President wants to see you,” Haig said. “I think you know what he’s going to say.”

Ten minutes later, I entered the White House. I stopped at Haig’s office first. His eyes told me all I needed to know. I walked into the Oval Office alone.

Nixon was sitting behind his desk, but he stood up as soon as I entered the room. We shook hands; he said, “Sit down,” and I took the chair to his right. The President leaned back in his chair with his hands clasped together in his lap. His face was solemn. He had been under tremendous strain; he was still very tense, but in control. Speaking slowly and deliberately, he came right to the point. “I have made the decision to resign,” he said. “It’s in the best interest of the country. I won’t go into the details pro and con. I have made my decision.” He paused for a moment, then added, “Jerry, I know you’ll do a good job.”

“Mr. President,” I replied, “you know that I’m saddened by this circumstance. I would have wanted it to be otherwise, but I am ready to do the job and think I’m fully qualified to do it.”

“I know you are too.”

Once he’d said that, he relaxed and our conversation became much more informal and as pleasant as it could be under the circumstances. Now that he had relinquished the burdens of the world, he was offering an old friend the best advice he had for the days ahead. We talked about the timing of the transition and the way it would be accomplished. Nixon would announce his resignation on TV that night. It would be effective at noon the next day. On Friday morning he wanted to say goodbye to his loyal aides and their families in the East Room. He hoped I would understand his desire to do that. He would write a letter of resignation to Henry Kissinger. When Kissinger received it, Nixon would no longer be President. He would be on his way to San Clemente as a private citizen. Then I could take the oath of office.

He talked pragmatically about the problems I would face in both foreign and domestic affairs. He mentioned the need to strengthen the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as his hope that I could reach agreement with the Soviet Union on strategic arms limitations. Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviets’ top man, was bright and tough,
vince Rosenthal in particular that a weakened Turkey would imperil the future security of Israel. None of my arguments made any headway. Congress was determined to interfere with the President's traditional right to manage foreign policy, and if this interference had dire consequences for the country as a whole, that was just too bad.

The final Congressional challenge came from opponents of legislation designed to improve our relationships with the Soviet Union. For years the Soviets had wanted us to grant them most-favored-nation status for purposes of trade. This didn't mean that they would receive preferential treatment, only that they'd fare as well as any other country. That is, their exports would be subject to the lowest tariff rates we applied to any third country. We had already granted most-favored-nation status to other Communist nations—Poland and Yugoslavia—so ideology didn't pose a problem. Nixon had wanted to extend it to the Soviets because he thought that it would advance the cause of détente. The House had passed the Administration's Trade Reform bill, but it had been stalled in the Senate for nearly a year. The argument centered on the degree of control that the Congress would exert over decisions made by the President. In return for giving trade concessions to the Soviets, Senator Henry M. ("Scoop") Jackson, a Democrat from Washington, wanted a written commitment from the Soviets that they would agree to allow at least fifty thousand Jews to emigrate every year, and when he had such a commitment, he intended to hold a press conference to claim that it was his tough stand that had made the Russians capitulate.

I fully agreed that the Soviet anti-emigration policy was deplorable and contrary to my long-held belief that people should be free from oppression. Yet by pursuing quiet but firm diplomacy, Nixon and Kissinger had persuaded the Soviets to ease their restrictions. Jewish emigration from the U.S.S.R. jumped from four hundred a year in 1968 to about 35,000 in 1973. When I became President, I sought to assure the Soviets that I was going to pursue the same kind of quiet diplomacy.

On Wednesday, August 14, I welcomed Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to the Oval Office with Henry Kissinger. I told him that I would consider it a personal favor if his government would agree to release Simas Kudirka, a Lithuanian seaman who had jumped aboard a U.S. Coast Guard vessel, only to be turned back to the Soviets by the American captain. Dobrynin said he would see what he could do. (Three months later, Kudirka was given permission to leave the Soviet Union.) Then our conversation turned to the emigration of Soviet Jews. The Kremlin, Dobrynin said, would give us an oral guarantee that it would allow 55,000 to leave every year, but it wouldn't put that guarantee on paper and let Jackson use it for his own political purposes.

Next morning I met for breakfast in the White House with Jackson, Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut and Senator Jacob Javits of New York. I reported Brezhnev's promise and warned that if they insisted upon a written guarantee, the agreement would come unstuck. In fact, I said, the Soviets would probably cut back on the number of Jews they allowed to emigrate. Ribicoff and Javits were understanding and cooperative. But Jackson was adamant. He kept saying that we were being too soft on the Russians. I left the breakfast hoping that we would be able to agree on a compromise, but I wasn't optimistic. Jackson had a strong constituency among American Jews. He was about to launch his Presidential campaign, and he was playing politics to the hilt.

While all this was going on, the Senate was considering the Export-Import Bank bill. Adlai Stevenson, a Democrat from Illinois, was shepherding the measure. Soviet trade with the U.S. had never reached its full potential, and we wanted to see it expand to billions of dollars per year. Export-Import Bank credits for the expansion of U.S. exports had seldom been restricted by Congress, but Stevenson amended the bill so as to limit the credits available to the U.S.S.R. to a paltry $300 million per year. No such limitation had ever been imposed upon other Communist nations. Poland and Yugoslavia, for example, had used billions of dollars of these credits. But Stevenson was insistent about his amendment and wouldn't listen to our predictions that its passage would have grave consequences.

During my first two weeks in office, I made a strenuous attempt to show critics that an "open" White House meant exactly that. George Meany of the AFL-CIO hadn't been invited to the Oval Office in more than a year. On August 18, I asked him over for a forty-five-
present themselves to a United States Attorney before January 31, 1975. They’d have to pledge allegiance to the country and agree to fulfill a two-year period of alternative service. Finally, they’d have to complete that obligation satisfactorily.

Deserters, for their part, could escape punishment once they pledged allegiance to the United States and agreed to spend two years in the branch of the military to which they had once belonged. At the end of this period they would receive a clemency discharge, which would not entitle them to normal VA benefits. The details of this plan, I knew, wouldn’t satisfy liberals, who wanted me to give general amnesty. Nor would it please conservatives, who demanded harsher punishment. Still, I thought it was fair, and I was hopeful that the Clemency Board—which I’d asked former Senator Charles Goodell to head—would get off to a quick start in processing the thousands of applications that I expected it to receive.

I also concentrated on eliminating, once and for all, the sort of abuses of power by some at the top that had flourished during the Nixon years. I discovered to my disbelief that both tradition and existing law gave the President access to individual income tax returns. I didn’t want to see anyone else’s return. I certainly didn’t think my staff should have that right, and in an executive order I placed severe restrictions on access to such files. Then, on September 20, in a memo to the heads of all departments and agencies, I talked about the need to keep the civil service—the more than two million government bureaucrats—out of politics. “I call upon you to see to it that the merit principles contained in the Civil Service Act and the personnel laws and regulations are fully and effectively carried out,” I said. “Appointments and promotions in the civil service must not be made on the basis of either politics, race, creed or sex.”

One of the first decisions I’d made as President was to ban any “bugs” or secret electronic recording devices either in the Oval Office or anywhere else in the building. The idea that anyone on my staff would tape another person without that person’s knowledge or consent was unconscionable, and I made sure that everyone knew my feelings about it. Additionally, late in September, I asked senior aides to draft and implement a new code of ethics for the White House staff. We didn’t put out a press release about this—we didn’t want a lot of fanfare or publicity—but the word got around and caused an improvement in the atmosphere.

On the foreign policy front, one of my chief concerns was the situation in the Middle East. On September 10, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his wife arrived in Washington. I had known Rabin when he was Israel’s ambassador to the U.S. A dour, very serious man who dressed conservatively and spoke in a soft, almost inaudible voice, he was nonetheless a tough negotiator. But toughness, I was convinced, was not the only ingredient needed to resolve the Middle East impasse. Flexibility—on both sides—was essential as well, and I wasn’t sure how flexible Rabin could be. “We have taken risks for peace,” he said, but he didn’t spell out what those risks had been, and in toasting me at a state dinner on September 12, he indicated that he wasn’t going to make concessions readily. Unfortunately, at the end of our two days of talks, we hadn’t made much progress toward solving the issues that still divided us, and I asked Kissinger to plan an October trip to the Middle East to see what he could do.

The long-standing conflict in that part of the world was also on the mind of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko when he came to Washington for two days of talks on September 20. Even before I became President, Kissinger had achieved significant success in easing the Soviets out of the Middle East. I thought they didn’t want a bona fide settlement there and that their only aim was to promote instability, so I wanted to keep them out. Gromyko, of course, complained about this. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R., he said, were cochairmen of the dormant Geneva Conference on the Middle East. Our two countries should work together in the interests of all parties. But Kissinger and I decided that we could accomplish more unilaterally by working with Israel and each of its Arab neighbors. Whenever Gromyko asked us about our plans, we would be as vague as possible. “We will keep you informed,” we’d say. That made him very upset.

I had better luck with Gromyko in discussing bilateral relations. I told him I thought Congress would listen to reason and strike out irksome amendments to the Trade Reform bill and the Export-Import Bank bill. This was reassuring. Then we talked about SALT. Nixon and Kissinger had been to Moscow that summer and had made minimal progress in their talks with Soviet leaders. But now Gromyko
hinted that his colleagues might be more "responsive" to the Ford Administration, just might be willing to make the sort of concessions that would enable us to agree on a new arms limitation pact. Kissinger and I decided that after his trip in early October to the Middle East, he would journey to Moscow to probe the Soviets' intent.

Next I turned my attention to reshaping the White House staff. Obviously, the first priority was to find a press secretary to replace terHorst. Although I knew that terHorst's deputies—Paul Miltich, Jack Hushen and Bill Roberts—were hard-working and competent, I didn't feel that any of them was up to so major a responsibility. Then Hartmann heard a rumor that Ron Nessen of NBC-TV might be interested. I asked him to double-check; it was true, and as it turned out, Nessen was the only person to whom I offered the post.

On the afternoon of September 19, Hartmann brought Nessen into the Oval Office. I told him I was surprised that he was interested in the job (which paid $42,500), because it would mean a cut in salary for him. He didn't care about that, Nessen replied. The challenge was what mattered most. He knew the job would be rough, but he thought he could handle it. In order to function effectively, he'd have to have as much information about all matters as quickly as possible. I raised a question: suppose a repeat of the terHorst-Nixon pardon situation occurred. If he knew everything and was asked about a sensitive issue, would that embarrass or compromise him before his former colleagues? No problem, he said. He recognized the potential conflict, but he would trust our judgment. I told him I would give him direct access to all staff members and allow him to sit in on all meetings except my private talks with individuals and the secret sessions of the NSC. As our meeting concluded, Hartmann turned to me: "You'd better tell him, Mr. President, that I have a lot of expertise in the field and that I'm going to be looking over his shoulder a lot."

I didn't think that was any way to welcome Ron to the staff. "Yes, it's true," I said, "Bob's had a lot of experience writing my speeches." There was a brief silence. Hartmann recoiled a bit. I had made the point.

Throughout my political career, nothing upset me more than bickering among members of my staff. It was time-consuming, terribly distracting and unnecessary. I had told my aides that I wouldn't tolerate it. But it continued, even accelerated, when I entered the White House, and—given the ambitions and personalities of the people involved—there didn't seem to be any way to put an immediate stop to it.

Hartmann was the worst offender, and to a degree it was understandable. Because he had been working for me since 1966 and had functioned effectively and loyally as one of my top aides since 1969, he expected to retain his position of primacy. Yet when we moved into the White House, he found that his direct access to me was blocked by Haig. He didn't like the idea of requesting an appointment to see me and Haig didn't want to let him waste my time. Inevitably, they clashed. Accounts of vicious infighting among members of the White House staff began to appear in the press. Hartmann seemed to be a likely source.

"You've got to get this guy under control," Haig told me on more than one occasion during my first month as President. "Otherwise, I can't serve you."

"Al, I want you to stay for at least a while longer," I replied. I concluded that I'd have to handle Hartmann myself. Hartmann, to be sure, was a person who stirred the pot. He made us all mad at one time or another, but he also kept us from becoming complacent or self-satisfied. And, in his own way, he was extremely valuable. I talked to Hartmann, told him that I didn't want to see any more stories injurious to Haig. But when the squabbling intensified, I began to look at the broader picture. There was no doubt in my mind that Haig was 100 percent loyal to me. Still, he did possess a "Nixon image." Then, too, he was weary of White House intrigue, so we resumed our discussions about other opportunities.

General Creighton Abrams, the Army Chief of Staff, had died on September 4. I considered Haig as Abrams's replacement and he wanted the job, but in order to get it, he'd have to be confirmed by the Senate. Because of his ties to the former President, we thought it possible that the Senators might attempt to reopen the Watergate affair at a time when I was doing everything I could to put Watergate and Nixon behind us. We concluded that the best alternative was for Haig to take the NATO job. If I sent him there, I could bring him...
The Soviets, I suspected, would adhere to their hard line on a new SALT agreement. The Jackson amendment to the Trade Reform bill, which was cosponsored in the House by Ohio Democrat Charles Vanik, was still pending in Congress. That irritated them; so did Adlai Stevenson's proposed amendment to the Export-Import Bank bill. Equally upsetting to them, and to American farmers as well, was a temporary embargo I'd placed on the overseas shipments of millions of tons of wheat and corn. (Such shipments, I decided early in October, coming at a time when the Department of Agriculture was forecasting a 12 to 15 percent drop in U.S. production of corn, would wreak havoc with our economy and push the inflation rate even higher.) So I was pleasantly surprised when Kissinger discerned a new moderation in the Soviet stand on SALT. I had already accepted invitations to visit Japan and South Korea at the end of November. If the Soviets were willing to meet us halfway on SALT, I could extend that trip and discuss with Brezhnev the issues that still divided us. Kissinger said he would see what could be arranged, and on October 26 it was announced that I would travel to the Siberian port city of Vladivostok on November 23.

But first we had to get through the fall election campaign. Republicans held only 42 seats in the Senate and 187 in the House. GOP governors held sway in the capitol of only eighteen states. Watergate, the Nixon resignation and my pardon of the former President all combined with the deteriorating economy to make our chances of scoring any gains remote. The only thing we could do was fight a holding action and try to cut out losses as much as possible. During the last three weeks of October I visited fifteen states—some of them more than once—and spoke on behalf of scores of Republicans. I wasn't as strident as some of my former colleagues in the House wanted me to be, but I feared an overdose of partisanship might disrupt the healing process which was still continuing. As the campaign neared its end, I traveled to Grand Rapids and appeared at a rally at Calvin College. When I entered the field house, the band struck up the "Michigan Fight Song." Then there was a pause. The master of ceremonies asked the band to play another number, a tune befitting the honored guest. As I walked on stage, the band obliged with "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

Late in October, Richard Nixon's health took a turn for the worse. The phlebitis in his left leg created blood clots that threatened his life, and doctors decided to operate. After the operation he went into shock, and doctors said his condition was critical. On October 31, I flew to Los Angeles to speak at a dinner for Republican candidates at the Century Plaza Hotel. My staff debated whether or not I ought to visit Nixon at the Long Beach Hospital; only half an hour away. If I made the trip, it would remind everyone of Watergate and the pardon. If I didn't, people would say I lacked compassion. I ended their debate as soon as I found out that it had begun. Of course I would go. Before dinner that evening, I telephoned Pat and asked how her husband was doing. "I don't want to push it," I said, "but would it help if I came down there?"

"Oh, there's nothing he'd like more," she replied.

Next morning, November 1, we helicoptered to the Long Beach airport, then drove to the hospital, where I talked to Nixon's physician, Dr. John Lungren. The former President, Lungren said, was a very sick man. I could see him, but I had to be very quiet, and I couldn't say anything that might upset him.

The hospital had just opened a new wing, and Nixon was the only patient there. I took the elevator to the seventh floor, where Pat, Julie and Tricia greeted me effusively. Then, with Lungren, I stepped toward Nixon's room. An attendant tried to open the door. He couldn't. Incredibly, the lock was jammed. It wouldn't respond to our frantic efforts and we had to wait five minutes while someone fetched an expert. I shuddered to think what might have happened had Nixon suddenly needed medical attention.

When I stepped into the room and saw Nixon's condition, I was even more shocked than I had been by the delay in opening that door. He was stretched out flat on his back. There were tubes in his nose and mouth, and wires led from his arms, chest and legs to machines with orange lights that blinked on and off. His face was ashen, and I thought I had never seen anyone closer to death. He opened his eyes and said, "Hi, Jerry," in a barely audible voice. We talked about generalities and the fall campaign. I told him the party had a good chance on election day. I wanted to tell him more, but I realized how difficult it was for him to respond to me. He couldn't keep his eyes
Custom provides that no one should ever pour his own cup of sake. To do so is a sign of sadness. You may, however, pour someone else's cup, which is a sign of friendship. Whenever a Geisha girl or another guest fills your cup, you should lift the cup while it is being filled and take a sip before putting the cup back on the table. Whenever the cup is empty, it will be refilled, so it is advisable not to "bottom up" on each occasion.

Everything went according to plan. The meal—which featured such delicacies as dried fish soup, seaweed and skewered sparrow—was delicious, the company convivial. I even became fairly adept in handling the chopsticks in my left hand. I was enjoying myself thoroughly. Suddenly, without warning, photographers appeared. Wait until Betty sees the pictures of me sitting with those Geisha girls, I thought.

Next morning we flew to the South Korean capital of Seoul. President Park Chung Hee met me at the airport and, later that day, after lunch with troops of the U.S. Army's Second Infantry Division at Camp Casey near the DMZ, I had a two-hour meeting with Park at the Blue House. A trim, poker-faced man who doesn't mince words, Park got down to business right away. There were 38,000 well-led, highly motivated American troops in South Korea at the time. He wanted a commitment that we keep our forces there and increase our military aid, including more modern weapons. In 1972, after we had withdrawn 20,000 troops from the country, we had promised to modernize the South Korean forces, at a cost of $1.5 billion, over a five-year period. Because of technical problems and some Congressional foot dragging, we were nearly a year behind in keeping that commitment, and Park wanted to know what he could expect.

Our troops would stay where they were, I assured him. Assuming Congress approved, the military aid we had promised would be delivered as soon as possible, and there would be no future slowdowns in the modernization program. Kissinger, Scowcroft, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Habib and U.S. Ambassador Richard L. Sneider were sitting in on my talks with Park. As our meeting drew to a close, I asked them to leave so I could chat with Park alone about the sensitive issue of human rights. While enjoying our support since 1972, Park had disbanded the National Assembly, set aside the South Korean constitution and adopted one-man rule. A former presidential candidate was under house arrest; the press had been gagged, church and student leaders had been jailed for criticizing Park's dictatorship. Congressional support, I said, would erode very quickly unless he took a more reasonable approach toward his opponents.

He understood that, he said, but he couldn't tolerate certain things the dissidents were doing. Widespread domestic unrest would undermine his ability to withstand a military attack by North Korea and prevent his own economy from growing at its programmed pace. In 1953, his country had been ravaged by war. Its economic progress since then had been remarkable, and he was not going to let those accomplishments go down the drain just to satisfy his political opponents. I told him I understood his problems, but urged him once again to be more lenient. Although he didn't commit himself to any specifics, I was led to believe that he would modify some of his more repressive policies.

The third stop on my Far Eastern tour was the Siberian port city of Vladivostok. Brezhnev, accompanied by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, had come by train from Moscow—four thousand miles across seven time zones—to meet me at the airport on the morning of November 23, and from the moment we met, we got along well. "I understand you are quite an expert on soccer," I said as we shook hands for the first time.

"Yes, I play the left side," Brezhnev replied, "but I haven't played in a long time."

"I haven't played football for a long time, either," I told him. "I wasn't very fast, but I could hold the line."

The bantering continued as we boarded a train that would take us to the site of our conference, the small resort town of Okeanskaya. Looking out the dining car window at the snow-covered terrain, I mentioned the difficulty we had clearing snow from the streets of Washington and how snarled the traffic became when the weather turned sour. Brezhnev's bushy eyebrows arched, and he leaned forward across the table that separated us. "Well, that will be our first deal," he said. "We'll send you Soviet snowplows."

Gromyko, normally a dour man, joined in. "Yes, snowplows," he said, "at a good low price."
The train ride took an hour and a half, and as our talks continued, I had a fine opportunity not only to size up Brezhnev as a world leader but also to observe a special penchant of Henry Kissinger's. Soviet stewards had piled cookies, pastries and mints on the table in the dining car, and Henry simply couldn't resist them. At first he would check to see if anyone was looking before he reached out to pluck a morsel from the plate. Then, aware that everyone knew what he was doing—the Soviets thought his antics were hilarious—he no longer tried to conceal his addiction. In that ninety-minute period he must have finished off three plates.

The site of the talks was the Okeanskaya Sanatorium, a health spa used by vacationing personnel from local military bases. Although the Soviets had labored for ten days to spruce up the place and apply a fresh coat of paint to the main building, it still looked like an abandoned YMCA camp in the Catskills. The spartan surroundings didn't bother Brezhnev at all. He was still in an ebullient mood as he escorted us to our dacha. "Why did you have to bring Henry Kissinger here?" he asked with mock solemnity.

"Well, it's just very hard to go anywhere without him," I answered.

Brezhnev pretended a scowl. "Kissinger is such a scoundrel," he said.

But Henry was ready for that. "It takes one to know one," he replied.

Soon the joking stopped. We had come to this remote Siberian site hoping to reach an agreement that would put a cap on the arms race and further the chances for a lasting peace. Our two countries had first reached an agreement on strategic arms limitations in May 1972. That accord put a freeze on the numbers of land- and sea-based ballistic missiles on each side, both those in existence and those under construction. The Soviets could deploy 2,360 and the United States 1,710. There was no limitation on the number of heavy bombers each side could keep ready for combat. Nor was there a limitation on the number of missiles each side could equip with multiple warheads (MIRVs). And this is where the pact worked to our advantage. Even though the Soviets had built and were thereby permitted more missiles, we already had a far larger number of long-range bombers which compensated for the disparity. Additionally, we had MIRVed almost half our missiles. The Soviets were far behind us technologically and hadn't deployed any MIRVs of their own. On the other hand, the Soviet missiles had bigger warheads and greater megatonnage. (In the 1960s, U.S. military strategists had opted for smaller warheads, less megatonnage, for greater accuracy.)

That first SALT agreement would expire in October 1977. Long before that date, both sides endeavored to reach a permanent—and more encompassing—accord. Hoping to achieve such an agreement, Nixon had flown to Moscow in June. But his efforts to bring MIRVs into the new agreement had failed. The United States then decided to work for a more comprehensive approach and a longer time period—ten years rather than five. When he met with me in Washington, Gromyko suggested that a summit meeting could resolve our differences. Initially, my reaction was cool. I saw no reason to travel halfway around the world just to hear a restatement of known Soviet views. The Soviets responded by pushing harder and hinting that they would make new concessions. Kissinger returned from Moscow in October convinced that the Soviets were sincere in their desire to reach a new accord. Even before I arrived at Okeanskaya, we had agreed on the general framework of a SALT II pact. We still had to button down two things: the numbers of launchers and MIRVs permitted each side, and whether to specify equal numbers of these for each country or allow a differential—with the Soviets to have more launchers and the United States more MIRVs. Defense Secretary Schlesinger and the Joint Chiefs of Staff urged me to hold out for numerical equivalency of ballistic missiles. They didn't think the Soviets would ever agree and said that I'd probably have to accept a compromise. Kissinger didn't want that. "Hang tough," he said in effect, "and they'll come around."

Before my meeting with Brezhnev, Kissinger and I had talked at length about the Soviet leader's personality and negotiating techniques. Brezhnev, Henry said, would dominate the Soviet side of the discussions, but on technical points he would confer with his advisers. Invariably, Henry continued, he would lead off with an angry, blustery diatribe accusing the U.S. of sabotaging the chances for lasting peace. He would, for example, blame us for not working with the So-
viets in the Middle East. But this would be primarily for home consumption. It would give him a chance to score points with the Soviet hierarchy. It would also be his way of testing my resolve. He would be curious to see if I would bend or fight back. And so, Henry maintained, we should not retreat from our position. We should be polite but firm. If they really wanted an agreement, they would be the ones to bend.

Which is precisely what transpired. No sooner had Brezhnev and I made our opening statements in the austere conference hall at Okeanskaya than we began to focus on the specific force levels that each side could have. After initially proposing different numbers—with the Soviets pushing for higher figures—we compromised at 2,400 ballistic missiles for each country. That meant they would have to reduce their launchers by about 300. Next we agreed that each side be allowed 1,320 MIRVs. We maintained our position from previous negotiations that our Forward Base System of F-4s, F-111s and FB-111s as well as the nuclear weapons we had deployed in Western Europe not be counted in our agreed-upon total of strategic weapons. Brezhnev frowned behind his wire-rimmed glasses. Chain-smoking, sipping from a glass of mineral water, he suggested a pause while he conferred with his aides. Minutes later, he returned to the conference table. Agreed, he said. That meant we had prevailed.

Now Brezhnev wanted something in return. We should stop production of the Trident submarine and cancel our plans to build the B-1 bomber. Our national security, I replied, demanded that we push forward with both. We simply couldn’t rely on our aging B-52s.

Then we turned to questions of a more general nature. I assured Brezhnev that although we had economic difficulties at home, he should not assume that the U.S. was weak and getting weaker all the time. Brezhnev countered that some members of his Politburo didn’t believe détente was a good idea. If he made too many concessions in his attempt to reach an accord, he would lose their support and be in trouble at home. I said I understood his predicament. Then, displaying a surprising grasp of the way our political system worked, he began talking about Congress. The Soviets had learned during Nixon’s years in office that the future of their relations with the United States didn’t depend solely on the decisions of the American President.

Congress was a force to be reckoned with, and Brezhnev wasn’t happy about that. Congress, he said, had fouled up the progress we thought we were going to make with the expansion of trade. And now it was insisting that it had the right to pass judgment on Soviet emigration policies. “You just had elections in your country,” he said. “What kind of a Congress will you be dealing with for the next two years?”

“Mr. General Secretary,” I replied, “I can only say that my fingers are crossed.”

Initially, we had planned to meet at six o’clock, talk for two hours, break for dinner and then resume the next morning. But we had made so much progress that both of us decided to cancel dinner and just keep going. We did take three short breaks to relax, walk outside in the snow and talk privately with our aides—without the possibility of our conversations being bugged.

During one of these breaks, Brezhnev walked up and gave me a wood portrait of myself. It was a marvelous work, although it didn’t look much like me; the artist had worked from a picture in some Russian magazine. Kennerly, Hartmann and Scowcroft were standing with a group of English-speaking Russians when I stepped outside. I held the portrait up while Kennerly began reeling off his photographs. The Russians crowded in, and I said, “Isn’t this nice? Just look at it. I think it’s a great likeness.” Kennerly paused from his picture-taking and said, “Hey now, would you look at that? They gave you a picture of Frank Sinatra.” That was one time I didn’t appreciate his wise-guy humor.

We didn’t wind up our talks until after midnight, and I was famished. The Soviet chefs assigned to our quarters were preparing a late snack, and as I waited for the food to arrive, I remembered that back home in the U.S., Michigan was scheduled to play Ohio State. I told Bob Barrett, my military aide, to wake me at six o’clock with the score of the football game.

Precisely at six, Barrett entered my room. “Mr. President, time to wake up,” he said.

“How did the game turn out? What was the score?”

“Twelve to ten,” Barrett replied, and turned to leave the room.

“Wait a minute. Who had the twelve, and who had the ten?”
“I was afraid you’d ask me that.” From the look on his face, I knew Michigan had lost. “Yeah,” Barrett continued, “the same poor kid who missed the field goal last year missed another one seconds before the end of the game.”

I knew how heartbroken that Michigan player must have been, and I found myself wishing that I were somewhere where I could easily pick up a telephone and try to brighten his day.

Shortly after ten o’clock, I returned to the conference hall for our second session. This meeting was devoted to the situation in the Middle East and the progress that both sides hoped to make in reducing our military forces in Europe. Although our discussions were candid, there were no breakthroughs. But our meeting the night before had far exceeded my expectations, and I was euphoric. As soon as technicians had ironed out the few remaining problems, we would sign a SALT II accord.

Brezhnev shared my enthusiasm. Impulsively, after a late lunch, he invited me to accompany him on a tour of Vladivostok. We climbed into the back seat of a long black limousine and headed toward the city, thirteen miles away. The local commissar, a large, dark-complexioned man wearing a thick wool coat, sat in the jump seat in front of Brezhnev, and the interpreter, Victor Sukhodrev, sat in front of me. Our conversation was natural and uninhibited. How many people lived in Vladivostok? What was the main industry? And was it always this cold? Twenty minutes later, we drove down a steep hill, entered the city and swung around the main square. A small crowd was there, and even though it was dusk, they recognized the car and applauded. The city itself reminded me of San Francisco, and I wished that I’d had more time to explore the place. But it was starting to get dark and we headed back toward Okeanskaya.

And that’s when the strangest thing happened. Brezhnev reached over and grabbed my left hand with his right hand. He began by telling me how much his people had suffered during World War II. “I do not want to inflict that upon my people again,” he said.

“Mr. General Secretary, I believe we made very significant progress,” I said. “I hope the momentum of our meeting will continue and that next year we can finalize what we have accomplished here.”

His grip on my hand tightened, and he turned to look me in the eye. “We have accomplished something very significant, and it’s our responsibility, yours and mine, on behalf of our countries, to achieve the finalization of the document.”

“I am optimistic that we can,” I said. “We have made so much headway. This is a big step forward to prevent a nuclear holocaust.”

“I agree with you,” he said. “This is an opportunity to protect not only the people of our two countries but, really, all mankind. We have to do something.”

I don’t remember what else was said. I do remember that he held on to my hand until the car pulled up in front of my dacha at Okeanskaya.

On our departure, a train took us back to the airport. Air Force One was waiting and Brezhnev walked with me to the ramp. On the first leg of our trip, we had stopped to refuel in Anchorage, Alaska. A local furrier and personal friend, Jack Kim, had presented me with a heavy Alaskan wolf coat. A warm and comfortable garment, it had served me well in Siberia. I saw Brezhnev eyeing it enviously. So just before I mounted the steps, I took off the coat and gave it to him. He put it on, and he seemed truly overwhelmed. We waved goodbye, and taxied down the runway. In another few hours we would be home. The American people would be delighted to hear that my meeting with Brezhnev had gone so well, and Congress, with some exceptions, would probably endorse the new accord. But what, I wondered, would I tell my old friend Jack Kim about his Alaskan wolf coat?

Vladivostok had been an appropriate ending to a journey designed to strengthen ties with old friends and expand areas of agreement with potential adversaries. The results of the trip had exceeded my expectations. There was, of course, no way for me to know at the time that this would be a high-water mark and that the next five and a half months would be the most difficult of my Presidency—if not my life. It was a period during which Murphy’s Law prevailed. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong, and on almost every front the nation took quite a battering.

The recession was deepening. Back on October 8, I had submitted to Congress a detailed program to deal with the problems of infla-
Another concern of mine in the waning days of 1974 was the status of the trade bill. The House had already passed the bill, and on December 13 the Senate did too. Although I thought the bill—the most significant trade legislation in the last forty years—would strengthen our economy and further our hopes for peace, I was concerned by its inclusion of language that could only be viewed as objectionable and discriminatory by other nations, primarily the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which linked our granting of most-favored-nation status to the Soviets to a relaxation of their emigration policies. The amendment had passed the Senate 88 to 0. On December 19, the day

that House-Senate conferees reached agreement on the bill, the Soviets reacted predictably. They issued a formal statement denying that they had ever given us specific assurances that they would ease their emigration policies in return for U.S. concessions on trade. Ominously, Gromyko said the Soviet Union expected a decrease—rather than an increase—in the number of Jewish citizens permitted to leave the country in 1975.

But that still didn’t give pause to our lawmakers. On December 20, both houses of Congress approved the conference report and sent the bill to the White House. Although I knew that its enactment would damage the good relations my Administration had achieved with the Soviets, I decided reluctantly to sign the measure into law. A veto would have been overridden by an overwhelming majority. I could only hope that when members of Congress saw the damage they had done to the cause of furthering the emigration of Soviet Jews, they would change their minds in the next session and vote to soften or delete the amendment from the bill. But I wasn’t going to hold my breath. As James Reston pointed out in the New York Times: “In the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, the Congress is reasserting itself in many positive ways, but it still has not found the line between effective and destructive intervention. It can and should influence the objectives and instruments of foreign policy, but when it intervenes in negotiations, it invariably gets into trouble.” In this instance, Congressional intervention was counterproductive. Jewish emigration from the U.S.S.R. dropped precipitously, and the Soviets canceled their 1972 trade agreement with us. They also reneged on their promise to settle a World War II lend-lease debt. In a world of 150 nations and fast-moving change, diplomacy is a continuing process. It must not be frozen in a statute.

On December 22, Betty, Susan and I flew to Vail for what I hoped would be a Christmas vacation with plenty of time to enjoy the slopes. The weather and snow, as it turned out, were almost ideal. But even though I was far from Washington, the pressures of the Presidency were never far behind. In just a few days’ time, I knew, I would have to make final decisions on the budget for fiscal year 1976. I would have to submit to Congress new proposals to deal with the economy and the energy crisis. So almost every day, after skiing
simply had to fulfill. Rumsfeld and I discussed other candidates and quickly agreed that Howard H. ("Bo") Callaway would be a splendid choice. A graduate of West Point, he had served with distinction during the Korean War. He had managed Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, and turned it into a thriving enterprise. In 1964, he had won election to the House and two years later had nearly become Georgia's first Republican governor. As Secretary of the Army in 1973, Callaway had boosted enlistments and done a first-class job of presiding over the switch to an all-volunteer force. He was attractive and articulate, and he possessed great personal integrity. I thought his selection would give me a boost not only in the South but with conservatives everywhere.

Calling Callaway into the Oval Office, I told him that I wanted my 1976 campaign to emphasize my dedication to five central themes: increased freedom for all our citizens from the encroachments of an ever-expanding federal government, the preservation of our free enterprise system, continued fiscal responsibility, a strong national defense, and affirmation of the rights and responsibilities of state and local governments. When Bo said that he could subscribe to each of those goals, I asked him to run the campaign.

That's when the trouble began. Back on June 16, I had endorsed Rockefeller as my 1976 running mate. We had worked extremely well together, and I thought we'd make an even more effective team in the years ahead. But under the provisions of the new election law, Nelson and I couldn't run as a team; we had to run separate campaigns. On July 9, one day after I had announced my candidacy, Callaway held a press conference and commented on this procedure. "The Ford and Rockefeller campaigns are not one and the same," he said. That was accurate as far as it went. But then Callaway went on to imply that Rockefeller was a liability.

I met with a troubled Nelson Rockefeller the next afternoon and assured him that he still had my full support. I still thought that he was doing a fine job, and I deeply appreciated it. Callaway, I explained, had had to say that our two campaigns were separate entities. But then he had got carried away. One reason was his desire to extend an olive branch to conservatives, he sincerely believed that the way to win delegates in the South was to imply that I hadn't made up my mind about a running mate and that Reagan therefore was a strong possibility. Another reason was his inexperience in dealing with the national press. By nature, Callaway always said exactly what was on his mind. He didn't know how to deflect probing questions. I told Nelson that the problem was only temporary and would soon be forgotten.

I let Callaway know how I felt, but he didn't get the message. On July 24, he met with reporters again and ventured the opinion that I might select a younger man—Rockefeller was sixty-seven—for Vice President or someone who could provide a better balance to the ticket. Rockefeller, he told the press, was "the number one problem. You and I both know that if Rockefeller took himself out, it would help with the nomination."

I was furious. Rockefeller was placed in an almost untenable position. He had never had a high opinion of Callaway's political skills, and he seemed convinced that Callaway was getting his marching orders from Don Rumsfeld, that Rumsfeld was orchestrating a plot to get rid of him so he could become Vice President himself. That wasn't the case at all. Rumsfeld was just as upset as I was by Callaway's remarks, and he sat in the Oval Office when I told Callaway that I wouldn't tolerate any more comments like that. I didn't pound the table or shout or read the riot act to him, but I did emphasize my personal loyalty to Nelson, and I said I couldn't allow anyone to downgrade him. "Bo," I went on, "the Vice President is very sensitive to the kinds of things you are saying. He is important to us in getting the nomination. I personally have a great fondness for him and a strong allegiance to him. You just can't do this anymore."

"Mr. President," he replied, "I'm sorry. I really am. I got caught."

Finally, toward the end of July, he began to change his tune. "The Vice President is an asset," he told reporters. "He has a great many attributes to bring to any ticket." Unfortunately, by that time, the damage had been done.

About a month earlier, my aides had received word that exiled Soviet author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wanted to visit me in the Oval Office. The information had come in a letter from North Carolina Republican Senator Jesse Helms. On July 2, Marsh, Scowcroft and I
discussed the problem. Kissinger was out of town, but he and Brent had talked about the issue earlier. Brent said that both he and Henry thought my seeing Solzhenitsyn would be unwise. I was due to meet with Brezhnev at the end of the month to discuss matters of vital importance to both nations. Why run the unnecessary risk of sabotaging those talks before they even began? Marsh presented both sides of the coin. If I saw Solzhenitsyn, I might improve my standing with conservatives. But Jack also recognized the foreign policy implications. I might jeopardize chances of achieving a SALT II accord. In the end, I decided to subordinate political gains to foreign policy considerations. I asked Jack to get word to Helms that my schedule was too tight to allow a meeting with Solzhenitsyn before I left on my European trip at the end of July.

Then someone on Capitol Hill leaked the story to the press, and the furor began. Solzhenitsyn made no secret of the fact that he thought my policy toward the Soviet Union was wrong. As soon as I saw the damage that my “snub” was causing me among conservatives, I told Marsh to tell Helms that I’d be glad to see Solzhenitsyn when I returned from Helsinki. The Soviet author had an “open” invitation. And this was the curious aspect of the whole affair. As soon as I issued the invitation, everyone seemed to lose interest in arranging the meeting. Helms never pushed it again, and Solzhenitsyn himself was reported to be too busy to come to Washington.

Ever since 1954, the Soviets had wanted us to attend a thirty-five-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Initially, the United States had been cool to the idea because we didn’t see any advantages to be gained. Then the Soviets had offered concessions. One was an East-West agreement on the status of West Berlin. A second was their stated willingness to begin mutual and balanced force reduction (MBFR) talks in Vienna so that the armies of the NATO and Warsaw Pact nations could be reduced in numbers and the imbalance between them lessened. In 1973, negotiators for both sides started planning the European Security Conference which was to be held in Helsinki. It was to be the largest gathering of European heads of state since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and on the face of it, there were a number of good reasons for me to attend.

The summit’s purpose was to have thirty-five nations sign documents that spelled out what their commitments were in three significant areas: security, economic and cultural cooperation, and the very important issue of freedom of movement of people and ideas. In exchange for our agreement that “legitimate” postwar boundaries were inviolable, the Soviets had conceded that national borders could be changed by peaceful means, and this, I felt, represented a real victory for our foreign policy. After all, it was not the Western countries that might be tempted to alter existing boundaries by force. The Russian tanks that had rolled into Prague in 1968 were implementing the Brezhnev doctrine that said the Soviets had the right to intervene militarily to keep their client states in line. At Helsinki they would be renouncing that policy. In addition, they had agreed to sign a document that pledged them to observe the basic principles of human rights. They had never recognized such international standards before. If the nations attending the conference failed to live up to their agreements, Europe would be no worse off than it had been previously, but if they made good on their promises, the cause of freedom behind the Iron Curtain would advance. That was a worthwhile goal.

Before flying to Helsinki, I’d be stopping off in West Germany and Poland; after leaving the Finnish capital, I’d be going to Romania and Yugoslavia. There were solid reasons for these visits. By touching down in West Germany first, I could emphasize the U.S. commitment to that country’s defense. I could also discuss joint economic strategy with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia were the three Eastern European countries least subservient to Moscow; it was proper for us to encourage their independent course. Finally, the trip to Helsinki would give me a chance to see what progress we could make toward reaching a SALT II accord. Since my meeting with Brezhnev in 1974, technicians on both sides had tried to resolve our differences. They had achieved success in some areas but had encountered new problems in others, and as a result, we had to postpone Brezhnev’s visit to the U.S. three times. The sticking points were our new cruise missile and their “Backfire” bomber.

In return for conceding our right to keep long-range bombers in Western Europe, the Soviets expected us to classify the Backfire bomber as a nonstrategic weapon. That was something we didn’t
want to do. Although it lacked the range of our B-52, the Backfire could fly from the Soviet Union to Cuba without refueling. Additionally, it boasted a nuclear weapons delivery capability.

We would also be discussing the cruise missile, a subsonic but highly maneuverable weapon that possesses a fantastic degree of accuracy. The cruise can be fired from manned aircraft, submarines and surface ships as well as from land-based launching pads, and it is almost impossible to detect and destroy because it flies in under the radar screen. That was what worried the Soviets. They wanted range limitations placed on the cruise. (The very fact that we had the potential of a cruise in our weapons arsenal represents something of a minor miracle. In 1972 and 1973, the Department of Defense was unenthusiastic about the missile's capabilities. Secretary Schlesinger, in fact, had opposed funding the necessary research and development. That's when Kissinger intervened. He thought the weapon was essential for our own security and persuaded Nixon to overrule the Secretary of Defense.)

Now Schlesinger and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were hardening their opposition to any limitations on the cruise. Indeed, Schlesinger had become the missile's greatest advocate. This seemed certain to complicate our hopes for a compromise. I believed, and I knew that Brezhnev agreed with me, that a SALT II accord was vital to the interests of both countries. I hoped the two of us could get together at Helsinki, level with each other as we had at Vladivostok, and wind up with a deal.

So for all these reasons, the European trip was likely to advance our hopes for peace. Yet no journey I made during my Presidency was so widely misunderstood. "Jerry, don't go," the Wall Street Journal implored, and the New York Times called the trip "misguided and empty." The responses from politicians were more predictable. Washington Senator Scoop Jackson accused me of "taking us backward, not forward, in the search for a genuine peace." And Ronald Reagan said, "I am against it [the Helsinki conference], and I think all Americans should be against it." Jackson was obviously running for President himself, and Reagan, it appeared, was gearing up for his own race.

I expected comments like these, but what I didn't expect was the outrage that the trip would provoke among Americans of Eastern European descent. A sampling of my White House mail showed 558 letters against the Helsinki agreement and only thirty-two in favor of it. Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian groups scheduled a vigil in front of the White House to protest Administration policy. On July 25, the day before my departure, I invited seven members of Congress, together with representatives of Eastern European ethnic groups, to meet with me in the Cabinet Room. When they took their seats around the long oval table, I told them I understood their doubts. I knew why they were suspicious of promises from Marxist regimes which had not proved to be reliable in the past.

Now, however, I stressed, we had an opportunity to make good use of the European Security Conference to get a commitment from leaders of closed and controlled countries to permit greater freedom of movement for individuals and freer flow of information and ideas. The conference also promised to set a standard by which the world could measure progress.

At the same time, I explained, we continued to support the Eastern European peoples in their aspirations for more freedom. The United States had never recognized the Soviet incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and was not doing so now. No territory acquired in violation of international law would be recognized as legal, and the United States would not compromise this long-standing principle.

My audience, if not converted, was receptive, and I felt I had stated the case for Helsinki honestly and effectively. The trouble was that some members of the White House staff didn't view Helsinki as a significant accomplishment. In their comments to the press, they were defensive about it. They should have lauded the accord as a victory. Instead, they intimated that it was "another Kissinger deal that was forced down the President's throat"; they started making excuses for it, and this furthered speculation that the journey was ill-conceived. In terms of domestic politics they may have been correct. But I have always thought that the responsibility of a leader was to lead. If any journey anywhere offered the chance of strengthening prospects for peace and bettering America's position in the world, I would embark upon it.

Just before I left, Congress slapped me in the face by refusing to
lift its embargo on the shipment of arms to Turkey. I considered this the single most irresponsible, short-sighted foreign policy decision Congress had made in all the years I'd been in Washington. In predictable retaliation, the Turks closed all but one of the roughly two dozen bases we had in their country. I had hoped to persuade Turkish Premier Suleyman Demirel to sit down with Greek Premier Constantine Karamanlis in Helsinki in order to hammer out an agreement about Cyprus. Both men had given me a positive response. Now Demirel was so angry at the Congressional vote that he changed his mind. I urged Congress to reverse itself.

Betty and our son Jack accompanied me on the trip. Our first stop, on the evening of July 26, was the West German capital of Bonn. During the next day and a half, I met twice with Chancellor Schmidt, attended a picnic with troops of the U.S. Third Armored Division and their families and enjoyed a state dinner aboard the cruise ship Drachenfels as it motored down the Rhine to the ancient city of Linz. On July 28 we flew to Warsaw, Poland. After laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, I met with First Secretary Gierek to discuss expansion of our bilateral trade, détente and the prospects for a SALT II accord. Our views on each issue were reasonably similar. There was a state dinner at Wilanow Palace that night, and next morning we flew south to Krakow. Then we helicoptered to Auschwitz, the infamous World War II death camp where four million civilians had been killed. I had read about the holocaust, but this couldn't have prepared me for the horror of the place. The Poles had preserved the camp as a memorial, and I could see the railroad terminal where prisoners arrived in boxcars, the brick barracks where they lived until they were too feeble to work, and the concrete ruins of the gas chambers where millions of them died. After placing a wreath at the base of a stone monument, I stepped back to observe a moment of silent prayer. I signed the visitors book, then entered one of the barracks. I saw the crowded tiers of bunks, and I could visualize the way the Nazis had tortured their victims. How long, I asked our guide, could a prisoner survive? Six months, he replied. Earlier, Henry had told me that members of his immediate family had perished at Auschwitz. He could scarcely talk about the tragedy, and as we stood by the barracks, there was little we could say without losing control. I shall never forget the unbelievable horror of that place.

Later that afternoon, we flew on to Helsinki. The next morning, after a working breakfast with Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Great Britain, Kissinger and I held the first of two lengthy sessions with Brezhnev and Gromyko. The General Secretary seemed thinner and paler than he had at Vladivostok. He occasionally slurried his speech, which appeared to confirm reports I'd heard that he had recently been ill. Once again, as they had the first time we met, the Soviets led off with a verbal attack against us. "We don't like the way you're handling the situation in the Middle East," Gromyko said. "We understood that you were going to include us in the peace process and that our two countries would work together. Here you are, going off on a tangent. That is contrary to the spirit of détente, and it's upsetting us."

We responded in kind. Once these obligatory opening statements were out of the way, we got down to business. Picking up where we had left off at Vladivostok, we discussed verification of underground nuclear tests that each side could conduct, and also the rules for counting MIRVs—how to tell whether a missile had a single or a multiple warhead. There the Soviets granted a concession. If they placed a MIRV in a certain location, then we had the right to assume that every missile in that field had a MIRV capability. Our talks went well until we began to address the issues that had separated us before. The Soviets concentrated on the various versions of the cruise missile and urged us to accept restrictions on their range and means of delivery.

Tentatively, we agreed to a limitation of 1,850 miles for the airborne cruise and a range of 375 miles for its submarine-carried counterpart. But how could they make sure that we were living up to the agreement? A cruise will fly as far as its fuel tank will permit. If you want to double its range, you add an extra tank. It is as simple as that. I had to agree that verification was a sticky issue and the Soviets had reasonable cause for concern. Brezhnev and I decided to leave the problem to the technical experts in the hope that they could find a solution.

Next we turned to the Backfire bomber. Brezhnev himself de-
scribed the plane’s capabilities and kept insisting that it was not a strategic weapon. His figures didn’t coincide with the ones our own Air Force had given me. Finally, I said, “Well, Mr. General Secretary, here is what our people tell me that Backfire can do,” and I began to reel off the statistics. He seemed surprised, almost shocked, by what I was telling him. He asked for a short recess so he could consult with his technical advisers. Ten minutes later, he returned, and he was angry. He didn’t shout, but he raised his voice and punctuated his remarks with gestures. “Our figures are right,” he said. “We know what the plane can do. Your figures are wrong.”

“I have to depend on the information given me,” I replied. “Our people have been right in most instances in the past. I have to use our figures in negotiating with you.”

We looked each other in the eye. Neither of us was going to give ground, so we agreed to disagree about Backfire and then moved on to other things. Nearly two hours later, we recessed our talks and agreed to another meeting before leaving Helsinki.

An hour or so after Brezhnev’s departure, I hosted an embassy luncheon for Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis. Despite the Congressional vote, it was vital, I said, that he and Demirel, his Turkish counterpart, get together to explore possible solutions to the Cyprus dispute. Karamanlis agreed to a meeting on August 2. So did Demirel. Then on the night of July 31, the House of Representatives reconsidered its decision to embargo military aid to the Turks. Once again emotion triumphed over common sense. The House let the ban stand. Demirel canceled his meeting with Karamanlis and returned to Ankara.

Because the roster of nations at the Helsinki conference was in English, I was among the last of the thirty-five heads of state to address the gathering. For three long days prior to my speech, I sat through every session in the elegant Finlandia House. President Giscard and Prime Minister Wilson spoke eloquently from the background of their countries’ great libertarian traditions. General Secretary Brezhnev, in what struck me as a conciliatory address, observed: “The special political importance and moral force of the [Helsinki] understandings reside in the fact that they are to be certified by the signatures of the top leaders of the participating states. We assume that all countries represented will implement the understandings reached. As regards the Soviet Union, it will act precisely in that manner.”

At the end of the afternoon session on August 1, it was my turn to speak. “The goals we are stating today are the yardstick by which our performance will be measured,” I said. “The people of all Europe and the people of North America are thoroughly tired of having their hopes raised and then shattered by empty words and unfulfilled pledges.

“Peace is not a piece of paper. But lasting peace is at least possible today because we have learned from the experience of the last thirty years that peace is a process requiring mutual restraint and practical arrangements. This conference is a part of that process—a challenge, not a conclusion. We face unresolved problems of military security in Europe; we face them with very real differences in values and aims. But if we deal with them with careful preparation, if we focus on concrete issues, if we maintain forward movement, we have the right to expect real progress.”

I paused and looked directly at Brezhnev. “To my country,” I went on, “these principles are not clichés or empty phrases. We take this work and these words very seriously. We will spare no effort to ease tensions and to solve problems between us, but it is important that you realize the deep devotion of the American people and their government to human rights and fundamental freedoms and thus to the pledges that this conference has made regarding the freer movement of people, ideas, information. History will judge this conference,” I concluded, “not by what we say here today but by what we do tomorrow—not by the promises we make but by the promises we keep. Our people want a better future. Our presence here offers them further hope. We must not let them down.”

Press reaction to the speech was uniformly generous. The Los Angeles Times said it was “probably Mr. Ford’s most impressive speech” as President. The Chicago Tribune highlighted my warning not to underestimate the devotion of the American people to the cause of human rights. I felt my message to Europe—that America still cared—had come through loud and clear.

Next morning just prior to my departure from Helsinki, I met with Brezhnev again to see if we could break our deadlock on SALT. The
cruise missile and the Backfire bomber, however, remained stumbling blocks. Reluctantly, after a three-hour conversation, we concluded that we weren’t going to reach agreement soon. Gromyko would be coming to Washington in September. Kissinger was scheduled to fly to Moscow in December. Perhaps by that time both sides could agree on a compromise.

After visiting Romania and Yugoslavia, we flew back to the United States. The failure to reach a SALT accord was disturbing, but on balance I felt the Helsinki trip had been a great success. As José A. Cabranes, an authority on international law and vice president of the International League for Human Rights, has said: “Careful reading of the Helsinki [documents] will confirm that the Soviet Union did not achieve its principal objectives. The Soviet bloc did not obtain a surrogate World War II peace treaty. It did not obtain renunciation of territorial claims or a commitment to the immutability of present frontiers. The Helsinki accord did not endorse the Brezhnev doctrine on intervention in ‘fraternal countries.’ The United States, Britain and France did not waive any four-power rights in Germany.”

What the Soviets did achieve, Cabranes went on to say, was a propaganda victory: “The rage of American citizens of Baltic extraction — the outcry that they had been ‘sold out’ by President Ford and Secretary Kissinger — was a testament to the Soviets’ successful public opinion campaign.” No sooner had I returned to Washington than I saw evidence of this. The first sampling of White House mail showed 122 letters condemning the accords; only eleven letters approved of what I had done, and I dropped several percentage points in the polls. The well-meaning ethnic groups in this country simply didn’t understand our accomplishment. This was not a failure in substance. It was a failure in public relations, and I will have to accept a large share of the blame.

Further compounding my problems was an interview that Betty gave to CBS reporter Morley Safer which was telecast on 60 Minutes the night of August 10. “What if Susan Ford came to you and said, ‘Mother, I’m having an affair?’” Betty was asked. And she replied, “Well, I wouldn’t be surprised. I think she’s a perfectly normal human being like all young girls. I would certainly counsel her and advise her on the subject, and I’d want to know pretty much about the young man — whether it was a worthwhile encounter or whether it was going to be one of those . . .” Betty stopped, then added, “She’s pretty young to start affairs.”

But Safer pressed on. “Nevertheless, old enough?”

“Oh, yes, she’s a big girl,” Betty replied.

She went on to discuss other subjects that First Ladies usually avoid. Had our children tried marijuana? “Probably,” she said. Might she have tried it herself had it been in vogue when she was growing up? “Probably,” again. Finally, what did she think of the Supreme Court’s ruling to allow abortions? It was “the best thing in the world,” she replied, “a great, great decision.”

Betty has always been forthright in expressing her views — I had admired her candor from the moment we met and had always encouraged her to speak her mind — and we had few disagreements, but when we differed, we respected the other’s opinion. Yet I was under no illusions as to what the reaction to her remarks would be. Letters, phone calls and telegrams deluged the White House, and two-thirds of them were critical. Some religious leaders said they were “appalled,” and there were harsh newspaper editorials. “Coming from the First Lady in the White House,” said the arch-conservative Manchester, New Hampshire, Union Leader, the interview “disgraces the nation itself. President Ford showed his own lack of guts by saying he had long ago given up commenting on Mrs. Ford’s interviews. What kind of business is that?”

Conservatives grumbled; their grumbles swelled to a roar. My selection of Nelson Rockefeller still rankled, I had declined to meet with Solzhenitsyn, and I had “sold out” the nations of Eastern Europe at Helsinki. Now there was the 60 Minutes interview — further evidence that Betty and I “condoned immorality.” In retrospect, given the anger that my stands and statements had provoked, I should have known that a primary challenge was inevitable — and prepared for it. But at the time I didn’t recognize the threat. After one year in office we had turned the economy around. We had begun to restore public faith in government. We had cemented old alliances abroad, and now we were moving closer in our efforts to secure peace in the Middle East. Those were solid accomplishments, I thought; they would impress voters and frighten off would-be candidates.
at the airport so we could return to Washington together. Not knowing what had happened, she entered the cabin of Air Force One and asked breezily, “Well, how did they treat you in San Francisco?”

During the long flight back to the capital, Secret Service agents gave me a report on the incident. My assailant this time had been a forty-five-year-old matron named Sara Jane Moore, who had ties to radical groups in the San Francisco Bay area. Her weapon had been a .38 caliber revolver which she had fired from a distance of about forty feet. The slug passed a few feet to my left, hit the front of the hotel, then ricocheted off to the right. An alert bystander, Oliver Sipple, had noticed the gun in her hand and reached out to deflect her aim. Moore was in police custody. (Later, she pleaded guilty to an attempted murder charge and was sentenced to life imprisonment.)

I was determined not to let the second near miss intimidate me, and when we returned to the White House later that night, I told reporters: “I don’t think any person as President ought to cower in the face of a limited number of people who want to take the law into their own hands. The American people want a dialogue between them and their President and their other public officials. And if we can’t have that opportunity of talking with one another, seeing one another, shaking hands with one another, something has gone wrong in our society. I think it’s important that we as a people don’t capitulate to the wrong element, an infinitesimal number of people who want to destroy everything that’s best about America.”

Midway between the two assassination attempts, I made a decision that infuriated millions of American farmers. Over the past five years, Soviet purchases of wheat and seed grains from this country had been highly erratic, fluctuating from 1.8 million metric tons in one year to 13.7 million metric tons in another. Because the purchases had been so unpredictable—as opposed to the steadier demands for grain from our traditional customers, Western Europe and Japan—they had disrupted the market and contributed to price instability. Further complicating the situation, a longshoreman’s strike at Gulf ports in September held up shipments of grain. Trainloads were backed up and elevators were filled. In desperation, farm organizations filed suit to force the loading of the grain onto the waiting ships. Backed by George Meany of the AFL-CIO, the longshoremen refused to budge. They wanted a Soviet commitment to use a larger number of American ships. The Soviets objected because they’d have to pay higher shipping costs.

At this point, I decided to act. Reluctantly, I suspended the Soviet grain sales and on September 9 announced that this moratorium would continue for at least another month. My Administration had urged farmers to increase their production in 1975 and they had responded with a record yield. Here we were telling them not to sell what they had produced. They were outraged, but I didn’t feel that I had any alternative. The American farmer would be far better off if we could reach a long-term understanding with the Soviets governing the amount of grain they could purchase in the open market every year. That would guarantee sales of at least 6 million metric tons in each of the next five years. At least one third of that tonnage should be carried in American ships. In mid September, I sent a State Department delegation to Moscow to see if it could negotiate such an agreement. Shortly thereafter, we agreed on both points and the terms were favorable to us. I lifted the grain embargo and the longshoremen loaded grain again.

Then I turned my attention to the economy. Our recovery from the “stagflation” of the spring of 1975 was moving in the right direction, but my advisers saw new storm clouds ahead. Even without costly new programs, federal spending was continuing to increase. Estimates as to the size of the budget for fiscal year 1976 hovered around $368 billion, and for the year after that, they shot up to $423 billion. It was mandatory that we keep the budget below $400 billion, and on the evening of October 6 I addressed the nation on TV.

“For several years America has been approaching a crossroads in our history. Today we are there,” I said. “To put it simply, we must decide whether we shall continue in the direction of recent years—the path toward bigger government, higher taxes and higher inflation—or whether we shall now take a new direction, bringing to a halt the momentous growth of government, restoring our prosperity and allowing each of you a greater voice in your own future. Tonight I will set forth two proposals that, taken together as they must be, represent the answer I believe we must choose. First, I propose that we make a substantial and permanent reduction in our federal taxes,
The challenge was serious. I recognized that now, and I thought ruefully about all the time we had frittered away trying to convince ourselves that Reagan wouldn't enter the race. My supporters had been crisscrossing America lining up endorsements from prominent Republicans. We had most of the generals on our side. But Reagan had many of the troops. His volunteers were already out ringing doorbells. The first test would come in New Hampshire on February 24. Reagan had recruited former Governor Hugh Gregg, a moderate Republican, to head his effort there, and he had secured the only computerized list of registered voters in the state. His people were holding meetings, mapping strategy. By contrast, my own effort seemed in disarray. Representative James Cleveland was in charge of my New Hampshire drive, but he was about to begin a three-week vacation trip, and little would happen until his return. A defeat in New Hampshire, I knew, would render a crippling blow to my entire campaign.

Yet at the time I couldn't afford to worry about politics. I was due to leave on a trip to the People's Republic of China, Indonesia and the Philippines at the end of November, and before my departure, I wanted to make several key decisions. The most important of these involved a nomination to the Supreme Court.

Associate Justice William O. Douglas had been ill for months, unable to perform his judicial duties. On November 12, he sent me a letter saying that he wanted to step down from the bench. Although I didn't agree with many of the Justice's legal opinions, I felt no rancor toward him personally, and I responded immediately, concluding: "May I express on behalf of all our countrymen this nation's great gratitude for your more than thirty-six years as a member of the Supreme Court. Your distinguished years of service are unequaled in all the history of the Court."

That afternoon I met with Attorney General Levi and Counselor Phil Buchen to discuss a replacement. Few appointments a President makes can have as much impact on the future of the country as those to the Supreme Court. The opinions of those selected affect the course of our society and the lives of our citizens for generations to come. Under Chief Justice Warren, the Court had begun legislating by judicial decree instead of simply interpreting the law. Chief Justice Burger had tried to limit federal jurisdiction and let state courts make more final judgments themselves. I thought his course was correct, and I sought someone who would agree with that view. "Survey the field," I told Levi, "and don't exclude women from your list."

The Attorney General gave me a dozen suggestions. We asked legal scholars to read the candidates' opinions as jurists or their writings as members of the bar. Soon the list was down to five or six names, including HUD Secretary Carla Hills and Detroit Federal District Court Judge Cornelia Kennedy. The final choice was between two men: Judge Arlin M. Adams of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia and Judge John Paul Stevens of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago. Both had received excellent ratings from the American Bar Association, both had had distinguished careers. I pored over their legal opinions myself. Stevens's opinions were concise, persuasive and legally sound. It was a close call, but after talking to Levi and Buchen, I selected Stevens in December. And the Senate confirmed him by a vote of 98 to 0.

Early on the morning of November 29, Air Force One took off, and Betty, Susan and I were on our way to the People's Republic of China. I had never met Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung or the newly designated Vice Premier, Teng Hsiao-ping; we had substantive matters to discuss, and I wanted to do everything possible to implement the Shanghai Communiqué of 1972. I was not about to abandon our commitment to Taiwan, but it was important to expand upon the dialogue that Nixon had begun nearly four years earlier. We landed in Peking on the afternoon of December 1. That night I was the guest of honor at a nine-course dinner in the Great Hall of the People. I listened as Vice Premier Teng underlined his country's concern about Soviet intentions. "Today, it is the country which most zealously preaches peace that is the most dangerous source of war," he said. "Rhetoric about détente cannot cover up the stark reality of the growing danger of war."

Henry Kissinger, who had visited the PRC in October to make arrangements for my trip, had told me that Premier Chou En-lai, reportedly dying of cancer, lay in a Peking hospital, and I would not be seeing him this time. Chairman Mao, Henry said, would receive me,
but at nearly eighty-two, he was fading fast; our meeting would be very brief. It turned out to be far more than a courtesy call. When Betty, Susan and I entered the living room of Mao's residence, he was sitting in a large armchair; two female interpreters and a nurse were standing behind him. The moment he recognized us, he managed to shuffle halfway across the room to shake hands. Greeting Susan, who was then eighteen, he smiled warmly; his eyes sparkled, and he seemed more interested in her than in anything either of her parents might say.

Soon the photographers had their pictures. Betty and Susan left, and Mao sat down with Henry, Brent Scowcroft, George Bush and me for a discussion that was to last an hour and a half. He spoke in what sounded almost like a low growl. Each of his interpreters would write down what she thought he had said. At regular intervals they would stop, confer among themselves and then show him the version they had agreed upon. After he had approved or revised the text, one of the interpreters would read the statement to me. When it was my turn to speak, only one interpreter was needed to write down and translate what I said. Mao may have been weak; his hands may have been gnarled, but it was apparent that he was still mentally alert, held strong convictions and conveyed a certain mystique.

Our talks that afternoon focused upon the Soviet Union. The Soviets, Mao said, wanted world domination, and if their drive was ever to be stopped, the United States would have to stand up to them. That was why the U.S. would have to remain strong in the Pacific basin, why we'd have to be willing to challenge the Soviets everywhere. Mao seemed fully aware of the restrictions that Congress was placing on my ability to conduct foreign policy. Clearly, these restrictions upset him. Would we do anything to challenge the Soviet-Cuban thrust in Africa? When was the United States going to strengthen ties with its NATO allies? Were we going to continue helping our traditional friends in Asia? Or, in the wake of our setbacks in Cambodia and South Vietnam, would the United States turn inward again?

Kissinger had told me that Mao was no ordinary politician; rather, he was a world statesman, a brilliant poet who thought in conceptual terms. At the end of our meeting, I came away convinced that the Soviet Union had an implacable enemy in the PRC. That enmity, I felt, would continue even after Mao was gone, for the other Chinese leaders I met seemed to fear and distrust the Soviets just as much as Mao did.

During the days that followed, I had several sessions with Vice Premier Teng to discuss how we could build on the foundation of the Shanghai Communiqué and find a formula for eventual normalization of diplomatic relations. Teng was cordial but firm, and seemed in no hurry to press for full diplomatic recognition or the termination of our long-standing commitments to Taiwan. I was impressed with his vigor and directness. He was obviously a doer—more pragmatic than theoretical. And I was amazed by his grasp of world affairs.

Finally, on the morning of December 5, we left Peking and flew first to Indonesia and then on to the Philippines. It was important for me to convey U.S. support for our Pacific friends. The Indonesians wanted to know how much military and economic aid they would receive from the U.S. next year, and the Filipinos wanted new agreements to govern the status of our military bases there. The U.S. had no irreconcilable differences with either country. They seemed reassured by our regional commitments despite the loss of Vietnam. After less than twenty-four hours in each capital, we headed back to the United States on Sunday, December 7, stopping for a memorial service at Pearl Harbor. As I told reporters on the plane, the trip had been a success, "no minuses and a lot of pluses."

Back in Washington, several problems required immediate decisions, each fraught with danger politically. When I nominated Bush as CIA director, I had hoped that Congress would put political considerations aside in this crucial appointment, and judge him on his merits and impressive experience. But the Democrats didn't want to play the game that way. They had no problem with his qualifications. They conceded that he would do a fine job. But with Rockefeller out of the political picture, they were fearful that Bush might get the nod to be my running mate in 1976.

As the hearings continued, the Democrats demanded that Bush pledge that he would not be on the ticket. "If I wanted to be Vice
heads of the departments and agencies could appeal to me—and they almost always did. (HUD Secretary Carla Hills was particularly adept at this, and she won three of every four appeals. She marshaled facts and figures to support her positions most effectively.) In November and December, I had spent two or three hours every day just deciding those appeals. The White House logs for those two months, in fact, revealed that the budget had occupied roughly one hundred hours of my time. I was fully prepared to brief reporters myself on the budget's details.

On the morning of January 20, I entered the huge State Department auditorium and faced several hundred members of the press. Vice President Rockefeller, my Cabinet and heads of other federal agencies sat at a table beside me. In a brief opening statement, I quoted from the budget message that I was going to submit to Congress the next day. "'The combination of tax and spending programs I propose,'" I said, "'will set us on a course that not only leads to a balanced budget within three years but also improves the prospects for the economy to stay on a growth path that we can sustain.' This is not a quick fix. It does not hold out the hollow promise that we can wipe out inflation and unemployment overnight. Instead, it is an honest, realistic policy; a policy that says we can steadily reduce inflation and unemployment if we maintain a prudent, balanced approach."

The questions came in a rush, fifty-six of them over the next hour and a half. Was there any "gimmickry" in my budget? Was I "really and truly" seeking Congressional help in controlling government spending? Why did I oppose a federal guarantee of a job for everyone who wanted to work? How much money was I providing for medical research? How much for the CIA? When the session ended, I felt that my appearance had done more to convince members of the press of my competence to be President than almost anything else I'd done since August 1974.

While I was defending the budget, Henry Kissinger was in Moscow making another attempt to reach agreement on SALT II. (We were also seeking to get the Soviets to reduce their involvement in the Angolan civil war.) Both of us were aware that this would probably be our last chance to achieve an arms accord in 1976. As the nomina-
tion and election approached, partisanship would flourish, making it impossible to discuss complex issues like SALT in a rational way. So Henry really wanted the Moscow talks to succeed. For a variety of reasons, most of them unfair, he had been going through exceedingly difficult times. Early in January, in fact, he had come into the Oval Office and handed me a “draft” of his letter of resignation as Secretary of State. His motivation, he explained, was political. Conservatives still blamed him for my dismissal of Schlesinger, although he had had nothing to do with it. That made him a liability to me in the primary fight. Unselfishly, in order not to embarrass me, he would step aside. Pointing to the letter, he said, “This is what I’ll send you if my resignation will help.”

I was shocked by the idea. His resignation was something I simply couldn’t accept. The country needed him—I needed him—to implement our foreign policy at this difficult time.

Later, after he had left the Oval Office, I reflected upon the problems Henry faced. In the early days of the Nixon Administration, he had misjudged the political situation, which was understandable for a person not familiar with partisan politics. Because of his steadfast views on Vietnam, he assumed that he would have the support of such staunch conservatives as Senators Barry Goldwater, Strom Thurmond and John Tower whenever he needed it. So he ignored the hard-liners of the party. He did too little to educate them about what he was doing and why. Instead, he concentrated on trying to build up support among liberals in Congress. He also wooed the press, and in turn, many reporters idolized him. His face appeared on magazine covers, his name and accounts of his “romantic entanglements” in gossip columns everywhere. He was “Superman,” “Henry the K,” the “secret swinger” who was about to end the war in Vietnam. He could do no wrong.

The first jolt to Henry’s reputation had come in May 1970, when U.S. forces had moved into Cambodia. Just before the action took place, Henry had briefed me as Minority Leader, explaining that several hundred thousand Communist troops were operating against us from “safe” bases inside Cambodia. Then he had asked my opinion as to what the Congressional response would be. “Difficult but manageable,” I had replied, and my judgment was correct. What neither of us had foreseen was the furor that the incursion would provoke outside Congress. Liberals pounced upon him savagely, the first in a long line of attacks still to come.

In 1972, Nixon and Kissinger had negotiated an interim SALT accord with the Soviets. Conservatives had been suspicious of the role Henry had played and they had expressed their doubts vocally. After the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Henry had made a valiant attempt to bring peace to the Middle East. Somehow, the idea got around that he was leaning too hard on Israel, and that had cost him support in the American Jewish community. A former assistant of his on the NSC staff, Morton H. Halperin, had filed a civil suit against him (and others), claiming that he had been responsible for approving wiretaps the FBI had placed on the telephones of seventeen individuals—including Halperin—during the Nixon years. Press reports about this had cast shadows upon his personal integrity and damaged his credibility.

Nor did the attacks cease when I became President. Simply because Nixon had appointed him, Henry remained a target for Nixon-haters who didn’t have the former President to revile any more. Inside my Administration, he became a target as well. In a well-meaning but misguided attempt to establish my credentials as a President who was knowledgeable about foreign policy, some members of my staff leaked stories to the effect that I had overruled Kissinger on several decisions. Reading such nonsense in the press upset me enormously. The stories were totally inaccurate—there never was a conflict of any significance between us—yet I’m sure that some of them were believed. And this hurt a proud and sensitive man.

Finally, Kissinger remained the favorite target of liberal Democrats on Capitol Hill. In the wake of war and Watergate, Congress had passed bill after bill restricting the President’s power to conduct foreign policy. When Henry tried to warn doubting lawmakers that their actions could imperil the nation’s security, his admonitions were dismissed. Congress knew better, Congress explained, and Congress would decide what to do without any help from him.

So during the fall of 1975, Kissinger’s relations with Congress had deteriorated. That wasn’t his fault. Congress simply was more rebellious, more assertive of its rights and privileges—and also more irre-
sponsible—than it had been for years. Proof of this had come in November, when the House Select Committee on Intelligence approved three resolutions which said that Henry was in contempt of Congress because he had failed to comply with three subpoenas that the committee had served on him.

Throughout that committee’s existence, I had bent over backward to cooperate. I had instructed officials to turn over documents relevant to the committee’s probe of the CIA and other intelligence agencies. I had also taken steps to make sure that the sort of abuses which had occurred in the past would not happen during my Administration. Yet the committee, which was determined to stick it to Kissinger, wasn’t satisfied. On November 7, it issued seven subpoenas on the Executive Branch for additional documents, demanding all that material in just four days. We decided to comply with four of those subpoenas, but not the remaining three. The first, addressed to Kissinger by name, called upon him to provide “all documents relating to [the] State Department recommending covert action . . . to the National Security Council and its predecessor committees from January 30, 1961, to [the] present.” I knew that the State Department had made no such recommendations during my time in office, so those documents wouldn’t embarrass me. Clearly, however, they contained highly sensitive military and foreign affairs assessments and evaluations. Also, they revealed the consultation processes that Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon had employed before making key decisions in the Oval Office. After checking with Attorney General Levi, I determined that these were the sort of documents that I could withhold on the grounds of Executive privilege, and I told Henry not to honor that subpoena. The other subpoenas demanded papers dating back to January 1965. We had already turned over some of the documents covered by these subpoenas, and we were doing our best to review the others as quickly as possible.

On November 19, I wrote the committee chairman, New York Democrat Otis G. Pike. “This issue,” I said, “involves grave matters affecting our conduct of foreign policy and raises questions which go to the ability of our Republic to govern itself effectively.”

After reviewing the facts of the case and stressing once again that I had done everything I could to cooperate with the committee, I urged Pike to reconsider the resolutions his committee had approved. I offered to send officials from the Executive Branch down to Capitol Hill to elaborate on the points I had made. “I believe that the national interest is best served through our cooperation,” I concluded, “and adoption of a spirit of mutual trust and respect.”

Fortunately, Pike backed off and on December 11, the committee withdrew its recommendation that Kissinger be cited for contempt. Thus he and I were spared what would have been a catastrophic confrontation with the Congress.

But another rebuff quickly followed, this time involving the U.S. position on SALT which Henry had prepared. The opposition came from Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I recognized that they held the trump card. The Senate would have to ratify the new accord. If Rumsfeld or the Joint Chiefs testified against it, there was no way that the Senate would ever go along with it.

After several intensive NSC meetings, I told Henry to take two proposals to Moscow on January 20. The first tried to build on the agreement that Brezhnev and I had reached at Vladivostok. It proposed incorporating the Backfire bomber into the treaty—with the exception of the 120 aircraft that had already rolled off Soviet production lines—and counting it as a strategic weapon. Cruise missiles on our bombers were to be counted as MIRVs, as were those on our surface ships and submarines. The Soviets, Henry and I agreed, were likely to reject this, so I approved an acceptable alternative that still satisfied our own security needs. In this second proposal we said we would limit the Soviets to 275 Backfire bombers by 1981, with specific restrictions on their deployment and operations. We proposed banning long-range cruise missiles from our submarines—although we insisted on our right to keep adequate numbers of the short- and medium-range variety—and we suggested deploying these missiles on up to twenty-five of our surface ships. Then we recommended that both sides cut their agreed-upon total of 2,400 ballistic missiles by roughly 10 percent.

Not surprisingly, the Soviets rejected the first proposal. But they seemed interested in the second. Brezhnev, in fact, hinted that he might be willing to accept a cut of more than 10 percent. Agreement,
it seemed, was very near. But when Henry returned to Washington, Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs had growing reservations. Most of their objections were highly technical, and I hoped that with some give from the Soviets, we could allay the Pentagon’s concerns. Brezhnev wouldn’t budge, however, and our Defense officials maintained their doubts, so we came up with a plan that I thought would satisfy everyone. We would ratify the Vladivostok agreement of 1974 and put both Backfire and the cruise missile into a separate package that we would continue to negotiate. While these talks were going on, we said, the Soviets could not increase Backfire production rates. In return we would agree not to deploy cruise missiles before January 1979. The Soviets reacted angrily. What we were suggesting was a "step backward," Brezhnev said, and there was no "give" in their position at all. Reluctantly, I concluded we would not be able to achieve a SALT agreement in 1976.

Meanwhile, we had other foreign policy concerns. Foremost was the widening war in Angola. Since the Senate’s vote in December to cut off U.S. assistance to the pro-West forces there, the military situation had worsened considerably and the pro-Communist MPLA seemed on the verge of winning a major victory. There was no doubt in my mind that the Cuban troops, with Russian weapons, were acting as proxies for the Soviets and I called in Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to tell him that his country’s involvement in the conflict was very damaging to our overall relations. Dobrynin, a skillful diplomat, insisted that the Cubans were mounting only a minor operation. I liked Dobrynin, but I knew he was not laying the cards on the table. In fact, at a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a majority of the nations represented deplored the Soviet-Cuban intervention and urged the U.S. to lend a hand to the Angolan nationalists who were resisting it. The House was considering a measure—an amendment to the Defense Appropriations bill—that would enable us to do just that, and on January 27, I addressed a personal appeal to Speaker Albert. "Resistance to Soviet expansion by military means must be a fundamental element of U.S. foreign policy," I reminded him. "There must be no question in Angola or elsewhere in the world of American resolve in this regard. The failure of the U.S. to take a stand would inevitably lead our friends and supporters to conclusions about our steadfastness and resolve. It could lead to a future Soviet miscalculation [and] it would make Cuba the mercenaries of upheavals everywhere."

Albert and others in the House leadership wanted to help. But so worried were liberal Democrats about our becoming involved in "another Vietnam" that they defeated the amendment. I was absolutely convinced that a favorable vote would have given us the tools to nip Castro’s adventure on this crucial continent. But Congress had lost its nerve and, as a result, we were bound to see further Cuban involvement in Africa.

Domestic politics now began to occupy my time more and more. The federal election law enacted because of Watergate would make me the first President to campaign under its new rules. The law limited to $1,000 the amount wealthy contributors could give to a Congressional or Presidential candidate in each primary, runoff or general election. (Political Action Committees—or PACs—could donate no more than $5,000 to a single individual.) It required that candidates disclose promptly the sums they had received, and in the race for President, it provided for federal financing—on a matching funds basis—of primary campaigns. Finally, it imposed spending restrictions on the candidates themselves. Before the GOP convention in Kansas City, still six months away, I could spend some $13 million on primary campaigns. After Kansas City, I could spend $21.8 million on primary campaigns. After Kansas City, I could spend $21.8 million on federal election funds.

In theory, it’s possible to label a trip to Chicago as “Presidential” and one to New York “political.” But because almost every trip a President makes in an election year can be described as political, it’s hard to draw the line. Nonetheless, we tried. If I was going somewhere to ask for votes, then the visit was political and the expenses would be shouldered by the PFC. So when Nessen announced that I would be making a trip to New Hampshire on February 7 and 8, he stressed that it would be political.

But even before I arrived, two factors complicated my campaign. One was a tactless remark, the second a trip that Nixon was planning to take. During an Oval Office talk with veteran newsmen Lowell Thomas, the conversation turned to skiing and Thomas asked me if I
A TIME TO HEAL
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

Gerald R. Ford

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS
AND
THE READER'S DIGEST ASSOCIATION, INC.

1979