyond the imagination of the Soviet leadership.

President Ford’s situation was different. Not a single one of his visits abroad as a president, he would admit later in his memoirs, had created such broad misunderstanding in the United States as his trip to Helsinki. In signing the Helsinki documents he counted on support in his country, mainly because the Soviet government actually was forced at last to assume important obligations for human rights. In addition, in exchange for the recognition of the frontiers established after the war, the Soviet Union recognized the lawfulness of changing national boundaries in Europe “by peaceful means,” which preserved the possibility of reunifying Germany. The Ford administration never made all this clear to the American people, and his opponents exploited the resulting ambiguity in the public mind.

The Helsinki Final Act was signed on August 1, 1975, and its ultimate reality was that it played a significant role in bringing about the long and difficult process of liberalization inside the Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe. This in the end caused the fundamental changes in all these countries that helped end the Cold War.

During the conference Brezhnev and Ford met twice, primarily to discuss SALT, an agreement on which the Soviet side regarded as essential before fixing the date for a summit and Brezhnev’s visit to the United States. As they were about to leave Helsinki, Brezhnev took Ford aside on the spur of the moment and expressed the hope that Ford would run for president and win.

That was why two attempts on the president’s life in September in California caused concern in Moscow. Not only did Brezhnev send an urgent personal message expressing his satisfaction at their failure, but the Soviet leader’s security system was tightened and Brezhnev’s limousine was reinforced to withstand not only gunfire but antitank missiles.

The Difficult Road to the Summit

Kissinger and the president had foreseen that the Final Act would cause trouble in conservative circles but after weighing all the pros and cons, they decided that the advantage to domestic policy and Ford’s election campaign lay in going ahead. So the White House and Kissinger were taken unawares when conservatives and liberals, supported by the media, fell upon the Helsinki Act and upon Ford personally for signing it. Right-wing groups in the United States, especially the Eastern European émigré organizations, criticized Ford mercilessly. Ronald Reagan and Senator Jackson issued harsh statements. Congress also expressed its dissatisfaction. In the press some saw Kissinger’s hand in the Helsinki conference, although he was not all that enthusiastic about it. Essentially, the criticism came down to the allegation that
through Ford the United States was formally agreeing to a division of Europe yielding the East to the Soviet Union, the shorthand for which was "the Yalta partition" of Europe supposedly agreed in the closing stages of World War II among Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill.

The administration was accused of excessive tolerance toward Moscow—and international communism, for that matter. Detente, they charged, had benefited the Soviet Union and not the United States because it had settled Europe's postwar borders and confirmed Soviet dominance over Eastern Europe. Conservatives also found nothing good in the SALT talks, so they accused the administration of being "too submissive to the Russians" there. Liberals blamed the administration for being too weak in defending the humanitarian issues, especially Jewish emigration and the plight of Soviet dissidents. And both groups raised a great outcry over Ford's refusal to receive the author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn after he was expelled from the Soviet Union and emigrated to the United States. Even grain sales to the Soviet Union became the object of an anti-Soviet campaign on the ground that they would raise prices for American consumers by limiting domestic supplies, even as they were profitable for American farmers.

This outcry so concerned the White House that the president held a special meeting about it. Kissinger said the majority attributed it to electoral politics but the president was still convinced that detente was supported by the general public and would be worth the struggle sure to take place in the election campaign. I thought Kissinger gave a good assessment of a complex domestic situation, but for us the principal question was whether the Ford administration would really be able to resist the temptation of a turn to the right in Soviet-American relations as the pressure mounted—and not only from the conservatives—when the campaign got tougher.

When I reported this to Moscow, I urged them to decide on the date for a new summit meeting, because our failure to do so was beginning to irritate the White House and the president. Furthermore, it was time for us to consider how we wanted to steer our relations with Washington during the always difficult period of a presidential campaign.

My report was discussed at the Politburo and prompted a more definite answer about the date of the summit. They took into account the fact that a new party congress in the Soviet Union was scheduled for the next February, in 1976, and it was important for the Politburo and Brezhnev personally to have achieved significant progress by then in relations with the United States. A meeting with Ford, the Politburo hoped, would produce a SALT agreement. So on August 13 I conveyed Brezhnev's message suggesting a visit late in November or during the first half of December. Ford immediately suggested November 15 or December 16.

But the road to the summit presented serious difficulties. The Middle East remained an apple of discord between Moscow and Washington; Brezhnev and Gromyko were furious that the United States had ignored the Soviet Union in mediating an agreement between Israel and Egypt on partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai. Negotiations on SALT were running into additional trouble over the definition of a "heavy ICBM" such as our SS-18.

Military technology was outpacing diplomacy, and new, complex problems kept emerging in the negotiations. In the United States, cruise missiles were being developed fast. Under certain conditions, these missiles could represent a new kind of offensive strategic weapon, carrying nuclear weapons by swooping in low under radar and cruising to their target with extraordinary accuracy. Right-wingers and military men were hoping that the massive deployment of these cruise missiles would regain superiority for the United States in strategic arms. Consequently, the Soviet side began demanding that their production be limited and they be taken into account in the numbers agreed at Vladivostok.

In the Soviet Union, a new bomber was being built (nicknamed by NATO as "Backfire"). The Soviet side claimed it was a middle-range aircraft because it could not reach American territory. The Americans argued that when refueled in the air it became a long-range bomber capable of striking the United States and therefore should be included in the Vladivostok limits. Naturally, this long-range potential was deliberately played up by American opponents of disarmament, as Kissinger admitted to me much later. The fact remained that the Soviet Union did not have any aerial tankers, and building them would be a costly affair.

Since a SALT treaty was meant to crown the summit, the latter was not really possible without the former. Although Ford believed that the very fact of holding a summit would help his electoral prospects, for Brezhnev it would not do just to have a meeting. His previous two summits had been productive. He needed a serious agreement with the United States to present to our next year's party congress, and a SALT agreement was the obvious one—but the Americans were throwing up an additional obstacle.

By the start of October Kissinger was applying additional pressure by telling me that the administration had come to the conclusion that for some "unaccountable reason" Brezhnev seemed inclined toward postponing his visit until after the Communist Party Congress, or maybe even until after the U.S. elections in November of the following year. I replied that our position had always been clear: a new SALT agreement had to be signed during Brezhnev's visit and that understanding dated back to the Vladivostok meeting almost a year ago.
On October 7 at a White House reception for the members of U.S.-Soviet Trade and Economic Council, the president took me aside and continued the conversation Kissinger had begun. He observed that Soviet-American relations had been subject to periodic swings and now were heading into a "time of troubles" before the elections. The mass media, dominated by the anti-Soviet lobby, were whipping up public interest in emigration and human rights in the Soviet Union. Ford remarked that even he himself as president sometimes received far less publicity than Andrei Sakharov and some of his dissident Soviet colleagues, and the dissident movement was being used by those in the United States who opposed better relations. They were highly influential and had both the money and the opportunity to orchestrate the mass media. He knew from his own experience as president and candidate that they could not be ignored, and that meant he had to maneuver carefully.

Ford said he hoped Moscow understood this. The SALT agreement had many enemies, the Pentagon included, and he said that was why it was so important that the Soviet reaction to the latest American proposals not be downright negative. "Let Brezhnev give me anything, at least something of a positive nature, to be able to continue the dialogue on a constructive, not totally pessimistic note," the president said.

But Moscow was in no mood to oblige. The Soviet leadership was under strong pressure from our own military, which sought restrictions on America's cruise missiles. At the same time it underestimated the importance of domestic factors for American presidents. Moscow believed that all requests of this kind from Washington had only one objective—to wring some further concession from the Soviet side. Nor did the leadership heed our reports about the serious differences of opinion among factions inside the cabinet which the president could not disregard. The Kremlin was convinced that a president was the boss and had the power to decide unilaterally, especially given his desire and need to reach an agreement. So, instead of attempting some goodwill gesture toward the president, we fell into our habit of stubbornly prolonging the argument. Usually we would make some concession at the end, but often only at the time when the moment for doing so had passed, and the only thing we would get in exchange was the enmity that arose from a deepening of the rift between the leaders of our countries. The history of the Soviet diplomacy was marked by such wasted opportunities.

Then Ford suddenly announced a radical reorganization of his cabinet early in November. Schlesinger was dismissed as secretary of defense, as was Kissinger's protegé, William Colby as director of the CIA. George Bush was recalled from Beijing to replace Colby. Donald Rumsfeld, the White House chief of staff, was appointed defense secretary. Rockefeller was given to understand that he would be dropped from the ticket in the next elections because of opposition from the right. His protégé Kissinger lost one of his two posts, as assistant to the president for national security affairs, and was replaced with his deputy Brent Scowcroft.

From the point of view of Soviet-American relations and especially SALT, this shake-up did not look promising. Kissinger lost his daily access to the president and his chairmanship of a number of influential interdepartmental committees where policies are usually hammered out. This significantly limited his influence on the White House decision-making process in foreign policy, although he remained the leading figure. Electoral politics also touched him: the Right accused him of being too accommodating to Moscow, and the liberals of excessive pragmatism that ignored human rights and the moral aspects of foreign policy. In Congress, the Democrats tried to weaken what it considered "the monopoly of the executive branch" in foreign policy by putting obstacles in the way of Kissinger's diplomacy. Inside the cabinet, the members of Ford's immediate circle ("the Grand Rapids' Mafia," as some papers called it) used every opportunity to trip him up. This could not but affect Kissinger. I noticed that he was growing nervous and that his actions were more hectic and controversial than before. He nevertheless remained the principal advocate of detente within the administration.

Scowcroft, while close to Kissinger, held more conservative views on military matters. Rumsfeld supported the Pentagon's policies and strongly opposed any agreements with the Soviet Union unless the United States could demonstrate it had come away with clear advantages. Moreover, he had convinced Ford that this was the right line for his election campaign.

When I next met Scowcroft in Mid-November I congratulated him on his new post. During our previous meetings, he had usually been rather reserved, but this time I found him more open, perhaps as a result his release from Kissinger's constant control. Scowcroft remarked that he was rather troubled by the weakening of contacts between our two governments and of the mutual understanding between our leaders as well. Scowcroft conceded that a number of circumstances had forced the full range of Soviet-American relations to focus on just one issue—the SALT agreement—which was complicated for a number of domestic and foreign policy reasons. Consequently, the dialogue between our two leaders regrettably focused on this one issue, however important it was. Moreover, Scowcroft cautiously admitted that SALT issues were still causing serious disagreements inside the administration, and the cabinet reshuffle had not settled but only amplified them.

I must also note here that I had already privately drawn Gromyko's attention to the danger of concentrating almost exclusively on SALT in our relations with Washington. He answered in his customary dry and decisive...
manner that our main objective at this time was the conclusion of a SALT agreement before the Communist Party Congress the following February.

Thus in both of our countries the most important issues of our foreign policy—SALT and the summit—had become hostage to domestic politics, and for this we were both soon to pay the price. On December 9 I was invited to the White House for a meeting with President Ford. Kissinger and Scowcroft were also present. The president handed me a message to Brezhnev requesting a postponement of Kissinger's visit until January. That certainly put Brezhnev's visit to the United States into the indefinite future, if any doubt remained on that question.

The president, seeking to forestall accusations from the right that he and Kissinger were in too much of a hurry to conclude a SALT agreement explained to me that he had decided to wait until his new secretary of defense returned from a trip to Europe in order to hold a full-dress meeting of the National Security Council to hammer out the American position for further SALT talks. The difficult issues were the same, but Ford's apologetic manner did not inspire me with hopes for a close agreement. The president went on to say that he wanted Brezhnev to know that he intended to maintain his commitment to detente despite U.S. domestic politics and the attacks against him over detente. Frankly, his reassurances did not sound very convincing.

**Intelligence Wars**

A few months after Ford became president, someone slipped a note under the door of our embassy saying, “Certain authorities of the United States are taking measures to raise the Soviet submarine sunk in the Pacific Ocean. Well-wisher.” I reported the this Moscow, but our navy did not believe it possible to raise a submarine from such a depth. Later on March 29 I told Kissinger that Moscow was concerned about press reports of work under way off Hawaii to raise a Soviet submarine armed with missiles that had sunk in 1968. The reports also said some of the crew's bodies had been dumped into the sea. The Soviet Union, I said, could not be indifferent to this; the law of the sea provides that a sunken warship remains the property of the nation whose flag it flew. I demanded an explanation and said all salvage work must stop.

“My information is without doubt no news to you,” I told Kissinger, and asked if he could explain. After some hesitation, he replied, “This whole problem has already caused extensive debate inside the government.” He declined to elaborate because he needed more information. Several days later he formally assured me that no work on the Soviet submarine was under way at the time, nor would it be in similar cases in the future. More information would be coming from Scowcroft, he said. Later Scowcroft gave me a written message saying six bodies had been found, three identified, and that in accordance with established American practice in such cases they were buried with full military honors. We asked for further information. But the American side never gave us a complete explanation.

Years later we learned that the CIA had ordered the construction of a special ship, ostensibly for mineral extraction on the seabed. It was called the Glomar Challenger, cost more than $300 million, and the real purpose of its huge underwater tongs was to lift our submarine with its missiles and technical documentation from a depth of more than 16,000 feet and bring it right inside the ship. That was a violation of maritime law: a man-of-war cannot be raised without the permission or knowledge of its government, which is its owner.

The White House, of course, knew all about this when we raised the question. Ford recalls in his memoirs that on the second day of his presidency he was visited by Kissinger, Scowcroft, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, and CIA Director William Colby, who asked permission to proceed even though a Soviet trawler lay nearby. Ford ordered the operation to proceed, but as the submarine was being lifted, its hull broke in two, and only one part could be pulled into the hold. The White House also knew that the bodies had been buried at sea with full military honors in a ceremony that was fully recorded on film. It was turned over to our government only after the end of the Cold War.

In April Kissinger raised “a highly confidential and delicate question” about what came to be called political disinformation. While they had no objections to my meetings as ambassador with different people in Washington, including the representatives of the opposition, he said it was quite a different matter when Moscow dispatched special and unofficial emissaries to criticize the administration in talks with Americans, especially with the members of the opposition, and then proposed establishing closer contacts with them to discuss the state of Soviet-American relations under the present administration. This only played into the hands of the president's opponents, Kissinger said, and the president wanted this brought to Brezhnev's personal attention.

What was the real situation? Basically, two kinds of people were involved. First there was the normal run of scientists, academics, journalists, and others who came to America, contacted different people, and expressed their own views on the Soviet-American relations, sometimes critical. After they returned home they shared their impressions and information with their official sponsors in Moscow or the Foreign Ministry. Lacking real experience in diplomacy and knowing no details of our negotiations, they often
improvised in their conversations with Americans—just to leave an impression of their own importance. This was often the case with academicians and professors specializing in foreign relations. Their dilettantish activities in diplomacy were not always helpful.

But others were directly used by Soviet intelligence, such as the journalist Victor Louis, who was of dubious character and had been specifically named by Kissinger. When Louis visited Washington he did not contact our embassy, and I never saw him in the United States or at home. In their own search for political information in the West, Louis and people like him presented themselves as more knowledgeable than Soviet diplomats about the inner secrets of the Kremlin and more suitable for finding "compromises" in our relations. They were trying to establish contacts outside of official channels with some influential people in the administration as well as those in opposition. But they were doing more harm than good by their free and incompetent performance in Washington.

During one of my trips to Moscow I drew Gromyko's attention to this. He got annoyed: "You ought to know that I am not a partisan of such silly improvisations." I realized he did not want to quarrel with the intelligence services. So I went myself to talk to Yuri Andropov, then the chairman of the KGB, and explained the situation to him. The practice of sending the most objectionable people to the United States was discontinued, and Soviet citizens were advised to steer clear of domestic disputes or outright criticism of foreign governments, above all when they visited the United States.

Ambassadors like other human beings have their share of personal opponents, enemies, and plain envious people at home, and I was no exception. My post in Washington carried great prestige with the people in our government and bureaucracy, and they knew me as an active ambassador with a wide circle of friends and acquaintances in the United States. My wife and I also traveled widely. All this was rather unusual for a Soviet ambassador. Most preferred to stay within the walls of their embassies, which promised them a more quiet life. So the word occasionally spread in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the KGB, and the Foreign Ministry that I had become too "Americanized," which to say the least was not a flattering term in the Soviet Union. That reminded me to be a bit cautious. But my main advantage in this was that I was a member of the Central Committee and that as the ambassador to Washington I was personally well acquainted at home with all members of the Politburo, the general secretary of the party, the premier, and many ministers, including those in charge of the KGB and Defense and of course the foreign minister.

The KGB residents in Washington often had only rumors and hearsay, while they knew I was getting information through the confidential channel.

I might tell the resident that his information was simply wrong. I had no need to drop the names of my sources and say I had heard this or that from the president or the secretary of state. They knew who my contacts were. I also showed or informed them of the contents of certain summary telegrams from me to Moscow, so the political assessments coming from the same embassy would not differ too much. We would from time to time jointly discuss foreign and domestic problems bearing on our relations with the United States.

In too many Soviet embassies, normal personal relations between ambassadors and the KGB resident were the exception rather than the rule. Not only did the residents have their own separate coded communication network with Moscow, but keen local rivalries not infrequently developed over supplying Moscow with information. There were also cases of personal incompatibility, presumptuous boasting, and attempts to show who really was boss in the embassy. On the whole, such behavior did not testify to the great intellect of those involved in these primitive quarrels. Time and again the Central Committee of the party had to interfere in local squabbles and even recall either the ambassador or the resident.

I saw quite a few KGB residents pass through our embassy—six altogether during my term as ambassador—and normally I got on with them. There were no clashes or collisions, and only partly because I was a high-ranking ambassador and Moscow knew me well enough. No less important was the fact that our spheres of competence were clearly defined and never overlapped. When KGB residents obtained important political information through their channels in Washington, they reported to me or often consulted me as to whether it seemed trustworthy. For my part, I did not interfere in the everyday business of their intelligence work, nor was I either informed or interested in their concrete operations and their agents; that was beyond the range of my duties. I dealt with their intelligence operations only if they surfaced at the intergovernmental level or threatened to do so. Then the resident was obliged to report to me because the government or Politburo became involved. For instance, during the exchanges of visits at the highest levels I would recommend that Moscow order a temporary halt to intelligence activities to prevent any possibilities of public scandal. As far as I know, they complied.

But there was one problem we did have with our intelligence officers, and it was so egregious that it reached the notice of no less than Yuri Andropov when he headed the KGB. He wondered how the Americans managed so often to identify which embassy officials were KGB officers. I told him frankly that there were several unmistakable signs of their real identity.
“What are they?” Andropov wondered immediately.

First, KGB officers had more expensive apartments in Washington than foreign ministry employees, who were not supposed to stage official receptions at home because they simply were not allocated the funds. Second, all the KGB workers, even of the lowest diplomatic rank, had personal automobiles supplied and paid for by the KGB. Foreign Ministry employees up to the highest-ranking officials used embassy cars on call because the Foreign Ministry had no funds for individual cars. Third, whenever embassy officials invited a foreigner to dine in a restaurant, their expenses were limited to twenty to twenty-five dollars for the whole meal, which was the maximum amount that the embassy would reimburse. The rest of the bill had to be paid out of their own pockets. Accordingly, an embassy official who was a real diplomat would be careful about the restaurant and the menu he chose, but not an employee of the KGB, whose expenses would be covered when he presented the bill. Fourth, diplomatic staff would normally attend to their business in the embassy during working hours, while KGB officers would spend much time around town. Fifth, the members of the diplomatic staff were known to the State Department through routine working contacts on specific problems, so everybody’s line of work was clear. But KGB operatives showed no special knowledge of any subject and were interested in everything.

There were other reasons—and there was one more by which we in the diplomatic service also knew who was who. At embassy staff meetings those on the KGB payroll mostly kept silent and took no part in general discussion, which distinguished them from the rest of the diplomatic staff.

Andropov clearly was interested and said he would think about all this without fail. I don’t know what he really did, but changes were introduced before long. No one referred to any orders from him, but I had no doubt that he had insisted on them. Diplomats were in many respects raised to the level of KGB officers in terms of private cars, more convenient apartments, restaurant bills, and similar business expenses. Our ambassadors had long raised many of these points with Gromyko, but he just waved them aside. Apparently managed to convince the Politburo that such questions deserved serious attention.

Interception was a venerable activity of the secret services. In 1962 Khrushchev inadvertently and with characteristic indiscretion and bluster made it clear to Ambassador Foy Kohler during a heated discussion that we had tapped his coded cables. He wanted to confront the ambassador with the fact that we knew he had personally opposed the delivery of steel tubing from the West for natural gas pipelines. Thus alerted, American intelligence presumably acted, and our information from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was much reduced.

For many years both our intelligence services were engaged in active competition over the installation of very sophisticated eavesdropping devices that were hidden in each other’s embassies. To realize the scale of these operations it is enough to say that when the buildings for our new embassy and the housing for its personnel were completed in Washington in 1979 by an American contractor, we found more than two hundred listening devices secreted inside. We showed them to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. But what could he say? Of course, our services were not idle either. When the new American Embassy was built in Moscow, U.S. officials, in their turn, refused to move in for the same reason. A more alarming aspect of the war conducted by both of our intelligence services appeared late in November 1975, when Kissinger told me that the American ambassador in Moscow, Walter Stoessel, was suspected of having developed leukemia, possibly as a result of extended electromagnetic exposure in the embassy in Moscow. American specialists assumed it had something to do with intercepting, decoding, or jamming the embassy’s messages. Kissinger said that if the ambassador’s illness became known, it could lead to a major scandal. The U.S. government therefore was asking the Soviet government to stop the radiation.

Moscow instructed me to deny Kissinger’s charge that the American
Embassy was being deliberately subjected to radiation. I said we had conducted a thorough investigation and determined that the electromagnetic field around the embassy did not exceed Soviet health standards, which were considerably lower than American standards.

Many years later I learned the real reason for the radiation. The KGB was trying to jam electronic espionage by the American secret service, which used the American Embassy in Moscow as a base to intercept important official telephone and radio conversations, which were mostly unscrambled. Both secret services therefore tried to cancel each other’s efforts; hence the diplomatic representations and counterrepresentations under different pretexts. They reached the presidential level, with Ford, under pressure from American intelligence, demanding that the Soviet side stop immediately, and Brezhnev replying that the electromagnetic field around the embassy was of industrial origin carrying no risk to health. A joint study was proposed but the Americans refused; for two years a special American medical team from Johns Hopkins University had been studying the medical histories of nearly five thousand officials and their families who had been stationed in Moscow from 1954 to 1976 and found no influence of the electromagnetic field on their health. We were privately informed about this by the State Department during the Carter administration. Meanwhile some precautionary measures were quietly taken by both sides.

In fairness, I should add that our embassy in Washington was in the same situation, but once we were told by our doctors that, in their opinion, our health was not in danger, we did not complain. I myself repeatedly suffered from throat and respiratory ailments. Our doctors suspected them to be the result of many years of work in an enclosed electronic space; my embassy office more than any other had insufficient ventilation because it was enclosed in double walls with a magnetic field permanently between them. Of course all these medical assurances and reassurances were fine, but who really can say with certainty that in the long run the health of diplomats in embassies of both countries was not compromised for the sake of the Cold War?

Secret services of both our countries cooperated quietly but very expertly in protecting leaders and officials when they visited the United States or the Soviet Union. Fortunately this protection never failed. More than that, they occasionally exchanged intelligence information about possible attempts on some high officials traveling in third countries. I have personal knowledge of at least two warnings I passed on from Moscow in total confidence, one report about preparations for an attempt on the life of the Director of the CIA, and another on the life of Henry Kissinger during the Paris peace talks on Vietnam.

Mutual suspicion and mistrust never fully cleared away among the intelligence services. The eighth floor of the U.S. State Department building leads from the office of the secretary and a magnificent suite of reception rooms to a large balcony which he often uses for summer cocktail parties. It has a panoramic view of Washington, looking across the Potomac River. After I ended my service as ambassador in Washington in 1986, I asked George Shultz, who was then secretary, to send me a photograph of the view as a souvenir of my many pleasant visits there. In due course it arrived with a cordial and humorous inscription. He later told me that obtaining the photo had not been easy. The American secret services opposed sending it to the Soviet ambassador because it supposedly depicted strategic points at the center of Washington, although the photograph showed neither the White House nor other important government buildings. Picture postal cards of more strategic buildings could be bought in any shop. Shultz refused to take the argument seriously and sent the photo, which I hung in my Moscow office.
III. How Appeasing the Right Helped Ford Lose the Presidency

Angola

If any one point of controversy over regional conflicts soured Americans on detente, it was Angola, a country on the Atlantic coast just under the bulge of Africa that few Americans, and probably fewer Russians, had ever heard of before. A sleepy colony of Portugal which had the mixed blessing of oil, it broke free after Lisbon’s own revolution shook off the Salazar dictatorship in April of 1974. Various Angolan factions had already been fighting colonial rule, whereupon they turned on each other in a civil war. Such ideological or other fundamental differences as may have existed among them had to be left to the trained observer, a point that might easily be discerned from the similarity of their names, the Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA).

The MPLA, whose leaders professed a Marxist ideology, had been receiving our assistance during the liberation struggle against the Portuguese, and this was withdrawn when the movement became locked in its own internal struggles. But soon the different factions began receiving assistance variously from Cuba and the Soviet Union, South Africa, the United States, and China. Angola became a cockpit of international ambition far beyond its importance to anyone, not least the unfortunate people of Angola itself. The conflict gradually became one of the most acute regional points of the confrontation between Moscow and Washington, although it was very far removed from the genuine national interests of either country. Moreover, it seriously aggravated the central problems of Soviet-American relations and raised the question of whether detente had any general rules outside our mutual behavior toward each other, and if so, what they were.

President Ford addressed all this at a meeting with me in his office on December 9, 1975. He said he had no real concern about the strategic interests of the United States in Angola, but the events there were increasingly being perceived by Americans and played up by the media as a test for the policy of detente; he had been accused of yielding to the Russians on still another issue. Ford said American intelligence had reported that the Soviet Union had established an impressive arms airlift to Angola, and it was also being used to transport Cuban troops who now constituted the principal striking force of the MPLA. The United States had established a similar airlift, and it was not at all that difficult to recruit foreign mercenaries for the FNLA, he said. But was it really necessary for both our countries to challenge each other in such a faraway place which was of no particular value to either of them? (This was, I admit, a very good question.)

Accordingly, Ford proposed: first, that we appeal jointly to the parties in Angola to stop their internecine war and agree to a peaceful settlement, and second, that we call on all interested states to stop interfering in Angola by sending arms there. Kissinger carried a similar message to the NATO foreign ministers in Brussels but he sounded more belligerent, warning that relations between Washington and Moscow would suffer if the Soviet Union went on participating in military operations or supporting them thousands of miles from Soviet territory in a place where there were no Soviet interests.

Brezhnev replied to Ford on December 18 that what was happening in Angola was not a civil war but direct foreign military intervention, and on the part of South Africa in particular. He said peacemaking had to be focused on jointly stopping foreign intervention, and the Soviet Union was not interested in viewing the events in Angola through the prism of “confrontation between Moscow and Washington” or “as a test of the detente policy.” But it was exactly in this light that events in Angola were seen not only by the Ford administration but by the American public, and they had the effect of worsening Soviet-American relations. Our embassy in Washington repeatedly warned Moscow of this. Our reports and arguments fell on the deaf ears of the morally self-righteous.

On December 23 Kissinger again questioned the Soviet role and linked it to detente. He proposed a face-saving exit by referring the whole thing to the Organization of African Unity, which was already involved in mediation without success. What really mattered to Kissinger was not who won, but that none of the combatants themselves should achieve victory with the outside help of a superpower.

But by this time Angola had become a superpower issue with a dynamic of its own. The MPLA, which we were supporting, formed a transitional government in the capital of Luanda. It looked like they were on the winning side. So we felt that our clients in Angola had more legitimate grounds then America’s. Moscow instructed me to reject Kissinger’s charges against the Soviet Union and accuse the United States and its special services of wreck-
ing the normal functioning of the transitional government in Angola. Moscow and Washington were thus drawn deeper and deeper into a vicious circle in Angola, which was to last there for many years.

Considerations of superpower image only increased the obstinacy of both sides, since neither felt it could afford to "lose Angola." During one of our conversations, Kissinger rightly said that it was essential not to let our two countries be guided by the iron laws of superpower competition which had caused unpredictable catastrophes in the past. I felt the same way, especially about Angola, but it was too late for that.

A leading if not decisive role in the Soviet involvement in the Angola adventure was played by the International Department of the Central Committee of our party, which for many years was headed by a secretary of the party, Boris Ponomarev. He was a protégé of our principal ideologist, Mikhail Suslov. Through the Portuguese Communist Party, the International Department had long before established contacts with some leaders of the liberation movement in Angola and supported them ever since. The Soviet Foreign Ministry had nothing to do with our initial involvement in Angola and looked at it with some skepticism. But the decision had been taken by the top party leadership, and the diplomats followed the decision of the party.

When I spoke with Ponomarev he advanced his set of arguments: the United States was involved in many civil wars around the globe, it was busy consolidating its positions in Egypt and elsewhere, and had actively overthrown a socialist government in Chile that came to power legally. So how could the Americans see our support for the newly formed government in Angola as a violation of detente? Must we yield to American arrogance and their double standard? This viewpoint came to dominate the Politburo. Furthermore, the Politburo felt we had to show the flag against China in Africa so as not to be seen by international communist and democratic movements as being idle in postcolonial areas.

Although the Kremlin saw Angola primarily as an ideological conflict with the United States, the Soviet leadership clearly underestimated the psychological effect of the Cuban factor in Angola on American public opinion and on the administration. The myth of Cuba as a Soviet proxy was especially damaging for us in America, where the Cuban crisis of 1962 had fixed the idea firmly. But it was the Cubans and not us who had initially interfered by sending their own military forces to back the MPLA, on their own initiative and without consulting us. The Cubans had connections with the political groups, and of course Fidel Castro liked to make things difficult for the Americans. As evidence of this, let me cite a visit I made to Cuba in 1986 as representative of the Soviet government when we were trying to restrain Castro in order to help improve our relations with the Americans. Castro made it clear to me that what was happening in Angola was a Cuban show. "It is my command," he said. He wanted to be a player on the world scene, and that was one way he could do it.

The Soviet leadership never contemplated using the Cuban troops in any third country, but the Cubans quickly managed to involve us there on the pretext of international solidarity. It was not difficult to do because of the mood of the party leadership. But by supporting the Cubans in Angola (all their arms were of Soviet origin) we played right into the hands of our opponents in the United States, and the Soviet-American dialogue over Angola became a dialogue of the deaf, which hardly improved our relations.

When Kissinger went to Moscow in January to discuss the SALT impasse, he also raised Angola in vain. "If Kissinger wants to talk about Angola, he has Sonnenfeldt to talk with," Brezhnev snapped to an American journalist who asked him about the agenda of his talks. Kissinger's assistant Helmut Sonnenfeldt, for his part, had relayed ahead Kissinger's "hope that there is not going to be a massive offensive in Angola during his stay in Moscow." They were under the understandable misapprehension that military operations in Angola were directed from Moscow.

When Kissinger returned, he began advancing a twofold policy toward the Soviet Union, supposedly to combine firmness and reconciliation, as well as strong defense and arms limitation. He also devised a so-called concept of historic interests—according to which the Soviet Union never had any interests outside Europe and Asia and therefore had none now. In March the administration canceled three Soviet-American government-level meetings on trade, energy, and construction. It also decided not to ask Congress for legislation to normalize trade and economic relations with the Soviet Union. The spirit of cooperation was disappearing, and this surfaced with a vengeance in the next round of talks on SALT.

In his Moscow talks on SALT, Kissinger found the outstanding issues unchanged—cruise missiles and the Backfire bomber. Brezhnev accepted Kissinger's main condition setting the maximum range for air-launched cruise missiles at 2,500 kilometers but refused to accept the same range for ground and sea-launched cruises. He wanted a shorter range for them as a matter of equality; American cruises could reach Soviet territory from their land or naval platforms, while American territory was out of our cruise range. Brezhnev made more concessions guaranteeing that the plane would not be adapted to intercontinental range and handed over all of its performance data. Kissinger seemed satisfied. Limitations on cruise missiles also moved toward compromise, but Kissinger warned that his position had been agreed with Ford but had not passed the Pentagon, an unusual proviso for him.
Sure enough, when he returned to Washington, the military leadership rejected his deal on the Backfire bomber. Donald Rumsfeld, the new defense secretary, was becoming a leader of the opposition to a new SALT agreement. On January 21 an angry meeting of the National Security Council took place in the White House. William Hyland, Scowcroft's deputy, told me in confidence that as the result of fresh wrangling everything just fell apart, and once again there was no consistent American position on SALT. The president faced the task of putting it back together anew, a task he was unlikely to complete because of the gulf between his principal advisers, Kissinger and Rumsfeld. Since the opening of the election season, Ford had increasingly tended to listen to Rumsfeld, who like the president was a former Republican congressman from the Midwest and held the same conservative views on many things.

It was therefore growing more evident that Ford was turning away from the Vladivostok agreements, or at least putting them aside until after the elections. With the Republican right continuously attacking Kissinger, it was not hard to understand why the secretary of state lost interest in SALT, which was taking so much of his energy to such little effect. Kissinger was demolished on some other international issues and even gave Ford a draft of a resignation statement in January, but Ford talked him out of it. Nevertheless his position was hardly auspicious. He was under public pressure from the right on at least the two principal issues with the Soviet Union: Angola and SALT.

In Moscow positions also were hardening. Brezhnev told the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Communist Party that a base had been created for Soviet-American cooperation but refused to accept any connection between the events in Angola and current difficulties with Washington. The congress closed without adopting any measures that might have neutralized the first indications of trouble for Soviet foreign policy. Brezhnev was named chairman of the Defense Council soon afterward and raised to the rank of marshal of the Soviet Union, attaining the peak of his domestic political power precisely at the time that detente started to lose momentum. But no one in the Soviet leadership worried very much about that because they thought it was a temporary trend.

It is interesting to draw a comparison between the Soviet and American attitudes. On March 1, when the Communist Party Congress in Moscow was in full swing, Ford succumbed to pressure from Reagan and his allies and publicly refused to employ the term “detente,” replacing it with the phrase “peace based on force.” Things were gradually changing, and not for the better.

Turmoil in the White House over Detente

It was clear that there was no hope for progress in Soviet-American relations during the election year. There were other complications beside Angola and SALT. Emigration and dissidents in the Soviet Union continued to be a politically charged issue. Loud and abusive picketing, hostile demonstrations, telephoned threats to Soviet diplomats and their families, rifle shots at the Soviet mission in New York, and a bomb explosion outside the Aeroflot office in Washington prompted President Ford publicly to condemn “these outrageous actions.” But all this only caused further tension and anxiety among diplomats of both countries, which hardly helped our negotiations on any issue, and that may have been just what the provocateurs and political terrorists in the United States such as Rabbi Kahane wanted to achieve. An especially destructive role was played by the American mass media, which was increasingly used by politicians hostile to the Soviet Union including Jackson, Reagan, and others. For the first time, an assignment to the United States was no longer a prize among Soviet diplomats. Living in the United States became unpleasant and even dangerous for them.

I was returning to Washington from Moscow aboard our government plane, and we scheduled a stop at Kennedy airport in New York. Air traffic was heavy. Planes had to wait in line, each at an altitude assigned by the control tower. Suddenly we lost communication with the American control tower. For a minute or two our pilots had to descend by peering through the clouds. As the airspace was crowded with other planes, there could have been a catastrophe at any moment. Later we learned that the controller who handled our plane was a member of an anti-Soviet organization. For a moment, he had let his emotions gain control over him and stopped guiding our plane. The officer was fired. We decided to let the matter drop, even though some American friends suggested we bring suit against him. We refrained, partly because of the generally unfavorable feelings toward the Soviet Union in the country.

Both Brezhnev and Ford could not help noticing the deterioration. They exchanged letters. On April 16 Brezhnev wrote that the American leadership “says and does a lot of things which can only be viewed as the opposite” of building good relations, especially its new policy of peace through military strength. He warned that election considerations “do not constitute grounds for endangering everything of significance and value that was so hard to achieve in Soviet-American relations.” Ford replied that despite the different voices in an election campaign, he wanted Brezhnev to remember that only the president or the secretary of state had authority to make official statements on foreign policy, and he remained a partisan of improving
Soviet-American relations. But he added that in all candor he was concerned about their relations because of events in Angola and because of his responsibility—like Brezhnev's in his own country—for the security of the United States, which demanded increased military appropriations. This exchange clearly demonstrated the increasing interference of the election campaign with Soviet-American relations.

Our embassy in Washington made sure that the Soviet leadership was well aware of the widespread anti-Soviet campaign in the United States, but Moscow did little to neutralize it. Moscow was strangely convinced that such campaigns were inevitable as a direct result of the ideological struggle between the different social systems. They therefore believed it was hardly possible to stop it without grave concessions. American pressure over humanitarian issues caused particular indignation in Moscow, where the leadership continued to believe that this was purely our own business.

In local American politics international questions were often used for political gain. Congressman Charles Vanik, full of favorable impressions after a visit to Moscow, called on me, mentioned his Slavic origins, and said he was not predisposed against the Soviet Union. But he frankly explained his cosponsorship of the discriminatory Jackson-Vanik amendment principally by his desire to be reelected in his Cleveland district with its many East European voters. His constituents now were lobbying against the grain deal with the Soviet Union but were making no progress against the twelve grain states.

Lou Harris, the pollster, told me of a confidential poll commissioned by the White House disclosing that a majority of the population supported the detente mainly out of fear of a nuclear confrontation. He concluded that an important agreement with the Soviet Union in 1976, say, on SALT, would persuade millions of Americans to support detente notwithstanding the opposition's attacks. This in turn would benefit President Ford. If, on the other hand, relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated, this would mean the end of the Ford administration. His prognosis proved correct.

Donald Kendall, chairman of Pepsi-Cola, a prominent Republican, and an early proponent of trade and investment in the Soviet Union, said he had spoken to Ford about election strategy and criticized him for his anti-Soviet remarks and for overestimating the role of Reagan and his conservative supporters who constituted, he said, only "a minority in the party of the minority." Hugh Scott, the Republican leader in the Senate, told me that a conference of Republican leaders pressed similar advice and told Ford to ignore Reagan and consistently urge the positive aspects of his program: peace without the threat of war. The president, he said, promised to take this advice into account, but he insisted that he could not ignore Reagan.

Less surprisingly but with no less concern, Ford's attempt to walk a political tightrope also produced critical reactions among Democrats in the Senate. Senator Edward Kennedy was concerned about the threat of the arms race. He recalled that his brother had exploited the infamous "missile gap" with the Soviet Union and discovered a new "gold mine" of political propaganda during the 1960 presidential campaign against Nixon. His own propaganda was immediately exploited by the military-industrial complex and its conservative political allies for an arms buildup further exacerbated by the Cuban crisis and lasting for a decade. Edward Kennedy believed his brother had made a "tragic mistake" by allowing himself to be carried away by a strong-America theme that was largely responsible for the lack of progress in Soviet-American relations. He feared the same tragic mistake would be repeated without a new SALT agreement.

Kissinger himself complained to me that the president was surrounded by petty politicians and campaign experts who saw their main task as forestalling attacks by Reagan instead of devising an offensive strategy based on the issues of war and peace. This internal turmoil surfaced after Kissinger passed to me on May 10 a proposal by Ford for simultaneous ceremonies in Washington and Moscow to sign a treaty on the peaceful use of nuclear explosions. Brezhnev agreed. But the next day Scowcroft urgently asked for a postponement on Ford's behalf. Scowcroft said the president was embarrassed to have to admit "without too much diplomacy" that the political timing was bad. Reagan had just won the Republican primary in Nebraska, and another victory for him in Ford's home state of Michigan could be fatal. Ford's domestic policy advisers pleaded with him to postpone signing the agreement, while his foreign policy advisers, headed by Kissinger, believed that the agreement might enhance his chances. Scowcroft reported that Ford had given in to the domestic advisers "after some painful vacillation." Apologizing once again for the "embarrassing situation," Ford asked for another postponement on May 20. As Scowcroft remarked, "It seems that our foreign policy and our relations with you won't amount to anything worthwhile until August"—after the Republican Convention. The treaty was finally signed May 28.

Henry Kissinger's Swan Song

In mid-June Kissinger invited me for a conversation. He had no specific issue to discuss but just wanted to talk informally "about the past, the present, and the future." This was one of several talks during the year reviewing our long relationship. I already knew that he was feeling somewhat gloomy, partly because of enforced idleness, which was not his natural state. A fortnight before he had complained to me that Ford had discouraged him from attacking
Reagan on issues of war and peace and, under pressure from his conservative advisers, forced his secretary of state to cancel two important speeches in California. Kissinger then decided to disengage himself from the president's election. “Let them do what they want,” he said.

Now he was in a philosophical state of mind. No matter who came to power next year, he said, his policy of negotiation would remain at the basis of our relations, even if some problems remained hard to solve. The first year under Jimmy Carter might seem more difficult than it had been under Ford, not because of any bias against the Soviet Union but because Carter lacked experience in international affairs and tended to oversimplify them. He figured it would take Carter four to six months to get a grip on foreign policy in general and Soviet relations in particular.

Kissinger noted that Carter had the disposition of a Baptist preacher, which meant he might indulge himself in “moralizing” over human rights without realizing how this would be seen as interference by the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Kissinger could not foresee any significant differences in Carter’s policy, although he would seem more dynamic and self-directing than Ford. (Carter, by the way, consulted Kissinger privately even before the election for advice on choosing his own successor if the Democrats won. Kissinger told me one thing he tried to do was to talk Carter out of appointing one of his advisers, Zbigniew Brzezinski of Columbia University, as secretary of state because he found the Polish-born professor excessively emotional and not able to think impassively in the long term.)

A few days before the elections, on October 29, Kissinger invited me to come see him “to cast a look” at the general state of our relations and the philosophy underlying them since he had started playing a major role in them in 1969. He called it a “time of great achievement” which now was at its lowest point because of the election campaign. The decline had begun, he said, in 1974 when Congress refused to grant MFN status to the Soviet Union. Since then, the issue of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union had prompted strong opposition to the Soviet Union by the American Jewish leadership on practically all issues of Soviet-American relations. And these events in turn influenced the mass media and public opinion in both countries. I agreed with him that Moscow’s handling of the issue had not only been unfair but also very clumsy.

He cited other factors accounting for the degradation of our relations. Massive military deliveries to North Vietnam which “the Soviet Union and not China” carried out during the preparation and immediately after the conclusion of the Paris agreements on Vietnam allowed the North Vietnamese to launch a major offensive in the South and destroy the agreements he had negotiated. Then there were the events in Angola, which Kissinger interpreted as a deliberate violation by the Soviet Union of the global balance with the United States which predisposed American public opinion against the detente. He claimed that our policy was designed to hurt America—even hurt Kissinger himself (which was not true).

I answered that in some respects he was probably right, but it was unwise to link Soviet-American relations almost mechanically to all the failures in American foreign policy, some of which arose from Kissinger’s own mistakes. I said, “We are no saints, but neither are the Americans.”

In a pacifying tone Kissinger said that his remarks should be interpreted just as “a short historic excursus,” and he was merely voicing his thoughts candidly and not for polemics, although they were shared with many Americans.

I felt that this man of exceptional intelligence was in a state of confusion and worry: the outcome of the election and what lay beyond it were obscure.

When we met again on the day after Ford’s defeat, he seemed above the battle for the first time and had a rather other-worldly look. He told me that in his heart he had for quite some time known that Ford would most probably lose, but he kept subconsciously pushing the thought aside and nevertheless hoping for the best, “as happens in the face of imminent disaster.”

Kissinger strongly criticized Ford for failing to use the real assets of American foreign policy, especially relations with the Soviet Union. Most of all, Kissinger blamed Ford for lack of foresight and vacillation which prevented a new SALT agreement. He was sure, he said, that if Ford had made a firm decision after Kissinger’s return from Moscow in January with a compromise, and if he had then made the Pentagon respect his opinion, the agreement could have been signed as early as March. While it certainly would have been the subject of heated debate during the campaign, Kissinger was sure it would have been supported by most Americans if Ford had presented it as a war-or-peace issue, which really was a principal determinant in the American public’s attitude toward foreign policy.

Now it was time to decide what to do next. Up to then he had not seriously thought about what he would do when he left office and he still did not know. He had plenty of options, but they seemed boring and shallow after his long term as secretary of State. Money was no problem, he said; he could earn it with publicity. The problem was to find a job which would satisfy his spirit.

Henry Kissinger, for all his zigzags and political maneuvers in our relations in a framework of his “realpolitik,” played a significant part in the general improvement of Soviet-American relations during the Nixon and the Ford administrations and in establishing the policy of detente. This was his indisputable personal achievement as a statesman, and his international reputation endured. After leaving the government, he remained as controversial as
ever, but he never lost his political stature and most of all, his role as a leading analyst of international events.

Ford versus Carter, as Moscow Saw Them

Well before the election, Moscow had to decide whether to take a position for or against Ford or Carter, or to remain neutral. On August 22 a special Politburo meeting was held in Moscow to discuss Soviet-American relations after the Republican convention in Kansas City had nominated Ford by the narrow margin of only 1,187 votes over 1,070 votes for Ronald Reagan. I reported to the Politburo on the electoral campaign in the United States. There were many questions to me about the outcome, the candidates' positions, and what I thought our attitude should be.

There was not much interest during the meeting in what American domestic policy would be under Ford or Carter. Nobody asked about their positions toward workers or members of the American Communist Party inside the country. The main points were: What kind of policy would both candidates have toward the Soviet Union? Who would have more ideological and military overtones in his policy? Who would rely more on competition and even outright confrontation than on cooperation, and who was more in favor of detente?

Ford was already known in Moscow. He left a rather mixed impression after three years in office. He looked like a decent man who would like to have more stable relations with the Soviet Union. But at the same time he had predominately conservative views, tended to yield to pressure from the right, and therefore could not be predictable in relations with us.

Carter's reputation in the United States was of a man who was more liberal than Ford. There was some unofficial information from different sources that he was interested in the SALT process and had some ideas of his own in this field that included radical reductions of strategic arms. But on the other side he was well known as a strong advocate of human rights and other humanitarian issues and his readiness to be involved in disputes with us about them could only bring trouble. Moral crusaders often make dangerous statesmen.

It was difficult to lean toward either candidate and better to remain evenhanded during the election campaign. In any case foreign interference or even expressing our preference would not do any good. That was the essence of my report to the Politburo.

Vivid discussion of both candidates followed along these lines. It was inconclusive, though with slight preference of Ford as a known quantity. The Politburo decided to remain neutral. Its formal directive said we would "continue business as usual with the Ford administration" and simultaneously, "maintain contacts with Carter's associates and establish direct contact with Carter if he displays readiness." The Soviet press was instructed to interpret the election campaign "in a calm tone and balanced manner."

What worried us was Ronald Reagan's success in shifting the political debate to the right even though he had not won the Republican nomination. A Foreign Ministry analysis of October 12, which was approved by the Politburo, remarked that the campaign debate had "produced a number of points unfavorable for us . . . in particular . . . the general tone of statements by both candidates who insist upon maintaining military might of the United States as a basic prerequisite for dealing with the Soviet side." Noting that the foreign policy statements of Ford and Carter were "obviously a reflection of certain rightist tendencies in U.S. public opinion on issues of Soviet-American relations," the analysis recommended that we continue trying for constructive cooperation with Washington while reacting firmly against any hostile American actions.

During my stay in Moscow I had my traditional one-on-one meeting with Brezhnev, who was greatly interested in the election campaign but tended to oversimplify it. He was indignant at Ford and accused him of failing to take the position of peace candidate against "this obscurantist Reagan." Brezhnev was sure that would have won over "all honest Americans." He was also indignant that Angola was being used against us, for he was convinced that "our cause is just." I tried again to explain things as Americans saw them, but I failed to impress the general secretary, who believed that "the imperialists in the United States" simply would not accept that his intentions were fair in Angola. He was not attempting to establish in Angola any Soviet military bases, as Americans were doing around the globe, but was only "helping local patriots and internationalists." In short, he was still held captive by his own ideology. And there were limits to my ability to change his mind.

At the same time, it was curious that he remained firmly convinced of the necessity of improving our relations with Washington, in part because he actually admired and almost even envied America's living standards and the achievements of its economy, science, and technology. He would tell me about this in private, but he still believed that the future belonged to socialism, which he was certain would ultimately gain the upper hand in the historic competition with capitalism. Even then, he completely excluded any possibility of a war with the United States, for this would amount to "the end of the world."

That is why I can testify that all allegations in the United States that the Soviet leadership may have been planning a "preventive strike" were com-
The Kremlin was afraid of war with the United States. Detente in Soviet-American relations was Brezhnev's true objective, although he failed to comprehend fully what it entailed. His credo was based on the traditional Marxist-Leninist "class approach" to foreign policy, which cast even peaceful relations into a mould of confrontation although not necessarily on the battlefield—a point those on the right in the United States had just as much difficulty understanding as he did when trying to view international relations as a fruitful compromise of interests. The United States thus remained for Brezhnev the principal opponent which strove to undermine the socialist order inside the Soviet Union and the socialist camp as a whole. Detente, therefore, had to have its limits.

Ford Loses the Election

The election was close, and political maneuvering by both candidates lasted until the very last moment. Late on the night of October 30 I got a phone call from Scowcroft. A group of Jewish leaders had sent Ford a request that amounted to an ultimatum to express his public support for the right of Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union. They said that Carter had already committed himself by sending a telegram expressing his sympathy to a group of Jews in Moscow. Scowcroft was calling to tell me, apologetically, that Ford had yielded to their demands. He asked us for "patience and understanding for another forty-eight hours, until this madhouse is over." After the election on November 2, he promised, everything was going to be "back to normal."

That never happened. Carter received 40.8 million votes to 39 million for Ford, or 51 to 48 percent, hardly an impressive majority, and close enough for Ford and some of his supporters to feel bitter. I believe that Ford's tactics of appeasing the Right probably cost him the presidency. As the Ford presidency was nearing its end, Brezhnev, at the age of seventy, was at the height of his political power. A sick old man, the Soviet leader came to believe (not without the help of his immediate circle in the Politburo) in the infallibility of Soviet domestic and foreign policy and saw no need of any major corrections at the time when reality demanded changes which should have broadly implemented detente. Stagnation of thought, ideological inertia, and lack of flexibility could not but lead to serious failures and an ultimate deadlock in Soviet policy.

Diplomacy and negotiations always played an important role in Soviet-American relations. But their quality depended on many domestic and foreign factors. The highest diplomacy does not consist of trying to drown differences in champagne and vodka toasts at feel-good summit meetings, nor of papering over unresolvable issues with communiqués written in gobbleygook, but in finding ways to disagree without doing profound damage to an important strategic relationship. Ford and Brezhnev failed in this because they were confused over their interpretations of detente and lacked a clear vision of a common goal.