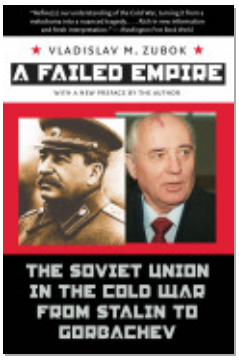
A Failed Empire

Vladislav M. Zubok



Published by The University of North Carolina Press

Zubok, Vladislav M.
A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev.
The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/40944.

(CHAPTER 7)
BREZHNEV AND THE ROAD TO DÉTENTE, 1965–1972

★

We must conduct negotiations in a big way, not a small-minded way. And the arrangement we achieve should encourage tranquility in the world.
—Brezhnev to Kissinger, April 21, 1972

On May 29, 1972, Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev met in the richly adorned and ancient St. Catherine Hall of a historic Kremlin palace to sign an array of bilateral documents, among them the Strategic Arms Limitations Agreement, the Antiballistic Missile Treaty, and "The Basic Principles of U.S.-Soviet Relations." This solemn occasion was the peak of Brezhnev's political career. It was also the highest point of international prestige of the Soviet Union since the beginning of the Cold War.

The origins and meaning of détente have always been subjects of controversy. Beginning in the mid-1970s, neoconservative critics of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations attacked détente as immoral appeasement of Soviet power. They also believed that the Soviet Union used détente as a devious camouflage for its secret plans of global aggression and military superiority. Supporters of détente defended it as the only prudent choice in a world of nuclear terror and as the only means to move toward the reunification of a Europe divided by the Cold War. In recent years, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, both sides have claimed they were right. The critics have argued that the rearmament and global attack on Soviet interests under Reagan helped overcome the legacy of détente and assured Western victory. Proponents assert that détente contributed to ending the superpower confrontation, since it inadvertently led to the "imperial overstretch" of the Soviet Union and was thus an important element in the causal chain leading to Soviet decline and collapse.[1]

The preponderance of détente studies has been on the Western side. The Soviet side of the story is sketchy and incomplete.[2] Earlier studies of détente greatly advanced our understanding of the nature of Soviet politics and policy

making under Brezhnev. Yet they also suffered from a paucity of sources and the poor correlation between Western explanations and Soviet realities.[3] This chapter is an attempt to elucidate the motives of Soviet behavior, specifically, the contribution of Leonid Brezhnev and his immediate foreign policy entourage to the policies of détente in the period from 1968 to 1972. I will consider several questions: What were the main arguments and motives in Kremlin politics as far as détente was concerned? What did the Brezhnev leadership make out of such important developments as the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War and the rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic of China? Was there any Soviet strategy to exploit what seemed to be a U.S. decline?

One must begin with factors that provide an essential background for the analysis of the Soviet road to détente. Among them are the collective thinking of the post-Khrushchev leadership, Kremlin politics, the return to ideological orthodoxy after 1964, and the continuing split between the conservative apparatchiks and the supporters of the new, de-Stalinized foreign policy. Most important of all, however, in my view, were Brezhnev's personal views and attitudes, his rise to the leadership position, and his international outlook. Under his leadership, after a brief renaissance of a hard line, the Kremlin began to search for accommodation with the United States and for détente in Europe.

DRIFT AFTER NIKITA

The ouster of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964 left the guiding of foreign policy in the hands of the collective leadership of the Politburo, the second group of the party oligarchs that emerged after Stalin's death. Most Politburo members were highly critical of Khrushchev for his bluffing and gambling over the Suez crisis in 1956, the Berlin crisis in 1958–61, and most particularly the crisis over Cuba in 1962. Politburo member Dmitry Polyansky prepared a special report on Khrushchev's mistakes. Its sections on foreign policy contained the following paragraph: "Comrade Khrushchev declares carelessly that Stalin failed to penetrate into Latin America, and that he [Khrushchev] managed to do it. But only a gambler may assert that under modern conditions our state can grant real military assistance to any country of that continent. Missiles will not do in this case: they will burn to the ground the country that requires assistance—nothing else. And if we, in defending a Latin American country, were to have delivered a first nuclear strike against the United States, then not only we would have been a target for a counterstrike,—everybody would have recoiled from us." The memo concluded that Soviet behavior during the Cuban missile crisis raised the international standing of the United States and damaged the prestige of the Soviet

Union and its armed forces. The report also curtly mentioned that "Soviet-Cuban relations seriously deteriorated."[4]

Polyansky's report borrowed many points from Molotov's 1955 objections to the new foreign policy. Polyansky rejected Khrushchev's thesis that "if the USSR and the US reach agreement, there would be no war in the world." This thesis, he continued, was wrong for several reasons. First, accommodation with the United States was a fallacy, because Americans "strive for world hegemony." Second, it was erroneous to consider Great Britain, France, and West Germany as only "obedient servants of the Americans," rather than capitalist countries with their own interests. According to Polyansky, the task of Soviet foreign policy was to take advantage of "the discord and contradictions among the countries of the imperialist camp, thus demonstrating that the US is not a hegemonic power of this camp and has no right to pretend to play this role."[5]

Alexander Shelepin, a young upstart at the Presidium, threw many of the report's criticisms in Khrushchev's face at the Politburo on October 13, 1964. It appears that Politburo members were ready to denounce Khrushchev's foreign policy at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee in the event that Khrushchev appealed to the plenum delegates as he had done in June 1957. But the Soviet leader surrendered without a fight, and the plenum ratified Khrushchev's ouster without discussing his foreign policy record.[6] As it turned out, the new leadership had no consensus on foreign affairs. Although they concurred that Khrushchev's brinkmanship was disastrous, they could not agree on what kind of foreign policy would be desirable for Soviet interests.

The new rulers felt even less confident in foreign affairs than Stalin's lieutenants had ten years earlier. First Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Alexei Kosygin, and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Nikolai Podgorny had very little experience in international affairs or the issues of international security.[7] Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Minister of Defense Rodion Malinovsky, and chairman of the KGB Vladimir Semichastny were not even Presidium members and played subordinate political roles. Mikoyan, who stayed in the leadership until November 1965, recalled that "the level of discussion at the Presidium markedly declined." Sometimes "cranky ideas came up, and Brezhnev with some others simply failed to understand their consequences."[8]

The role of leading Soviet statesman fell by default to Kosygin, whose background lay exclusively in domestic economy.[9] During the first three years after Khrushchev's ouster, he gained some international prestige and prominence. From August 1965 to January 1966, he successfully acted as international mediator between India and Pakistan, who were on the brink of a full-scale war. After 1966, Kosygin became the chief spokesman on the issues of arms control. He

carried out his duties stoically but without enthusiasm—he apparently never developed a taste for international affairs. Kosygin's views and beliefs were typical of the cohort of "red directors," the managers of huge industrial enterprises who had risen to prominence during the 1930s and 1940s. He worshiped industrial and military power but also believed in the ultimate superiority of the Soviet system and in the moral mission of the Soviet Union to lead all Communist and progressive forces against Western imperialism. The Sino-Soviet split deeply chagrined Kosygin, and for a while he refused to accept its irrevocability. In a close circle, he said: "We are communists and they are communists. It is hard to believe we will not be able to reach an agreement if we meet face to face."[10]

International media and foreign commentators also focused at the time on Alexander Shelepin, who, after Khrushchev's fall, became an active spokesman on foreign policy issues. A graduate of the Moscow Institute of Philosophy and Literature, Shelepin was, in contrast to most of Politburo members, a well-educated person. At the same time, he admired Stalin's leadership and had the reputation of being a realist. His career in the Youth Communist League under Stalin and as chairman of the KGB under Khrushchev gave him a narrow but visible power base among younger, ambitious, and elitist apparatchiks. There were rumors about a "Shelepin faction" among apparatchiks. In reality, Shelepin had more enemies than friends in elite circles.[11]

Shelepin, Polyansky, and their followers in the top party echelon, as their criticism of Khrushchev's record demonstrated, longed to return Soviet foreign and security policies to a more Russo-centric and militarist version of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm. At first, nobody in the post-Khrushchev leadership was prepared to challenge this. Although some of them had helped Khrushchev to criticize and defeat Molotov's orthodoxy in 1955, their real views were much more conservative, and hostility to the West, as well as militant unilateralism in foreign policy, became part of their group identity.[12]

The Stalinist worldview, the revolutionary-imperial paradigm, continued to hold the post-Khrushchev cohort of political leaders in its grip. Ustinov, Brezhnev, Podgorny, and many others in the new collective leadership belonged to the generation whose members had made spectacular careers under Stalin. The majority of them admired Stalin's leadership in the Great Patriotic War, fully identified with the 1945 victory, and supported mobilization and rearmament during the early Cold War. They remained personally committed to Stalin's legacy of forging a Soviet military superpower in the confrontation with the United States. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization struck at the core of their collective identity. It left their past leaderless, desacralized, and utterly compromised.

Stalin, who knew his cadres better than anyone else, was concerned about the

ability of the next generations of Soviet nomenklatura to provide ideological leadership. In his words, the political class that replaced and destroyed the Old Bolsheviks was too busy "with practical work and construction" and studied Marxism "through brochures." And the generation of party and state officials that followed was, in Stalin's estimation, even less prepared. The majority of them were raised on pamphlets, newspaper articles, and quotations. "If things continue this way," Stalin concluded, "people might degenerate. This will mean the death [of Communism]." Stalin believed that future party leaders should combine theoretical vision with practical political talent.[13]

Indeed, there was nobody in the Kremlin who could be a political leader with a vision. Mikhail Suslov, the last survivor among the theoretically minded party apparatchiks, turned out to be the least imaginative and politically talented. The post-Khrushchev oligarchy, as Robert English writes, embodied "the last hostages" of orthodox thinking. Their collective thinking did not stem from profound ideological faith or revolutionary passion but was rather the product of their lack of education and tolerance for diversity and their Stalinist formative experiences.[14]

In the domestic sphere, there was an attempt to roll back the Thaw in the cultural and ideological spheres. Even semantic changes pointed in the direction of Stalinist orthodoxy: Brezhnev changed his title to general secretary, as it had been under Stalin; the top party structure (called the Presidium of the Central Committee from 1952 to 1964) once again became the Politburo. Russocentrism, Russification policies in Soviet republics, and deafening militaristic propaganda, characteristic of late Stalinism, also resurfaced. In Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and other major cities, the members of the intelligentsia of Jewish descent lived in fear of another anti-Semitic campaign.[15]

The sociocultural profile and collective mentality of the new cohort could have tremendous consequences for Soviet international behavior and the future of the Soviet Union itself. On the one hand, the majority of the post-Khrushchev leadership shared the ideological (revolutionary) component of the international paradigm. In domestic politics, many of them supported the abrogation of de-Stalinization, the greater suppression of cultural diversity, and the freezing of liberal trends in literature and art. On the other hand, they were not the masters but rather the prisoners of ideology, afraid to abandon the orthodox tenets and unable to reform them.

The new oligarchs ridiculed Khrushchev's ill-fated and misguided interventions into the field of Marxism-Leninism, especially his "editing" of the Party Program. Yet many of them also suffered from a curious complex of ideological inferiority. In other words, they feared that their own lack of education and

theoretical sophistication might somehow lead them astray in the matters of "high policy." Brezhnev and other Politburo members delegated the intricate business of defining "ideological correctness" to Mikhail Suslov, who had been trained in orthodox party history and the textbook version of Marxism-Leninism. Memos on international affairs initially had to pass through the filters of the central party apparatus, which was dominated by Suslov and propagandists with provincial, parochial backgrounds. Some of these people (for example, the head of the Science Department, Sergei Trapeznikov; the head of the Propaganda Department, V. I. Stepakov; and Brezhnev's deputy, V. A. Golikov) were Brezhnev's old friends and specialists on collectivized agriculture. They espoused Russocentric and Stalinist views in domestic policies and admired the Chinese, the followers of leftist dogma, in foreign affairs. During preparation of Brezhnev's report for the coming Party Congress in March 1966, these orthodox advisers suggested deleting the sentences on the "principle of peaceful coexistence" and "prevention of a world war," on "great diversity" in the methods of building socialism in different countries, and on "non-interference in internal affairs of other communist parties." They held the 1952 propaganda view of the United States and wanted the party report "to show the beastly colonial nature, aggressiveness, war-mongering" of the United States, as well as the "growing fascist trend" in "American imperialism." Golikov declared in internal discussions: "We must not forget that world war is coming." Rumors also circulated about a phrase Shelepin allegedly had used: "People must know the truth: a war with America is inevitable."[16]

Not surprisingly, the new collective leadership agreed that the first priority of Soviet foreign policy must be reconciliation with "fraternal" Communist China rather than détente with the capitalist West. It ignored the fact that China was sliding toward revolutionary chaos, soon to be known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Some Soviet diplomats in Beijing tried to report this to Moscow, but these reports met with incredulity and ignorance. The ambassador in Beijing, Stepan Chervonenko, the former party secretary in Ukraine, knew the mood in the Soviet leadership better and changed the report's spin to more positive tones. Sergei Lapin, who replaced Chervonenko in 1965, was a cynical apparatchik and did not even bother to provide adequate analysis. In January 1965, the Politburo rejected the proposal from the Foreign Ministry and the Central Committee's Department for Socialist Countries to take immediate steps to improve relations with the United States. Shelepin attacked the heads of these institutions, Andrei Gromyko and Yuri Andropov, for their lack of "class position" and "class consciousness."[17]

The escalation of the war in Vietnam in 1965 led to the first significant foreign

policy discussions in the post-Khrushchev Kremlin. Previously, the Soviet leadership had not ascribed any geopolitical importance to Vietnam and Indochina. They sought, in vain, to dissuade Hanoi from starting the war against the South. They feared, historian Ilya Gaiduk concludes, that this war would be "an impediment to the process of détente with the United States and its allies."[18] The direct U.S. intervention, however, forced the Politburo's hand. Now the ideological call for "fraternal duty" prevailed. The supporters of a pro-China foreign policy began to argue that Soviet assistance to Vietnamese Communists would create a means for reconciliation between the USSR and the PRC by dint of their joint assistance to the North Vietnamese. The Soviet Union began to increase supplies of arms and other kinds of assistance to North Vietnam.[19]

In February 1965, Kosygin, accompanied by Andropov and a number of other Soviet officials and consultants, went to the Far East in an attempt to build a new foreign policy strategy. His official destination was Hanoi, but he made two stops in Beijing. He met with Zhou Enlai and, on the way back, with Mao Ze-dong. Kosygin's talks in Beijing were disheartening: the Chinese were rigid and ideologically aggressive, attacked Soviet "revisionism," and refused to coordinate any policies with the Soviets, even on the matter of assistance to North Vietnam. The talks in Hanoi were also sobering for the Soviet leadership. Andropov's consultant Alexander Bovin, who was on this trip, observed how Kosygin failed to dissuade the North Vietnamese leaders from all-out war with the United States. The Vietnamese and the Soviets, despite their common Marxist-Leninist ideology, came from different worlds. The Hanoi leaders were revolutionaries, veterans of underground and anticolonial fighting. The Soviet officials were state administrators, who had matured and grown into their positions in the corridors of bureaucratic power. After many years of feeling like pawns in Soviet and Chinese power games, Hanoi's Communist leaders were determined to score a complete victory, disregarding human costs and the advice from Moscow.[20]

Still, American intervention in Vietnam stoked the ideological instincts of the collective leadership and the Soviet military and led to a serious deterioration of Soviet-American relations.[21] The party organized mass propaganda campaigns, demonstrations, and meetings of "solidarity with people of Vietnam" around the Soviet Union. The Politburo reacted with deliberate coolness to the initial approaches of the Johnson administration to start talks on limitations in the strategic arms race.[22] Furthermore, Kosygin was infuriated when the United States bombed Hanoi and the port of Haiphong in February 1965 during his official visit to North Vietnam.[23] There were still quite a few in the Soviet foreign policy elites who believed that North Vietnam was not worth a quarrel with the United States.

These figures were forced to keep a low profile, however, as the chorus of indignation against the American bombing campaign grew.[24]

In May 1965, as the American bombing campaign in North Vietnam intensified, news of American intervention in the Dominican Republic aroused emotions in the Politburo. Defense Minister Malinovsky portrayed developments in Vietnam and Central America as an escalation of the global confrontation and brooded that "the Dominican events will be followed by actions against Cuba." In response, he proposed Soviet "active countermeasures," among them military demonstrations in Berlin and on the border with West Germany and the redeployment of airborne troops and other units from Soviet territory to the GDR and Hungary. As Mikoyan remembered, the defense minister "emphasized that we should be ready to strike on West Berlin."[25]

In the middle of 1966, Bovin recalls, in response to new American escalation in Vietnam, the Soviet military and some Politburo members began to talk again about cutting Americans down to size and intimidating them with demonstrations of Soviet force. Yet, even the most ardent advocates of a showdown had to admit that the Soviet Union had no means by which to affect the policies of Washington and Hanoi in Vietnam. Besides, the memories of the Berlin and Cuban missile crises were still too fresh. Mikoyan, Kosygin, Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Suslov advocated for restraint.[26]

1967 brought new shocks that challenged the Kremlin leaders' emotions. The Communist camp in Southeast Asia lay in ruins. In Indonesia, the Soviets had lost all influence after President Sukarno was replaced and the subsequent murder of an estimated 300,000 Communists and their sympathizers by the military under the leadership of General Suharto. And in the June 1967 Six Days War, Israel destroyed the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Soviet influence seemed to be crumbling from Jakarta to Cairo. The rout of the Arab states stunned the Soviet leadership and elites. The Politburo could do nothing to help Sukarno, but the Middle East was an entirely different matter. Israel's victory had strong domestic repercussions for the Soviet Union: Growing pro-Zionist sympathies among Soviet Jews spiked in the largest manifestation of their solidarity with Israel since the proclamation of its statehood in 1948. In Moscow and Leningrad synagogues, KGB agents heard people praising Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan and demanding weapons to go to fight for Israel.[27] The international implications, however, remained the most painful. The Politburo regarded the alliance with radical Arab regimes as the biggest geopolitical achievement of Soviet foreign policy since the end of World War II. Soviet officials preached ideological solidarity with the Arabs and gave Egypt and Syria extensive military,

intelligence, and psychological support. At the same time, the Kremlin feared that another war between the Arabs and the Israelis could lead to escalation of the Soviet-American tension and a greater American involvement in Middle Eastern affairs on the side of Israel.[28]

During the Arab-Israeli Six Days War and its aftermath, the Politburo was in session almost around the clock. A participant wrote in his diary about the black mood of those days: "After militant boastful declarations of Nasser we did not expect that the Arab army would be defeated in a second."[29] The Politburo had to devise a new policy in the region. However, at a specially convened Party Plenum, anti-Zionist emotions and ideological schemes prevailed over reality. The Soviet leadership decided to break diplomatic relations with Israel for the second time since 1953 until Israel reached a settlement with the Arabs and returned their lands in exchange for security guarantees (according to UN Resolution no. 242). A few experts realized that this effectively froze Soviet diplomacy in the region, but the majority, including Gromyko and Suslov, stuck with the new line. Simultaneously, the Soviets continued to invest in Egypt and Syria, throwing good money after bad (Egypt alone owed the Soviet Union about fifteen billion rubles), in a desperate attempt to maintain a Soviet presence in the Middle East. As a result, Soviet Middle East diplomacy became a hostage of Arab radicalism and demands. Again, as in Vietnam, the new collective leadership demonstrated that, in contrast to Stalin, it was the prisoner, not the architect, of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm. Moscow restored relations with Israel only in 1991, shortly before the collapse of the USSR.[30]

At the peak of the Six Days War, the Politburo sent Kosygin to the United States for urgent talks with President Lyndon Johnson. The meeting in Glassboro, New Jersey, could have reopened the possibility for calm and pragmatic summits undermined by Nikita Khrushchev in 1960–61. President Johnson, increasingly desperate to end the war in Indochina, was ready for far-reaching negotiations. He wanted the Soviets to be a mediator in a Vietnam settlement and proposed to start talks on mutual cuts of strategic arsenals and military budgets. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara especially wanted to negotiate a ban on antiballistic missile defense (ABMs). Kosygin, however, was unprepared for serious talks and irritated over American support for Israel. Dobrynin, who observed him at the summit, called him a "reluctant" negotiator. To make matters worse, Kosygin totally misunderstood the intentions of Johnson and McNamara with regard to ABMs. In a rare display of anger, he declared: "Defense is moral, aggression is immoral." According to Dobrynin's summary, "Moscow at that time sought first of all to achieve nuclear parity in strategic offensive weapons."[31] It would take several years and the emergence of Brezhnev as a

political leader and "peacemaker" before the post-Khrushchev cohort would be ready for negotiations with the United States.

BREZHNEV'S SERMON

Brezhnev participated in the Politburo foreign policy discussions throughout all these crises but avoided taking a clear stand on controversial issues. The new leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union knew he was neither in Stalin's nor Khrushchev's league in terms of experience, knowledge, energy, and character. Like a host of apparatchiks whom World War II and Stalin's purges of the Old Bolsheviks had catapulted to privilege and authority, Brezhnev had enormous practical acumen but very limited education and social horizons. Along with many young Communists of the 1930s, he acquired the habit of keeping a diary to raise his intellectual level. The diary's content, however, reveals a total lack of intellectual and spiritual interests. To every historian's despair, Brezhnev recorded mostly routine and banal events of his private life.[32]

Russian historian Dmitry Volkogonov portrayed Brezhnev as the blandest and most one-dimensional of all Soviet leaders. To Brezhnev he attributed "the psychology of a middle-rank party bureaucrat—vainglorious, cautious, conservative personality."[33] Indeed, those who knew Brezhnev from his military service spoke dismissively of his leadership qualities. One of Brezhnev's war buddies observed: "Leonid will never grow above his head."[34]

Catapulted into political leadership by Khrushchev's downfall, Brezhnev was in constant need of psychological support. He complained to his foreign policy assistant, Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, that he had never dealt with foreign policy and knew nothing about it. He humbly admitted that his horizon remained that of a regional party secretary. "Here I am, sitting in the Kremlin and looking at the world only via the papers that reach my desk."[35] Brezhnev's assistant Georgy Arbatov would recall that Brezhnev was very weak in matters of Marxist-Leninist theory and felt this keenly. "He thought that to do something 'un-Marxist' now was impermissible—the entire party, the whole world, was watching him."[36] One could expect that with such a background Brezhnev would have joined the chorus of hard-liners and found a safe niche on the dogmatic and rigid flank of Soviet policy making. Initially, his behavior conformed to this expectation. It was a great surprise, therefore, when Brezhnev later became the main defender of détente in the Soviet leadership. As it turned out, other aspects of his personal views and character facilitated this surprising transformation.

Isaiah Berlin, in his book about Russian thinkers, distinguishes between the "foxes," who know many truths, and the "hedgehogs": who know only one but

the most important truth. Brezhnev was not a thinker, but in foreign policy he had one strong belief, like the hedgehog in Berlin's classification. His belief was disarmingly simple: war must be avoided at all costs. During his meetings with foreign leaders, Brezhnev told them time and again about a conversation he had had with his father, a steelworker, at the beginning of World War II. When Hitler was overrunning Czechoslovakia and France, his father asked him: What is the world's highest mountain? "Everest," Brezhnev answered. Then his father asked him about the height of the Eiffel Tower. "About 300 meters," Brezhnev answered. Then Brezhnev's father suggested that a tower of this height should be erected on the top of Everest. Hitler and his cronies should be hanged there on a scaffold for the whole world to see. Brezhnev considered it a fantasy at the time, but then the war began. After it was over, the Nuremberg Trial condemned the captured Nazi leaders and hanged some of them. Brezhnev's father turned out to be prophetic. This story left an indelible impression on Brezhnev, his international worldview, and his policies—indeed, on his whole work and life. Brezhnev's interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, heard this story so many times that he began to call it "the Sermon on the Mount." When Brezhnev met with Richard Nixon for the first time, the Soviet party leader suggested they should conclude an agreement, a bizarre version of a peace pact, directed against any third country that would act aggressively. The Americans interpreted it as a crude attempt at a pact between the superpowers designed to destroy American alliances. They did not know that it was not a devious Politburo scheme but rather a personal dream of the general secretary.[37]

World War II was a major life-shaping experience for Brezhnev, who was then in his late thirties. As a division-rank political commissar, he experienced grueling combat firsthand; from 1942 to 1945 he marched with the troops from the Caucasus to the Carpathian Mountains. He firmly believed, however, that no price was too high for victory. In June 1945, he took part in the Victory Parade on Red Square and attended Stalin's banquet for the victors. For many years, he continued to admire Stalin as a warlord. By 1964, he was already a member of the Central Committee Secretariat, and in this capacity he supervised the Soviet space program and numerous projects of the military-industrial complex, including the production of nuclear weapons and the construction of missile pads and silos.[38] Brezhnev's hagiographic memoirs, which were written by professional ghostwriters, give only a glimpse of these crucial pages of his life.

Similar experiences converted many in the nomenklatura, among them Brezhnev's close friends Dmitry Ustinov and Andrei Grechko, into ardent advocates of military strength and preparedness. Brezhnev believed in military preparedness, but he also was genuinely concerned about the prospect of war and wanted to

negotiate peace among the great powers. He was not unlike Ronald Reagan in thinking that the military buildup was important not for its own sake but as a prelude to international agreements. This belief that strength and peace do not contradict each other would cause many problems during the 1970s, when the continuous Soviet strategic buildup would allow American neoconservative critics and Pentagon experts to claim that the Kremlin was seeking military superiority. In the end, their public campaign about a growing "Soviet military threat" would undermine Soviet-American détente. At the beginning of the decade, however, Brezhnev's belief helped him see the need to cooperate with the United States.

Brezhnev deeply loathed brinkmanship and the crisis-mongering that had characterized Khrushchev's foreign policy since 1956. Twenty years after the Cuban missile crisis, he still could not contain his anger at Khrushchev for unleashing it: "We almost slipped into a nuclear war! And what effort did it cost us to pull ourselves out of this, to make the world believe that we really want peace!"[39] He reserved similarly harsh criticism for the Berlin crisis, saying to advisers in November 1971: "Instead of diplomatic achievements we built—bluntly speaking—the Chinese wall in Berlin, and hoped to resolve the problem in this way."[40] Overcoming Khrushchev's legacy of brinkmanship and building a firm foundation for world peace would become the mainspring of Brezhnev's foreign policy activism in the early 1970s.

Other facets of Brezhnev's leadership facilitated his conversion into a détente statesman. Henry Kissinger wrote in his memoirs that Brezhnev was "brutal" (in contrast to the "refined" Mao Ze-dong and Zhou Enlai). In reality, Brezhnev displayed more amiability than evil, more vanity than premeditated cruelty. During the pivotal moment of the post-Stalin power struggle in June 1957, Molotov rudely dressed Brezhnev down and the future Soviet leader fainted. Even when Brezhnev contemplated a removal of Khrushchev in 1964, his biggest fear was the danger of direct confrontation with the formidable Nikita.[41] As a person and politician, he abhorred confrontation and extremism. In his youth, his relatives knew him as "handsome and charming, a careful dresser and ladies' man." During his whole career under Stalin and Khrushchev, Brezhnev learned how to please people. Among friends, he was "modest, gregarious, with simple habits, a great conversationalist without any arrogance of power." Brezhnev once confessed: "Charm can take you a long way in politics." One sophisticated schoolteacher, who saw him during a performance at the Bolshoi Theater in 1963, wrote in her diary: "Brezhnev is downright handsome: blue eyes, black eyebrows, dimpled cheeks. Now I realize why I always felt sympathy for him."[42] It was as natural for Brezhnev to smile cordially as for Khrushchev to threaten with his fist.

By nature, Brezhnev was a centrist politician and an enemy of radical political moves in any direction. The general secretary did not object when, after 1964, his conservative allies and cronies began to roll back the Thaw in the areas of culture, propaganda, and ideology. At the same time, Brezhnev did not want to antagonize the large group of Soviet scientific, artistic, and cultural elites who feared a neo-Stalinist coup. He also was skeptical of an ideological rapprochement with the Chinese. He knew that the "Soviet Chinese," that is, the most ardent advocates of ideological reactions, grouped around Alexander Shelepin and almost openly talked about him, Brezhnev, as a transitional figure and a small-time politician vulnerable to booze and women.[43]

Militant attitudes reigned among the majority of Brezhnev's colleagues. To begin acting as a peacemaker in this milieu was extremely difficult and dangerous for one's career. Against all expectations, Brezhnev succeeded in this endeavor. For all his intellectual mediocrity, he was capable of good political instincts and tact. Advisers recall that in questions of power "Brezhnev was a great realist" and could bring along the conservative majority whenever he wanted.[44] After 1964, he focused on the most important task: cadres and networking. With several allies at the Politburo, including Mikhail Suslov and Andrei Kirilenko, he tirelessly phoned regional party secretaries, inquiring about their problems and needs and even asking for advice. In 1967, he gradually began to remove his rivals from positions of authority, beginning with Shelepin. By 1968, Brezhnev became the uncontested head of the party apparatus: the keys of political power were now in his hands.[45]

About the same time, Brezhnev began to show a greater interest in foreign policy and became impatient with Kosygin's international prominence. He was smart enough to realize he could not compete with Kosygin in the area of domestic economy. By contrast, foreign policy opened big opportunities for personal diplomacy and there Brezhnev's modest talents could be displayed most advantageously. The post of general secretary gave him a formidable advantage: by tradition, the occupant of this post was also the commander in chief and the head of the Defense Council. Thus, Brezhnev was formally responsible for security and military policies. And he had the power of appointments, the crucial tool in Soviet politics.[46]

Later, some Western observers connected Brezhnev's removal of hard-liners with the victory of pro-détente forces in the Politburo. In reality, there were no doves in Brezhnev's entourage. The majority of the Politburo remained ideologically orthodox even during détente. When the Politburo commission on arms control was established early in 1968, it was packed with Brezhnev's hard-line friends, among them Ustinov (as chairman) and Grechko.[47] Dmitry Ustinov was

Stalin's whiz kid, a brilliant autodidactic technocrat who had organized the evacuation of Soviet industries under the nose of the advancing Nazis in 1941 and who later was a mover and shaker in the Soviet missile project. For two decades, he was a tireless leader of the Soviet military-industrial complex. He feared that the United States might at the first opportunity strike at the Soviet Union and was determined to master enough force to deter the Americans. Andrei Grechko began his military career when, at the age of sixteen, he joined the Red Cavalry during the civil war that broke out after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917. He had been Brezhnev's military superior during the Great Patriotic War and since 1967 the Soviet minister of defense. He firmly believed in Soviet victory in a future world war and felt nothing but contempt for the United States and NATO.[48] Both Ustinov and Grechko argued for an unrelenting arms race and feared that any arms limitations would threaten Soviet security.[49] They were worthy counterparts of American hawks.

Between 1965 and 1968, Brezhnev allowed Ustinov to shake up and centralize the enormous military-industrial complex that had previously been troubled by competition among various ministries and design bureaus. The general secretary also threw his full support behind the construction and deployment of the strategic triad of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in hardened silos, nuclear submarines with ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers. The scale of the ICBM program was particularly impressive: American satellite intelligence recorded with concern that in 1965 and 1966 the Soviets doubled their arsenal, catching up with the U.S. strategic forces. From then on, the Soviet ICBM force grew by about 300 new silo launchers a year. This was a colossal armament program that, according to an expert, "was the largest single weapons efforts in Soviet history and the most expensive, significantly outstripping the nuclear program of the late 1940s." By 1968, the strategic missile force was consuming about 18 percent of the Soviet defense budget. Brezhnev could not say no to any military production and deployment proposal.[50]

What ultimately distinguished the general secretary from his orthodox friends was not greater ideological tolerance and a less conservative outlook. It was his dream to become a peacemaker. It was also, as his speechwriter Anatoly Chernyaev correctly noted, the burden of great power that dictated state interests that did not fit into ideological orthodoxy. As Brezhnev became involved in foreign affairs, their logic taught him to rely not on the conservative and ignorant majority but on a few "enlightened" foreign policy experts working in the central party apparatus.[51]

These people included Evgeny Samoteikin, Georgy Arbatov, Alexander Bovin, Nikolai Inozemtsev, Vadim Zagladin, Nikolai Shishlin, Rafail Fedorov, Anatoly

Blatov, and Anatoly Chernyaev. They specialized in foreign affairs, came from universities and academic research institutes, and were much more open-minded and sophisticated thinkers than the average nomenklatura members. They were shaped by the cultural Thaw, de-Stalinization, and other liberalizing influences of the period from 1956 to 1964. They considered themselves Soviet patriots but also pragmatic freethinkers, and began to see the ossified ideology as a big obstacle to state interests. Many of them had been recruited by Andropov and his rival Boris Ponomarev to join the Central Committee apparatus. Andropov supported these people, telling them to think and write without regard to ideology. "I will know myself what to report to the Politburo." There was a constant bureaucratic struggle between them and Stalinists like Trapeznikov and Fedor Golikov. From 1965 to 1968, the "enlightened" apparatchiks formed the nucleus of Brezhnev's speechwriting team and therefore became part of his inner circle of advisers.[52]

Brezhnev's group of speechwriters also included his assistant Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, a trained philologist and diplomat and an expert on Iceland and Scandinavia. Earlier, he had worked as assistant to Alexandra Kollontai and then to Gromyko. Alexandrov-Agentov was a devotee of Marxist-Leninist theory and a true believer in the international Communist movement, but he was not a rigid ideologue in international affairs. As Chernyaev observed, he "believed that realpolitik worked for our communist future."[53]

Brezhnev's early mentor in foreign policy was Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in many respects a profoundly conservative figure but also a highly professional diplomat. Gromyko was obsequious and always implemented "with religious fervor" the instructions of the leader whom he served at the moment.[54] At the same time, he despised ideological intrusions into foreign policy and greatly admired Stalin's diplomacy during the Grand Alliance years. Gromyko's main goal was to obtain from the Western powers recognition of the new borders of the USSR and Soviet satellites in Central Europe, including the borders of the GDR. His next goal was to reach, after tough bargaining, a political accommodation with the United States. In January 1967, in a policy memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Politburo, Gromyko argued: "We must resolutely continue to dissociate ourselves politically and ideologically from adventurous schemes of the Chinese leaders who have pinned their hopes on the inevitability of an armed conflict between the socialist countries headed by the Soviet Union and the United States within 8 to 10 years. The opinion that a war with the United States is inevitable would reflect precisely the position of the Chinese. On the whole, international tension does not suit the state interests of the Soviet Union and its friends. In conditions of détente it is easier to consolidate and broaden the positions of the Soviet Union in the world."[55]

This memo highlighted promising developments in capitalist countries, especially the turn toward détente in the Western capitals. Despite the war in Vietnam, Gromyko and other Soviet diplomats, among them the ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, and the head of the U.S. desk in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Georgy Kornienko, favored negotiations with Lyndon Johnson.[56] Gradually, Brezhnev himself came to realize that the policy of détente and negotiations with the capitalist great powers would be the shortest road to successful statesmanship and international recognition. This happened, however, only after several momentous developments in Europe and Asia and after a change of leadership in the United States.

IMPULSES FOR DÉTENTE

The single most important event at the end of the 1960s affecting Brezhnev's outlook on international affairs was the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968. The rapid flourishing of the Prague Spring presented a dire threat to Brezhnev's career. As leader of the CPSU, he bore direct responsibility for the preservation of the Soviet military sphere of influence in Central Europe. The Czechoslovak strategic location, advanced armament industries, and uranium mines made it an indispensable part of the Warsaw Pact.[57] The Soviet leadership feared "falling dominos" in Central Europe no less than the Johnson administration feared them in Southeast Asia. And Soviet fears were even more justified, considering the revolutions in Poland and Hungary in 1956, the stubborn neutrality of Yugoslavia, the gradual distancing of Rumania from the Warsaw Pact after 1962, and the constant instability in the GDR.[58] Worst of all, many in the Soviet leadership could possibly blame Brezhnev personally for such a catastrophe. After all, Alexander Dubcek, the head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party since January 1968, was Brezhnev's protégé. The Soviet leader had withheld his support for Antonin Novotny, the old-time Stalinist leader of Czechoslovakia, and had endorsed the Czechoslovak Action Program for reforms. Ukrainian first secretary Petro Shelest believed that Brezhnev's "rotten liberalism" made the Prague Spring possible. As the crisis unfolded, both Polish leader Gomulka and GDR leader Ulbricht pushed for invasion and openly criticized Brezhnev for emotionalism, naïveté, and vacillations.[59]

Brezhnev's character made him a reluctant interventionist. One witness recalled that even in the summer of 1968 there was uncertainty and diversity of opinion in the party headquarters in Moscow. People were shouting at the top of their lungs: "Do not send tanks to Czechoslovakia!" and "It is time to send tanks and finish this mess!" But all archival evidence demonstrates that throughout the

Czechoslovak crisis Brezhnev hoped to avoid "extreme measures," that is, military invasion. Instead, he preferred to increase political pressure on Dubcek and the Czechoslovak leadership.[60] Brezhnev feared that a Soviet invasion could trigger a NATO response, leading to a European war. The burden of decision was almost too much for the general secretary. During the months of the crisis, people often saw him shaken, pale, and lost, with trembling hands. In a revealing private remark, he admitted: "I may look soft, but I can strike so hard that afterwards I feel sick for three days." According to some reports, during 1968, Brezhnev began to take tranquilizers in order to alleviate unbearable pressure on his psyche. This would later grow into a fatal habit.[61]

On July 26–27, the Politburo, presided over by Brezhnev, decided to set a provisional date for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviets continued, however, to negotiate with Dubcek and the Czechoslovak leadership. Brezhnev, among others, tried to bully "Sasha" Dubcek into drastic measures to reverse liberalization and reforms. Once all their attempts failed, the Kremlin leaders finally made the decision on August 21, and the forces of the Soviet Union and other countries of the Warsaw Pact (except for Rumania) occupied Czechoslovakia.[62]

Two men were particularly helpful and supportive of Brezhnev during the crisis. Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko helped assuage Brezhnev's fears of possible confrontation with the West over Czechoslovakia. He told the Politburo that "the international relations now are such that the extreme measures [that is, invasion of Czechoslovakia] cannot produce aggravation of the international situation. There will be no big war. . . . If we preserve Czechoslovakia—it will make us stronger."[63] Yuri Andropov, Brezhnev's appointee to chair the KGB, used the resources of his agency to steel Brezhnev's resolve. In his reports to the Politburo, Andropov pointed out that there was no alternative to a full-scale invasion. Under his guidance, the KGB falsely depicted peaceful events in Czechoslovakia as preparations for an armed uprising à la Hungary in 1956. Since Andropov had been ambassador in Budapest during the Hungarian revolution of 1956, his recommendations carried special weight.[64]

The crisis gave Brezhnev a crash course on crisis management and international relations. His morale soared when the much-feared reaction in the United States and West Germany to the Soviet invasion did not materialize. The signals from Western leaders that favored business as usual after the invasion of Czechoslovakia indicated a political victory for the Soviet Union. It boosted the Kremlin's self-confidence, battered earlier by the erosion of the socialist camp. In September 1968, Gromyko reported to the Politburo: "The determination that the Soviet Union demonstrated with regard to the Czechoslovak events made the leaders of the United States consider more soberly their potential in that region and see once

again the determination of our country's leadership in defending the vital interests of the Soviet Union."[65] In his speeches to senior diplomatic cadres, the foreign minister sounded even more upbeat: "Look, comrades, how radically the correlation of forces in the world changed in recent years. Not so long ago we in the Politburo had to think carefully, time and again, before taking any foreign policy step—What would the U.S. do? What would France do? This period is over. When we believe now that something must be done in the interests of the Soviet Union, we do it without hesitation, and then we study their reaction. Whatever noise they can make, the new correlation of forces is such that they no longer dare to move against us."[66] About the same time, Alexander Bovin, one of the speechwriters for Brezhnev, found the general secretary supremely confident and relaxed. "From the crucible of Czechoslovakia emerged a different Brezhnev."[67]

But the longer-term costs of Brezhnev's 1968 success were high. After the initial shock, the Czechs boycotted Soviet attempts to stifle liberal reforms; it took years of forced "normalization" to freeze Czechoslovak society. The Prague Spring created a widespread "spill-over" in the Western non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union, arguably even more destabilizing than during the Polish and Hungarian revolutions of 1956.[68] The invasion killed any remaining socialist illusions on the part of the anti-Stalinist members of the educated classes in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cultural centers of Russia. A handful of them dared to protest openly, but many were in moral and intellectual agony. The fault line between the supporters of de-Stalinization and the Soviet system created in 1956 became an unbridgeable chasm. It was "the biggest political error during the postwar time," wrote Bovin in his diary. Those who had worked in Prague for the international Communist journal, *The Problems of World and Socialism*, concluded that the invasion was a crime. Chernyaev wanted to resign from the Central Committee International Department. He stayed, however, and played the role of conformist. Many future reformers, including Mikhail Gorbachev and Alexander Yakovlev, did the same.[69]

This fallout notwithstanding, the general secretary passed the test and proved to his colleagues that he could protect Soviet security interests under pressure. For all his later willingness to conduct peaceful dialogue with the Western powers, Brezhnev would have found it much harder to do if he had not earned his credentials as the executioner of Czechoslovakia. In 1972, he told the Party Plenum: "Without [the invasion of] Czechoslovakia—there would have been no Brandt in Germany, no Nixon in Moscow, no détente."[70]

Sino-Soviet conflict commanded Brezhnev's attention several months later. A new and dangerous military confrontation loomed in the Far East.[71] In the politi-

cal and military leadership, the hope for reconciliation with China quickly gave way to fears of China's irrational aggressiveness, the new version of the old Russian chauvinistic myth about "yellow peril." A joke circulated in Moscow: A Soviet commander in the Far East calls the Kremlin in panic, asking: "What should I do? Five million Chinese have just crossed the border and surrendered!" This joke did not raise spirits among those responsible for Soviet security in the Far East. Indeed, would they give the order to fire on the crowds of unarmed Chinese civilians if they started flooding over the Soviet borders? Soviet marshals and generals, trained for waging and winning a nuclear war, had no scenarios for this event.[72]

Apparently, Brezhnev shared racism-colored fears of China. He neither trusted the Maoist leadership nor wanted to negotiate with them, leaving this unpleasant business to Kosygin. But China's nuclear capabilities bothered him. Later, in May 1973, Brezhnev, according to Kissinger, considered the possibility of a preemptive strike on China. Almost ten years earlier, when John F. Kennedy sounded out Khrushchev about a possible surgical strike against the Chinese nuclear arsenal, the Soviet leadership ignored those signals.[73] Echoes of this proposal probably came to Brezhnev's attention. Later he would try several times to offer U.S. leadership the idea of a joint front against possible violators of peace in Beijing.[74]

The idea fit Brezhnev's "Sermon on the Mount" philosophy. Its main goal, however, was practical: to deter the Chinese from future provocations on Soviet borders. During talks between Kosygin and Zhou Enlai in a Beijing airport in 1969, Zhou began the conversation with "a rumor" about a Soviet preemptive nuclear strike. A Soviet diplomat, present at the meeting, interpreted it as a sign that the Chinese leadership was "very scared by this possibility." Zhou Enlai clearly hinted to the Soviet side that China neither planned nor was able to launch a war against the USSR. After the talks, Moscow organized additional intimidating signals and Beijing authorities offered a secret nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union. Russian scholars conclude that Moscow's tactics of deterring Beijing through nuclear intimidation were effective.[75] At the same time, Soviet intimidation produced the classic "security dilemma" effect: Mao began to seek rapprochement with the United States against the northern enemy, putting aside ideological constraints.

A third momentous development that opened the door for Brezhnev's involvement in détente policies was the rapprochement with the new leadership in West Germany. Some Western European countries, especially France, had sought to improve relations with Moscow ever since Stalin's death. But the key to European détente lay in West Germany. As long as Konrad Adenauer remained chancellor,

the Bonn government refused to recognize the GDR in any form. The Berlin Wall dramatically raised the price the German people were paying for such a policy. A top Soviet expert recalled later that "much of what happened in Europe—and the origins of the Helsinki process—had roots in the second division of spheres of influence in Europe that took place on August 13, 1961." The failure of the Western powers to prevent the division of Berlin had a profound impact on the mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt, and his adviser, Egon Bahr. Brandt, by then the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), became vice chancellor in 1966 and was elected chancellor in September 1969, campaigning on the platform of *Ostpolitik*, a new foreign policy that promised to reopen the borders between the two parts of Germany.[76]

Alexandrov-Agentov believed that Brezhnev was fortunate to deal with Brandt, "a man of crystal integrity, sincerely peace-loving and with firm antifascist convictions who not only hated Nazism, but fought against it during the war."[77] In order to respond to *Ostpolitik*, Brezhnev had to overcome many hurdles: his memories of World War II, the propagandist image of West Germany as a nest of neo-Nazism and revanchism, and the old ideological enmity between Communists and Social Democrats.[78] Brezhnev abhorred the idea of destabilizing the GDR, in his eyes the country "paid for by the sacrifice of Soviet people, with the blood of Soviet soldiers." He also had to manage a difficult relationship with the GDR leader, Ulbricht, who treated any Moscow-Bonn contacts with deep suspicion and had the means to spy on them and spoil them. Still fresh in the collective memory in the Kremlin was the "Adzhubei episode" of 1964, when Khrushchev's son-in-law, allegedly after consuming too much alcohol, offered an informal deal to the West German leadership at Ulbricht's expense. Mindful of all this, Gromyko and the Soviet Foreign Ministry deliberately played it safe with regard to the GDR and ignored promising changes in Bonn.[79]

The new head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, helped Brezhnev begin the Soviet–West German dialogue. Like Gromyko, Andropov considered Stalin's wartime diplomacy a brilliant example of Realpolitik. Andropov's vision of détente was classic "peace through strength." He is on record as saying: "Nobody wants to talk to the weak."[80] At the same time, Andropov had long ago decided that economic, technological, and cultural cooperation with West Germany and the Germans should be an anchor of future Soviet foreign policy aimed at ending U.S. domination in Western Europe. He was also reportedly hopeful that in the future closer relations with and technology transfers from West Germany could help the modernization of the Soviet Union. Early in 1968, Andropov, with Brezhnev's quiet approval, sent journalist Valery Lednev and KGB officer Vyacheslav Kevorkov to Egon Bahr with the task of setting up a back channel exchange. The

secret nature of this channel helped to break through the wall of mutual suspicions and pretenses. It also permitted Brezhnev to conduct a pragmatic dialogue with Bonn without looking over his shoulder at Ulbricht. After the Czechoslovak crisis, the back channel was ready for activation.[81]

Brezhnev waited for the other side to make the first formal move. His own ideological and political doubts still bothered him. Only in October 1969, after Brandt won elections and became chancellor, did Brezhnev ask Andropov and Gromyko to seek an agreement with West Germany.[82] The sluggish dynamics of Soviet–West German relations began to accelerate, as Egon Bahr began to shuttle between Bonn and Moscow. He spent half a year in 1970 in the corridors of Soviet power and even learned some important rules of the Soviet bureaucratic "kitchen." Brezhnev grew to like him. On August 12, 1970, a nonaggression pact between West Germany and the Soviet Union was concluded in Moscow. Another treaty, with Poland, acknowledging the post-1945 geopolitical reality, was signed in December 1970. In May 1971, Walter Ulbricht, a major opponent of the Moscow-Bonn dialogue and a personal critic of Brezhnev, resigned under joint pressure from the Kremlin and from the group of younger GDR officials headed by Erich Honecker. This opened the road to mutual recognition and a treaty between the two German states a year and a half later.[83]

Another obstacle was the difficult problem of West Berlin. This problem obviously could not be solved on a bilateral basis, since it involved the GDR and four Western occupying powers. By 1971, fortunately, U.S. president Richard Nixon, through his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, indicated a strong interest in rapprochement with the Kremlin. The Americans were eager to "embed" Brandt's *Ostpolitik* in the framework of their own strategy toward the Soviet Union. As a quid pro quo for Soviet assistance in helping the Americans to withdraw from Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger promised the Politburo to facilitate a settlement on West Berlin. Formally, the talks on West Berlin proceeded within the four-powers framework on the level of foreign ministers. In reality, in the best traditions of secret diplomacy, a web of back channels emerged among the White House, the Kremlin, and Brandt. In September 1971, the Western powers formally acknowledged that West Berlin was not part of the Federal Republic of Germany.[84]

Thus, Brezhnev achieved what Khrushchev had failed to achieve, despite great pressure, ten years earlier. The dramatic struggle around Berlin and the GDR that had caused the two most severe international crises in Europe since World War II finally become history. On September 16–18, 1971, Brezhnev entertained Brandt near Yalta, at the state dacha built in Oreanda, where Czar Nicholas I had had a palace. This "second Yalta" meeting, held in the immediate vicinity of Livadia,

where the "Big Three" had met in 1945, was a relaxed event that fit Brezhnev's style and character. He was impeccably dressed, treated Brandt to sumptuous feasts, drove him on a speed hydrofoil ride, swam with him in his giant swimming pool, and led Russian-style chaotic conversations about politics and life. In his clumsy, gregarious way, Brezhnev wrecked the entire schedule of the meeting, to the initial irritation of his German guest. "The light and joyous spirit of mutual affection and trust hovered over everything," Alexandrov-Agentov rhapsodized in his memoirs. "One could see that Brezhnev liked Brandt very much, and the latter seemed also satisfied with his host. Later they would rather easily find common language even on quite complex and sensitive issues." The Crimean meeting was a psychological breakthrough for Brezhnev. He achieved something that Khrushchev most likely had wanted to do but never could: a leader of a major capitalist country, above all Germany, became Brezhnev's "friend."[85]

The opening to West Germany created the duo of Gromyko and Andropov. Both became Brezhnev's most reliable political allies on the matter of détente. The pragmatic, opportunistic nature of this duo was apparent: eventually Gromyko and Andropov benefited from it greatly and ended their careers in the highest positions. Characteristically, like Brezhnev, they constantly asserted their hard-line ideological credentials. Andropov continued to apply "the lessons of Hungary" to foreign policy. Even in a facetious verse he wrote to his advisers, he insisted that the "socialist achievements" must be defended, "if necessary, by the axe." And Gromyko, at a conference of high Foreign Ministry officials, said that West Germany had made concessions to the Soviet Union on practically all the issues. And "we gave them nothing."[86]

Triumphalism aside, Gromyko's tough remarks reflected the pressure of domestic politics on the decision makers. Portraying the rapprochement with West Germany as a foreign policy success meant bolstering the political authority of those who had advocated it, and above all, Brezhnev's personal authority. This was not easy, since Brezhnev was not Stalin and the Soviet Union was no longer a totalitarian monolith. Molotov in retirement remarked that "agreement on the borders of the two Germanys is a big deal," but praised Brandt, not Brezhnev, for it. Other Stalinists, present everywhere in the party apparatus, continued to believe that geopolitical deals should not come at the expense of the ideological goals of Soviet foreign policy. There was also a broad array of increasingly influential cultural and intellectual figures whom Walter Laqueur considered "Russian fascists": anti-Western proponents of transformation of the Soviet Union into a Great Russia.[87] In 1976, long after the policy of détente was hailed as a great success by party propagandists, Brezhnev remarked: "I genuinely want peace and will never back down. Some people, however, dislike this policy. And they are

not [out in the streets], but inside the Kremlin. They are not some propagandists from regional committees. They are people like me. Only they think differently!"[88] These concerns about potential opposition continued to dominate Brezhnev's détente policies on all levels.

Initially, "those who thought differently" tried to pull Brezhnev over to their side. Eventually, however, Stalinists and Russian nationalists lost the battle for Brezhnev's soul. Brezhnev grew to depend on his small circle of foreign policy speechwriters and assistants, and these people began to influence, "with word and pen," the shape of not only foreign, but also domestic, public pronouncements of the general secretary. By contrast, Brezhnev increasingly distanced himself from the most extreme views of his ignorant, crudely anti-American cronies who did not approve of détente for dogmatic ideological reasons. From time to time, Brezhnev showed written examples of "anonymous" criticism of hard-liners to his liberal assistants, as if telling them: "There are wolves ready to devour you, but I will not give you away to them."[89]

Some of Brezhnev's speechwriters (Arbatov, Chernyaev, Shakhnazarov) later supported Mikhail Gorbachev and contributed to glasnost and the "new thinking" that transformed Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet Union itself. Their impact was considerable: they couched Brezhnev's speeches and reports in much less militant and ideological language than the majority of the nomenklatura and many of Brezhnev's old friends and cronies expected and preferred. Yet, in retrospect, their role was strictly limited. Their attempts to liberate Soviet policies of détente from the dead weight of ideology and to open Brezhnev's mind to new international realities brought few results. The general secretary remained staunchly antireformist in domestic politics and dependent on ideological orthodoxy. The main impulses for détente initially came from outside and were successful to the extent that they matched Brezhnev's deeply held convictions and ambitions.

The general secretary wanted to convert the growing military power of the Soviet Union into the coin of international diplomacy and prestige. With the help of Andropov, Gromyko, and his "enlightened" assistants and speechwriters, Brezhnev began to formulate his grand international vision, a program of constructing peace in Europe and openings toward the West. The centerpiece of this program was the idea of an all-European conference on security and cooperation. The Soviet leader announced this at the next Party Congress, which was scheduled for the spring of 1970 but was held in March–April 1971. A scholar of détente concluded that at the Congress "Leonid Brezhnev established his leadership of the Politburo in foreign affairs." He also "openly identified himself with the Soviet response to Brandt's *Ostpolitik*."[90] The unanimous support and the

ovation that Brezhnev received from the Congress delegates for his Peace Program and the opening toward West Germany was not merely a ritualistic act but a crucial political event. From now on, Brezhnev was in a better position to silence the critics of his foreign policy. To make this point clear at the Congress, Gromyko spoke against the anonymous figures inside the party and the country who interpret "any agreement with capitalist states as some kind of conspiracy."[91]

In October 1971, Brezhnev lectured his speechwriters: "We have been constantly fighting for détente and we have already achieved much. Today in our talks with the largest states of the West we aim at agreement, not at confrontation. And we will do everything to make the [Conference on European Security and Cooperation] proclaim a declaration on the principles of peaceful coexistence in Europe. This will postpone war perhaps by twenty-five years, probably even by a century. To this end we focus all our thoughts and activities of our Foreign Ministry and public organizations of our country, as well as those of our allies."[92] But "the fight for détente" was to grow ever more complicated. And the reason was not so much domestic constraints as developments in the outside world. The Brezhnev leadership had to overcome the biggest obstacle of all: the war in Vietnam and the persistence of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation.

BIRTH PANGS OF U.S.-SOVIET DÉTENTE

For years, Brezhnev and his friends in the Soviet military command and the military-industrial complex had regarded the United States as the main adversary. The ideas of arms control and negotiated compromise with the United States did not mesh well with their mind-set, which was permeated by anti-Americanism. Making matters worse was the Khrushchev-era military doctrine, which aimed at *winning* a nuclear war. The Ministry of Defense insisted, in addition to strategic parity, on getting some kind of a force, equivalent to the American, British, and French medium-range and short-range nuclear missiles, deployed in Western Europe and in the seas around the Soviet Union.[93] Ultimately, the Soviet military command (much in the same way as its U.S. counterpart) wanted to retain complete freedom in the continuing arms race. The Soviet military continued to be suspicious of a few diplomats who began to understand that victory in a nuclear war was impossible and that the goal should be negotiated parity based on mutual trust. Minister of Defense Grechko claimed at a Politburo meeting that the head of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) delegation, Vladimir Semenov, "was giving in to American pressure." At first, Brezhnev also was not particularly supportive of the diplomats. When he instructed the SALT delegation before the talks began in Helsinki in October 1969, he told them sternly to keep

their mouths shut about military secrets. The KGB, he warned them, was just around the corner.[94]

The establishment of the back channel between Washington and Moscow in February 1969 did not produce results for months. Every Soviet message to the White House had to go through the cumbersome procedure of Politburo collective approval. Nixon's intentions were the subject of guesses and strong suspicions in Moscow. For years, Soviet leaders knew him only as a devout anti-Communist and expected the worst from his presidency.[95] Sharp differences in priorities did not help Soviet-American relations either. The Politburo believed that the bilateral arms control negotiations were a top priority. Nixon, however, was obsessed with Vietnam and tied all arms control issues to his demand that the Kremlin should apply pressure on Hanoi to end the Vietnam War.[96] Nobody in the Kremlin was ready to do this. When Nixon proposed a summit meeting, Foreign Minster Gromyko, sensing the prevailing mood of the leadership, spoke at the Politburo meeting against any hurry to meet with the U.S. president. He insisted on linking the summit to a successful signing of the agreements on West Berlin. The Politburo agreed, and Nixon's offer was left unanswered for months.[97]

Not until 1971 did Brezhnev show strong personal interest in the back channel communications. By the summer of that year, however, he was willing to meet with Nixon and even visit the United States. Several factors intervened to bring about this change. The first development was Brezhnev's growing self-confidence after the Party Congress in March–April 1971 and as a result of the successful meetings with Bahr and Brandt. Another factor was the sudden announcement of Nixon's trip to China. The Sino-Soviet border clashes finally convinced Washington policy makers that *joint* support of North Vietnam by the two Communist giants was fiction. Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, launched their "triangular diplomacy," parallel and coordinated rapprochement with Beijing and Moscow. From that moment, Gromyko's procrastination tactics no longer looked prudent.[98]

The final push soon came, on August 5, 1971, when Brezhnev received his first personal letter from Nixon. Until then, the official Soviet addressee of the back channel correspondence was Kosygin. The president appealed to Brezhnev to become his partner in discussing "big issues." The general secretary immediately responded with a suggestion to hold a Soviet-American summit in Moscow in May–June 1972. Dobrynin received instructions from Moscow that from now on Brezhnev would personally supervise preparations for the summit.[99]

As in the case of *Ostpolitik*, the general secretary decided to invest his political capital in the relationship with Nixon only when he saw reasonable prospects for a breakthrough. Still, the final miles leading to the Moscow summit were strewn

with rocks. The first crisis broke out when Brandt faced a no-confidence vote in the Bundestag that threatened to disrupt the ratification of the Soviet–West German Treaty. It would have been a tremendous embarrassment for Soviet diplomacy and Brezhnev—the results of the Soviet-German rapprochement would have been suspended or, even worse, reversed. Brezhnev appealed to the White House to intervene in West German politics to help Brandt. At some point, the KGB even contemplated bribing some deputies of the Bundestag.[100] On April 26, 1972, Brandt won the vote of confidence by a two-vote margin. On May 17, the Bundestag ratified the Moscow Treaty. This gave Brezhnev the high ground, politically and psychologically, for negotiations with Nixon in Moscow.

Another development that tested the emerging Soviet-American dialogue at the highest levels followed in South Asia. In November 1971, a war broke out between Pakistan and India. Just three months earlier, the Soviet Union had signed the Treaty on Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with India. The Soviet leadership committed itself to deliver a large supply of armaments. Brezhnev's assistant later recalled that this was primarily a geopolitical move to offset Nixon's rapprochement with China. But what happened next stunned the leadership of both superpowers. Emboldened by the treaty and arms supplies, Indian president Indira Gandhi authorized the Indian army to make incursions into Bangladesh, then Eastern Pakistan, to assist Bengali separatists. Then the Pakistanis attacked Indian airfields. Although the Pakistan army quickly lost the war in the east, the war could still spread into Kashmir, the main contested region between the two states.[101]

Nixon and Kissinger responded to the Indian-Pakistani war almost hysterically; they saw it as a Soviet plot to undermine the entire edifice of American triangular diplomacy, specifically American attempts to build up China (and its ally Pakistan) as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. They demanded Brezhnev's guarantees that India would not attack Western Pakistan. Nixon seemed to be ready to link the future summit in Moscow to Soviet behavior on this issue. He also sent the U.S. Navy to the Bay of Bengal. The Soviets, including Dobrynin, could not see why the White House supported Pakistan, whom they believed had started the war, against India. Brezhnev, puzzled at first, was soon enraged. In his narrow circle, he even suggested giving India the secret of the atomic bomb. His advisers did their best to kill this idea. Several years later, when Alexandrov-Agentov reminded Brezhnev of this episode, he still reacted angrily and spoke spitefully about American behavior.[102]

But the biggest obstacle to the summit remained the Vietnam War. In the spring of 1972 Hanoi launched a new offensive in South Vietnam, without even bother-

ing to consult with Moscow. In April, the U.S. Air Force resumed the bombing campaign against the North and accidentally hit four Soviet merchant ships, killing several sailors. In early May, Nixon ordered even more brutal bombing attacks on Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong harbor.[103] Kosygin, Podgorny, Shelest, and other Politburo members believed that the summit with Nixon should be cancelled because of the bombing and the deaths of the Soviet personnel.[104] Brezhnev wavered. He was, recalls his assistant, "shocked and furious at Washington's provocative actions." Nixon's motives to preserve his prestige in the eyes of the American public concerned Brezhnev very little. "He only felt that the Soviet-American meeting, the business that required so much of his energy and time, was now an object of a gamble, and that [Nixon] was trying to push him into the corner."[105]

But Brezhnev's personal interest in the summit prevailed over emotions, and he pleaded with colleagues for moderation. As it was clearly impossible to force Hanoi to stop its military actions halfway, Brezhnev and Gromyko tried to mediate between Kissinger and the Hanoi representatives. They also quickly agreed that Kissinger should secretly come to Moscow for troubleshooting discussions. Nixon's national security adviser was in Moscow on April 21 and 22. Instead of pressing the Soviet leader on Vietnam (as Nixon wanted him to do), Kissinger did his best to strike a cordial relationship with Brezhnev. In the matters of substance, Kissinger was in a mood for compromise: he gave way to Brezhnev and Gromyko on the text of "The Basic Principles of Relations between the USSR and the USA." As Brezhnev's foreign policy assistant summarized, "This document was tantamount to recognition of the most important principles that the Soviet side stood and struggled for during many years." The most important for the general secretary was acknowledgment of "equality" as a basis for Soviet-American détente.[106]

Brezhnev's conversations with Kissinger, now declassified, reveal the general secretary at his prime as a negotiator: a confident, energetic, and jovial man in a stylish dark blue suit with gold watch chain, not giving an inch in substance and style to his partner, the former Harvard professor. At the time, Brezhnev was in good physical shape. He used his charm, mastered the topics of conversation quickly, did not read from the script, and easily answered Kissinger's arguments. The general secretary tried his best humor on his guest, and the American responded in kind.[107] He also wondered when the United States was going to leave Vietnam. "De Gaulle fought seven years in Algeria," he reminded Kissinger. "It was simply a waste of time and effort. You face the same prospect." He also told Nixon's skeptical adviser: "I certainly support President Nixon's idea of ending the war. That is the end-goal of all of us. Certainly the Soviet Union has no

axe to grind. We seek no advantage to us whatsoever." At the same time, Brezhnev clearly wanted to move from Vietnam on to other issues of "general détente." He told Kissinger that "the current discussions represent the start of a major future process, the start of building mutual trust." There should be "other goodwill measures to solidify good relations between the USSR and the U.S.," in the spirit of "the noble mission that rests on their shoulders."[108]

Brezhnev's personal diplomacy began under exceptionally favorable conditions. Never since the times of the Grand Alliance had an American president tried so hard to win Soviet trust and allow the Kremlin leadership so much access to the White House. Nixon and Kissinger, each for their own reasons, kept the State Department, the rest of the administration, and indeed the entire U.S. political establishment in the dark about their strategies. Kissinger chose Dobrynin and later Brezhnev as his confidants to complain about the "Byzantine bureaucracy" of Washington and Nixon's "idiosyncratic style." Several times Dobrynin was Kissinger's exclusive guest in the top-secret Situation Room in the West Wing of the White House. Brezhnev, as his assistant recalled, was "mightily amused" by Kissinger's repeated pleas to keep some aspects of their talks as their personal secret. At the same time, he could not help being flattered by such an exclusive relationship.[109]

But Kissinger's mission, successful as it was, could not dispel the storm gathering in Moscow on account of Vietnam. The Politburo remained divided, and some of its members urged rescinding Nixon's invitation to Moscow and reaffirming the Soviet Union's prestige in the Communist camp by acting as a staunch ally of Hanoi. The leading skeptic was Nikolai Podgorny, chairman of the Supreme Soviet and therefore technically "head of state." His background and cultural level was very similar to Brezhnev's, but he lacked his friend's charm and flexibility. Podgorny had been watching Brezhnev's foreign policy activism with jealousy and since 1971 had tried to poke his nose into diplomatic affairs. Gromyko, with Brezhnev's blessing, firmly rebuffed these encroachments. But in April and May 1972, Podgorny sensed his opportunity to speak up on foreign affairs. His potential ally was the Ukrainian party leader, Petro Shelest, a staunch believer in "class-based" foreign policy and a closet critic of Brezhnev's leadership qualities. Shelest wrote in his diary: "Our successes in foreign affairs wholly depend on our domestic strength, on our people's faith in us, on our fulfillment of our plans and commitments." Détente, in his opinion, was a slippery slope. Worst of all, Brezhnev's allies and friends wavered: Minister of Defense Grechko spoke against inviting Nixon to Moscow, and Mikhail Suslov, the supreme judge of the ideological purity of state policies, was suspiciously silent on the forthcoming summit.[110] Alexandrov-Agentov recalls that there was "a real danger"

that emotional arguments about solidarity with Vietnam "might resonate among the considerable part of the Central Committee and among the public."[111]

Faithful to his consensus-building style, Brezhnev waited for others in the Politburo to defend the idea of a summit. To everybody's surprise, Kosygin spoke in favor of it. He and Gromyko argued that a cancellation of the summit could derail ratification of the Moscow treaty with West Germany still pending at the time in Bonn, and it could put an indefinite hold on the agreements with Kissinger on SALT and ABMs that created the framework of strategic parity between the United States and the USSR. The winning argument was that the North Vietnamese should not be allowed to exercise a veto over Soviet relations with the United States.[112] For the moment, state interests prevailed over ideological passions.

This was the time at which the Soviets sharply increased the purchase of Western technology and began several projects aimed at the modernization of the chemical and automobile industries. They were building two giant vehicle manufacturing plants—one for cars (Tolyatti) and another for trucks (the Kama River plant).[113] Kosygin's support for détente reflected the widespread expectation among the captains of Soviet industries that European détente and a U.S.-Soviet summit would reopen access to Western economic, financial, and technological resources. Chernyaev's diary record of the Politburo meeting on April 6 provides a colorful illustration of this. Deputy of Kosygin and longtime Minister of Oil Nikolai Baibakov and Minister of External Trade Nikolai Patolichev presented a draft agreement on the economic and trade agreements with the United States. Podgorny sharply objected to cooperation with the Americans on constructing gas and oil pipelines from Tyumen and Yakutia, two permafrost areas to the east of the Urals. Couldn't the Soviets develop Siberia without foreign capital and technical assistance? Brezhnev invited Baibakov to speak. He "calmly took the microphone, barely hiding an ironic expression on his face." Using facts and figures, he demonstrated the profitability and benefits of the agreements. "If we reject the agreement," Baibakov continued, "we will not be able to access the oil reserves of [Yakutia] for at least thirty more years. Technically we can lay a gas pipeline. But we lack metal for pipes, machinery, and equipment." Eventually, the Politburo voted for the drafts.[114]

The full clout of the general secretary had to be brought to bear to overcome the resistance of the military. By mid-April, the obstructionist stand of the Ministry of Defense forced the top SALT negotiator, Vladimir Semenov, to turn to Brezhnev for assistance. At a meeting of the Defense Council in May 1972, Brezhnev abandoned his customary caution and spoke in full voice. According to a witness, he asked Grechko: "If we make no concessions, the nuclear arms race

will go further. Can you give me, the Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces, a firm guarantee that in such a situation we will get superiority over the United States and the correlation of forces will become more advantageous to us?" When Grechko mumbled indicating a negative response, Brezhnev concluded: "Then what is wrong? Why should we continue to exhaust our economy, increase military expenses?" With great reluctance, the military dropped their objections to the arms agreements. During the Moscow summit, the head of the Military-Industrial Commission, Leonid Smirnov, played a constructive role in finding compromise settlements with the American delegation. Grechko had to go along with them, but his resistance to the negotiated compromises with the Americans continued.[115]

Brezhnev also decided to convene a secret plenary session of the Central Committee and appeal for support for his decision to meet with Nixon. The days before and during the plenum, less than a week before Nixon's arrival, were perhaps the most nerve-wracking time for Brezhnev since the Czechoslovak crisis. The uncertainty about ratification of the Moscow Treaty in Bonn added to the tension. Alexandrov-Agentov recalled "the atmosphere of condensed anxiety" at Brezhnev's dacha, where Gromyko, Ponomarev, and a team of speechwriters worked. "Leonid Ilyich was in those days like a walking bundle of nerves, popping in and out of the room, smoking one cigarette after another."[116] One is struck by Brezhnev's personal emotional investment and his feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, despite the power of his office. This was, of course, vintage Brezhnev. Kissinger, during his first secret talks with Brezhnev, observed "an uneasy, quite touching, meld of defensiveness and vulnerability somewhat out of keeping with the assertive personal style. At this point the personalities of Nixon and Brezhnev intersected."[117]

Fortune again smiled on Brezhnev. At the plenum, Kosygin, Gromyko, Suslov, and Andropov spoke strongly for détente with the United States. This event marked a big victory for Brezhnev.[118] Now he could safely assume the mantle of a statesman without fearing for his back at home. When Nixon arrived at the Kremlin for talks on May 22, Brezhnev suddenly whisked him into his office (once Stalin's quarters) for a private conversation. Podgorny and Kosygin, as well as Kissinger, were left outside, furious. Soviet interpreter Viktor Sukhodrev, the only living witness of this meeting, believes it was a pivotal moment in Brezhnev's personal commitment to Soviet-American détente. During the talk, Brezhnev raised the question of whether the United States and the Soviet Union could reach an agreement on the nonuse of nuclear weapons against each other. The antinuclear agreement could, in his view, form a sound basis for lasting peace in the world. This proposal revealed the limits of Brezhnev's strategic vision and

sophistication. Brezhnev reduced the essence of the Cold War to a mutual fear of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. He also believed that an agreement between leaders would be sufficient to dispel this fear. But Brezhnev's proposal also showed the strength of his belief in détente. As Brezhnev's entourage claims, this idea did not come from Gromyko's briefings but sprang from the heart of the general secretary.[119]

The crucial part of the meeting was Brezhnev's suggestion to establish a personal relationship and engage in a special personal correspondence with the U.S. president. Nixon eagerly responded, reminding Brezhnev of the special relationship between Roosevelt and Stalin during the war. For Brezhnev, this was a move behind the Politburo's back. As is always true in human affairs, but particularly in Brezhnev's case, perceptions were more important than substance. Two years later, Averell Harriman recorded the general secretary saying: "Perhaps most Americans did not realize the importance of those first few minutes of conversation with President Nixon in 1972, which had had a decisive effect. The President had said, 'I know you are loyal to your system and we are loyal to ours. So let's put this question aside and build a good relationship despite this difference in systems.' Brezhnev said he had given the President his hand in friendship and had agreed there would be no interference in one another's internal affairs and the two countries would subscribe to peaceful coexistence. A whole series of political and economic agreements had been reached on this basis."[120]

According to Sukhodrev, Brezhnev made the same remark in his narrow circle over and over again. He was impressed that the U.S. president was prepared to leave all strategic interests and details aside and just talk about how to improve Soviet-American relations.[121] The perception of friendship with the U.S. president elevated Brezhnev way above his colleagues and rivals, to the historic place that only Stalin had reached before. Détente became Brezhnev's personal project and he intended to keep it going.

DÉTENTE WITHOUT BREZHNEV?

This close look at the origins of détente proves that the rapid decline of Cold War tensions in the period from 1970 to 1972 was not inevitable nor preordained. True, the shadow of the nuclear arms race and the rapid proliferation of nuclear missiles and warheads in the United States and the Soviet Union greatly contributed to the perception of a dangerous stalemate and helped to rationalize détente in terms of state interests, by presenting arms control as the optimal policy for both sides. This rationalization has since been enshrined in mountains of books,

particularly those written during the 1970s and 1980s, since the outcome of the global bilateral confrontation was still not certain. But to imply that the psychological and economic costs of the nuclear arms race, and the danger of nuclear war, were enough to compel statesmen to seek accommodation in the late 1960s and early 1970s would be the same as suggesting that the prospect of accidental death could be a sufficient reason to cancel Formula One or NASCAR races. In other words, it would mean ascribing too much rationality and wisdom to great powers and their leaders.

True, Soviet political leadership felt intense pressure to reenergize the economy and produce both guns and butter. Détente could be an easy way out of this double bind. There was a desperate need for hard currency and Western technologies.[122] Upon a closer look, however, these economic concerns, strategic calculations, and attention to the nuclear balance carried much less weight in the Kremlin policy debates and contributed less to the Soviet change of heart in favor of détente than one might expect. The majority of Politburo members, as well as the party secretaries and the military—men like Kosygin, Suslov, Podgorny, Shelest, Ustinov, and Grechko—all had deep reservations for different reasons about dancing the "détente waltz" with the Americans. Andropov in the KGB and Gromyko in the Foreign Ministry initially lacked the clout and political will to go too far out on the limb in favor of negotiations with the West. It was Brezhnev's personal and increasingly emotional involvement and his talents as a domestic consensus builder that proved to be the most important factor in securing the policy of détente in the period from 1968 to 1972.

The orthodox views and collective experiences of the majority of the members of Soviet elites and the Politburo prevented them from seeing world realities and acting on them in the way neorealist scholars have assumed they did. At the same time, despite their orthodox zeal, the majority in the Politburo did not live up to the dark expectations and warnings of American neoconservatives. Although some documents prepared by the Foreign Ministry and the KGB did portray détente as the best possibility for the accumulation of Soviet power and spread of Soviet influence in the world, the debates in the Politburo never produced any devious plan of Soviet aggression and domination, as neoconservatives feared. This Politburo, despite its periodic bouts of ideological emotions and jingoism, was not prepared for global and open conflict with the United States. The majority lacked the global vision and the clarity of purpose for what the Soviet Union should do with its growing military power. They did not even see how to benefit from the fact that the United States was bogged down in Southeast Asia. After China, the Soviet leadership "lost" Indonesia and was rapidly losing influence in Egypt and the Middle East. Nothing was gained from their assistance to North

Vietnam. Between 1964 and 1971, the Soviet leadership subjugated its primary security interests, including direct negotiations with the United States, to the vaguely constructed cause of "proletarian solidarity" with Communist Vietnam and to the support of radical Arab regimes. The Soviet leaders also closed their eyes to the fact that the North Vietnamese and Egyptian leaderships remained impervious to Soviet political influence and, in effect, fought their own wars without taking Soviet interests into account.

Soviet behavior in the years leading up to détente can only be explained if one takes into account the dynamics of the Soviet post-totalitarian politics in which consensus concealed "the fight of bulldogs under the carpet" and in which the leader was more broker and negotiator than dictator. The new evidence reveals complex and very important "two-level" games between Soviet foreign policy and domestic politics, and between global strategy and local commitments to various satellites (for example, the GDR and North Vietnam). It is obvious that this change required serious efforts at persuasion, propaganda, and political coercion; from 1964 until 1972, the pro-détente consensus in the Soviet political leadership was extremely fragile and still could have fallen apart. Consolidating this consensus and investing political capital into détente at crucial moments was the main contribution of Leonid Brezhnev to international history.

Kissinger disparaged Brezhnev in his memoirs. "He sought to obscure his lack of assurance by boisterousness, and his sense of latent inadequacy by occasional bullying." In Kissinger's opinion, Brezhnev's ethnic Russian background contributed to his insecurity: He "represented a nation that had survived not by civilizing its conquerors but by outlasting them, a people suspended between Europe and Asia and not wholly of either, with a culture that had destroyed its traditions without yet entirely replacing them."[123]

Indeed, Brezhnev felt insecure in the international arena. But, by contrast to the irascible Nikita Khrushchev, whose lack of assurance translated into bouts of revolutionary diplomacy and crisis-mongering, Brezhnev transformed his insecurity into a quest for international recognition. Détente for Brezhnev also became an important substitute for domestic reforms, the substitute that obscured the already-present drift and decline in economy, technology, and science and, above all, in the ideological sphere. The general secretary suffered from comparison with Stalin and Lenin, and even with Khrushchev. He lacked the will, vision, and intellect to become an efficient and charismatic leader in the Soviet Communist regime. By 1972, Brezhnev had been in office for eight years. The length of his term was approaching that of Khrushchev. He needed a clear and visible success, and these dynamics became obvious during the presummit crisis in April and May 1972.

The initial effect of the Moscow summit on the Soviet people and the elites was powerful. In pursuing détente with Germany and the United States, Brezhnev found the heretofore missing source for his domestic legitimacy. Although there were no studies on Soviet public opinion done at the time, fragmentary evidence, including personal diaries, indicates that Brezhnev's popularity and support for his peacemaking increased among millions of average Soviet citizens, including less-educated people with war memories and those who had strong anti-American feelings.[124] The April plenum of 1973, at which Brezhnev received overwhelming support for his policy of rapprochement with the United States and West Germany, was a high point of his political career. Anti-American propaganda, pervasive in Soviet news, suddenly ceased. A trickle of positive publications on life and culture in the United States, once extremely rare in other than a few elitist journals, now grew into the media torrent that reached the general public, the first such occasion since Kennedy's assassination. The jamming by the state of the Voice of America stopped, and Soviet youth gained access to American pop culture and the Beatles' songs on short-frequency wavelengths. Chernyaev even called Nixon's visit a foreign policy equivalent of Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech. He wrote: "These May days of 1972 will be counted as the start of an era of convergence [of capitalism and Communism]—in its truly revolutionary sense of the word, the one that would save humanity."[125]

Very soon this hyperbolic assessment had to be toned down. The nature of the Soviet political and economic system, of Soviet politics and the character of the leadership, made it impossible for détente to turn into an exit from the Cold War. The consensus he presided over was not as belligerent and xenophobic as the one that had existed under his predecessors. Still, it was clearly based on the formula of "peace through strength," and it left all the props of Soviet ideological orthodoxy intact, so as to make détente palatable for hard-liners. Last, but not least, Brezhnev presided over the most expensive and far-reaching armaments programs in Soviet history. In doing so, he stayed in the good graces of his conservative friends, Ustinov, Grechko, and the rest of the military and military-industrial establishment.[126]

Brezhnev harbored sincere hopes that his personal friendships with Brandt and Nixon would help reduce Cold War tensions. A hard-nosed realist in party politics, he lapsed into romanticism in international relations. This was not a revolutionary kind of romanticism. Brezhnev did not believe as much in the promotion of revolutions and anticolonial movements around the world as in serving Soviet interests by establishing friendships with other state leaders. He mistakenly believed that these friendships and economic cooperation between

the Soviet Union and other great powers could overcome fundamental political, economic, and ideological differences between East and West.

Without Brezhnev and his "Sermon on the Mount," the détente of the period from 1970 to 1972 either might not have happened at all or might have been much less of an event than it was. Brezhnev's emotional makeup and his experience in World War II enhanced his sensitivity toward the dangers of war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries and a nuclear showdown between the Soviet Union and the United States. One need only imagine an unsmiling Kosygin, a gloomy Gromyko, or a hawkish Shelepin taking Brezhnev's place at the summits with Western leaders and the difference becomes clear. Brezhnev's penchant to please, his vainglorious and gregarious nature, his love for foreign cars and other trinkets can be seen as weaknesses of character—but they worked well for détente. In a sense, this was the first Soviet leader who consciously and with pleasure donned the mantle of a peacemaker and a commonsense statesman, and not of a blustering revolutionary or of a domineering emperor. He was also the first in the Kremlin who used the broadly televised images of his proximity to world capitalist leaders as a public relations ploy inside the Soviet Union. Egon Bahr correctly noted in his memoirs that "Brezhnev was necessary for transition to Gorbachev; what the latter accomplished, the former introduced. He was an asset for world peace."[127]