A Failed Empire

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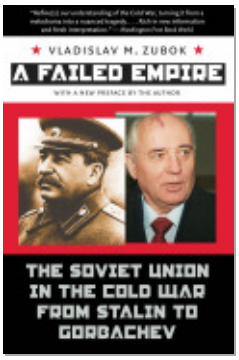

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(CHAPTER 8)

DÉTENTE'S DECLINE AND SOVIET OVERREACH, 1973–1979

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What should the Soviet Union fear?
Only its own impotence, relaxation, laxity.
—Molotov, May 1972

History turned a new page on Christmas Eve of 1979, as columns of Soviet motorized troops crossed the bridges hastily built over the Amu Darya River near the city of Termez and began to pull into the dark gorges between the snowy peaks of Afghanistan. Soviet citizens learned the news from foreign shortwave broadcasts. Around the same time, the elite commando forces "Alfa" and "Berkut" stormed the palace of the general secretary of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin, killing him, his family, and his guards. The KGB set up a puppet government headed by Babrak Karmal, an exiled Afghan Communist. A few days later, the Soviet news agency TASS announced that the invasion was caused by "extremely complicated conditions which put in danger the conquests of the Afghan revolution and the security interests of our country." The news was a surprise even to most of the Soviet foreign policy elite. Experts on the region were not informed about the invasion in advance. Leading scholars from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Soviet Academy of Science instantly realized that the Kremlin's old men had committed a fatal policy error. Afghanistan was a historically unconquerable territory, populated by fiercely xenophobic Muslim mountaineers. Yet only one private citizen, father of the Soviet nuclear bomb and dissident academician Andrei Sakharov, voiced an open protest against the invasion. The Politburo immediately expelled him from Moscow to Gorky, beyond the reach of foreign correspondents.[1]

Around the world, the impact of the sudden Soviet invasion was much greater than the shock of the similar invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The latter did not stop the détente process in Europe and gave only a brief setback to the U.S.-Soviet talks on strategic arms. Not so in 1979. Western European reaction was mixed, but American retaliation was immediate and harsh. President Jimmy

Carter and his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, concluded that the invasion of Afghanistan could only be the beginning of a strategic thrust toward the Persian Gulf, the largest oil pool in the world. This meant a clear and imminent danger to the most vital interests of the United States. In a series of punitive sanctions, the White House froze and suspended most détente agreements, talks, trade, and cultural relations with the Soviets. Carter even imposed an embargo on profitable grain sales to the USSR and appealed to the world to boycott the Olympic Games scheduled to take place in Moscow that summer.

Fifteen years later, new evidence from the Kremlin's archives revealed that the Soviet leadership had no aggressive plans to reach the Persian Gulf. Scholars have concluded that the Soviet leaders reacted above all to the developments in Afghanistan and the region around it. Selig S. Harrison summarized: "Afghan political developments propelled Brezhnev and his advisers on their course much faster than they had anticipated or programmed, in ways they were unable to control, and with undesired results they did not envisage."[2]

In retrospect, the invasion of Afghanistan, despite its initial military success, presents itself as one of the first signs of Soviet imperial overstretch. As if to prove this point, a revolution erupted in Poland in the summer of 1980. The rise of the anti-Communist national movement "Solidarity" was a greater threat to Soviet geopolitical positions in Central Europe than was the Prague Spring. The Kremlin leaders, however, decided not to send troops, allowing the Polish revolution to continue until December 1981.[3] The fear of American reaction played only a marginal role in this decision. Vojtech Mastny writes, "Moscow's conduct in the Polish crisis was not significantly influenced by any specific Western policies."[4]

If the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a disastrous miscalculation and not an offensive scheme, should it invite a reappraisal of the entire preceding period? As many books on the Cold War in the 1970s informed us, this was the time of rapid decline of "high" détente between the Soviet Union and the West. An intense arms race, qualitative as well as quantitative, continued; proxy wars raged between the superpowers in Africa, above all in Angola (1975–76) and Ethiopia (1977–78). Zbigniew Brzezinski believed that "détente was buried in the sands of Ogaden," because of Soviet interference in the African Horn war between Ethiopia and Somalia. Most Soviet foreign policy veterans also insist that détente was a spent force before the end of 1979. However, they blame this on misunderstandings between the Carter administration and the Kremlin rulers.[5]

A closer look at the domestic scene in America and the Soviet Union helps explain the decline of détente. In the United States, by 1975, it had become a tainted term, a target of criticism from many politicians in both political parties.

Less understood and explored are Soviet attitudes toward the deterioration of relations with Washington. This chapter explores Brezhnev's diminishing ability to shape Soviet foreign policy and maintain positive momentum in Soviet-American relations. As his personal interest and health deteriorated, other factors of a bureaucratic and ideological nature doomed Soviet foreign and security policies to drift, stagnate, and dangerously overreach.

DÉTENTE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

As the year 1972 drew to a close, prospects for Soviet-American "partnership" looked better than at any other time since 1945. The U.S. Senate ratified the ABM treaty and approved a provisional agreement on SALT. In October, a package of Soviet-American economic and trade agreements was signed, clearing the way for nondiscriminatory trade status for Soviet exports to the United States and official credit support for U.S. exports to the Soviet Union. Nixon publicly promised to provide long-term credits to Moscow. The back channel was bursting with activity as Americans shared with Moscow exhaustive information on the concluding stages of the Paris talks on peace in Vietnam.[6] In November, both of Brezhnev's major partners in the West, Nixon and Brandt, were reelected—one by a landslide, the other by a secure margin.

On November 20, Brezhnev appeared at the Party Secretariat after a long period of illness. "Everything goes well," he said to the applauding apparatchiks. "After all, the victorious forces turned out to be the forces of peace, not of war." Brezhnev looked forward to the preliminary meeting in Helsinki to discuss preparations for a conference on European security. As a result of Soviet–West German rapprochement, concluded Brezhnev, "we inspire and organize European affairs. We should keep this in mind and never let this slip out of our hands."[7] Also in November, at Soviet insistence, delegates from Eastern and Western Europe, along with the Soviet Union, the United States, and Canada, agreed to develop the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This organization, in Brezhnev's opinion, would become the ultimate political structure on the continent, replacing NATO and the Warsaw bloc.

During the first half of 1973, the general secretary reaped the harvest of successful Soviet diplomacy. In May, he became the first Soviet leader to visit West Germany, the country that Soviet propaganda had vilified for decades as the nest of neo-Nazism. Brezhnev was thrilled by everything he saw, including his residence, Palais Giemnich, in the vicinity of Bonn, and his new BMW sports car, a gift from Brandt. The good personal relations between the two leaders trans-

lated into fruitful negotiations between politicians and industrialists: the Soviet Union increased the supplies of oil, gas, and cotton in exchange for German equipment, technologies, and much-coveted consumer goods.[8]

In June 1973, Brezhnev went to the United States, and there again he did not conceal his excitement and pleasure. He toured Washington and spent time at Camp David and in Nixon's house in San Clemente, California. He also drove American cars at high speeds with a terrified Nixon at his side, hugged Hollywood celebrity Chuck Connors, and played like a child with a toy six-shooter and a cowboy belt he got from the president. But, in fact, the results of the visit were very modest. There was still no breakthrough on trade and economic cooperation. Yet Brezhnev beamed with satisfaction when, on June 22, the anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, he and Nixon signed a bilateral Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War.[9]

For the general secretary, the nonnuclear pledge agreement was an important step toward fulfilling his father's wish. Nixon and Kissinger saw it differently. They would later claim it was a move aimed at driving a wedge between the United States and NATO. In his memoirs, Kissinger insisted that he was the first to perceive Brezhnev's proposal as "a dangerous Soviet maneuver to lure us into renouncing the use of nuclear weapons, on which the free world's defense after all depended." Kissinger even wrote that it was a devious Soviet move to justify a preemptive attack on China. In reality, at the time of its signing, Kissinger and Nixon considered this agreement as a purely symbolic one. Its "decoupling" effect for NATO allies did not concern them too much, and they did not even consult the West Europeans. And the Chinese ability to initiate a nuclear war bothered the Americans at that time as much as that of the Soviets.[10]

This gap between Brezhnev's intentions and how his American partners perceived them (or at least wanted to portray them) indicated the limits of trust between Washington and Moscow. Indeed, both sides viewed détente as managed competition, as a continuation of the Cold War by less dangerous means. Raymond Garthoff, participant and scholar of détente, observed that both sides wanted to obtain, whenever possible, a unilateral advantage over the other side. As Brezhnev rejoiced over the strengthening of the Soviet political position in Europe, Nixon busily journeyed around the Soviet periphery: to Iran, seeking to establish the Shah as American proconsul in the Persian Gulf, and to Poland, reviving anti-Soviet hopes in the midst of the Warsaw Pact.[11]

It was not so much strategy, but rather domestic politics, ideology, and bureaucratic interests that ensured that American politicians and Soviet rulers continued to stand on the familiar ground of "negotiating from strength." After the signing of the SALT agreement, Nixon urged an increase in strategic arms. Brezh-

nev, when he was in West Germany, refused even to discuss the forthcoming deployment of brand-new Soviet intermediate range missiles, the "Pioneer," later known in the West as SS-20's. Brezhnev's assistant Alexandrov-Agentov believes that Brezhnev "followed the lead of our military leadership, above all Ustinov, supported by Gromyko." The military was very proud of the new mobile and high-precision missiles, regarding them as a long-awaited response to the NATO bases surrounding the USSR.[12]

The only hope for Soviet-American détente in this situation was if both Brezhnev and Nixon regarded détente as a joint project worthy of their investments of time and political capital. Nixon and Kissinger indeed had a personal stake in détente and zealously pushed aside all others in the U.S. government and Congress who might have taken credit for it. Still, for them détente was one of many irons in the fire. Nixon's paramount goals before November 1972 were negotiating an end to the Vietnam War and winning reelection. Kissinger played an even more complex game that included China and the Middle East. And from the very start, the potential for an anti-détente backlash in the United States was much higher than in any other country of the West. Initially, Nixon could control the conservative right, but the Watergate scandal would soon erode this control and would ensure that Nixon's numerous liberal enemies could attack détente along with the rest of the president's record.[13]

Brezhnev's agenda was noticeably different. Anatoly Chernyaev, the "enlightened" apparatchik in the Central Committee International Department, noted in his diary that "the main life project of Brezhnev is the idea of peace. With this he wants to stay in people's memory."[14] Wherever he could afford it, Brezhnev made the extra effort to help his new "friends," Brandt and Nixon, and to rescue détente from the attacks of domestic opposition. The general secretary even contemplated some kind of an alliance among the three leaders. In September 1972, he nudged Kissinger to do something to help Brandt's reelection. "Both you and we are interested in seeing [him win]." Kissinger evasively responded that if the coalition in West Germany won, of the Christian Democrats and the Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), the Nixon administration would "use our influence with them not to change policy."[15]

The issue of Jewish immigration tested Brezhnev's willingness to help Nixon and Kissinger in their domestic games. Since 1971, the Soviet Union, acting under growing pressure, had established modest quotas for Jewish emigration. After the Moscow summit and back channel negotiations with Kissinger, the Soviet leadership agreed to raise the quota of those who could apply "for permanent residence in Israel." In the period from 1945 to 1968, only 8,300 Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1972, Jewish emigra-

tion rose from 2,673 to 29,821 per year and continued to grow exponentially.[16] Brezhnev had to spend considerable political capital to allow this emigration, since, ideologically, it was tantamount to betrayal of the Soviet "motherland." Besides, many apparatchiks shared anti-Semitic prejudices and resented letting the Jews emigrate so easily. In August 1972, Soviet authorities issued a special decree that required Jewish emigrants "to compensate" the state for the cost of their education as a prerequisite for obtaining permission to leave. This scheme of "Jews for cash" soon caused the political fallout that was disastrous for Soviet détente goals.

The American Jewish community used this practice as a casus belli against Soviet, and indirectly against American, anti-Semitism. The American media launched a furious campaign against the "exit tax" for Soviet Jews, and a powerful Jewish-liberal-conservative opposition to the package of trade and financial agreements with the Soviet Union emerged in the U.S. Congress. Henry M. Jackson, Democratic senator from the state of Washington, a politician with presidential ambitions, made the ratification of the U.S.-Soviet trade bill conditional on "freedom for Soviet Jews." Charles Vanik of Ohio seconded this amendment in the House of Representatives. The Jackson-Vanik amendment signified a radical shift in the U.S. Congress and took from the hands of Nixon and Kissinger the most visible "carrots" they could offer to Brezhnev: nondiscriminatory trade status for the Soviet Union and state credit support for U.S. exports to the USSR.[17] This campaign revealed how superficial and fragile U.S. domestic support for agreements with the Soviet Union was. It was also a striking illustration of the power of interest groups and ideological factors in American foreign policy.[18]

Initially, Brezhnev kept his distance from the growing turmoil; he was not anti-Semitic, but at the same time he had no desire to get burned by such a hot issue.[19] Repeated pleas from the White House to do something made him change his mind. After obtaining the support of the chief party ideologist, Mikhail Suslov, he quietly asked the KGB and the Ministry of Interior to waive the exit tax for most emigrating Jews, especially the middle-aged and elderly. Amazingly, Brezhnev's informal instruction was ignored by the bureaucracies, and in the spring of 1973 some immigrants still were required to pay the exit tax. During the first two months after the introduction of the exit tax, fewer than four hundred Jews paid 1.5 million rubles for the right to leave the Soviet Union.[20]

New signals from Washington followed, and on March 20 the general secretary brought up the issue before the Politburo. The transcript of the meeting depicts Brezhnev's caginess. The general secretary had to reckon with the sensitivity and explosive power of the Jewish Question. He shared with his colleagues

his thoughts about the possibility of lifting the ban, imposed by Stalin, on Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union. He quickly added, however, that he was mentioning it only "as food for thought." As a result, the exit tax was repealed, but "informally," in order to not signal any concession to the pro-Jewish lobby in the United States. Brezhnev also agreed with Suslov, Andropov, Kosygin, and Grechko that people with education and skills, specialists from secret and military labs, or top-level scientists and professionals should not be given an exit visa to Israel—"because I do not want to seek a quarrel with the Arabs," he admitted. The entire system of state-imposed discrimination against Jews stayed intact.[21]

Years later, Anatoly Dobrynin wrote that the position of Brezhnev and Gromyko on Jewish immigration was "irrational."[22] This opinion ignores a dilemma that the Jackson-Vanik amendment placed before Soviet architects of détente. Trade and financial agreements with the United States had high symbolic and material value for them. At the same time, the new American conditions were totally unacceptable, because they contradicted the principle of parity and equality, the major Soviet goal in détente. They asked themselves, Why should the United States dictate political terms to another superpower with regard to economic agreements that were beneficial for them as well? What would the Arab allies in the Middle East say to the unlimited emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel? Even deeper lay the problem of domestic politics and ideology: authorized mass emigration would severely damage both the propaganda of the Soviet "socialist paradise" that nobody leaves and the process of assimilation of Jews into "the family of Soviet peoples." Why should only Jewish immigration be allowed? What would other ethnic groups in the Soviet Union say? The growing number of Russian nationalists among members of the cultural elites and bureaucracy suspected the Soviet leaders of being too lenient on the Jews. Nationalists singled out Brezhnev, claiming that his wife was a "Jewess" (Victoria Brezhnev came from a Karaite family, and the Karaites traditionally practiced Judaism). Brezhnev could not have been ignorant of these rumors, which were politically damaging to his authority.[23]

Still, Brezhnev was prepared to help Nixon deal with pro-Jewish opposition and obtain ratification of economic and financial agreements in the U.S. Congress. By March 1973, the general secretary was communicating constantly with Andropov, Gromyko, Grechko, Minister of Interior Nikolai Shchelokov, and other officials, looking for a solution on Jewish immigration that would satisfy the Americans but would not look like a concession under external pressure. At the Politburo, Brezhnev emotionally criticized the unnamed saboteurs of his détente in the ranks of Soviet bureaucracy. He appealed to his colleagues: "Either we earn money on this business or we will continue our intended policy towards

the United States. Jackson pre-empted us. If things turn out his way, then our work and our efforts will be worth nothing!" The result of all this furious activity was a system of quotas on the immigration of professionals and the authorization to inform Nixon and U.S. senators via the back channel that the exit tax would be applied only in extraordinary circumstances.[24]

But limited concessions did not placate Jackson and his allies. The opposition expanded their claims to demand freedom of immigration in general. The neoconservatives, cold warriors who at that time surrounded Jackson and would later migrate to Ronald Reagan's flank of the Republican Party, rejected any compromise with the Soviet regime.[25] The failure of Nixon to deal with the Jewish-liberal-conservative opposition was a very serious blow to U.S.-Soviet relations. It precluded chances, however remote, for expansion of economic and trade relations, which could have broadened political support for détente in American society. And it encouraged an opposition to deliver more blows to détente. This opposition was broad and in many ways similar to the movement against recognition of the Soviet regime before 1933. Ideological reasons, which caused the rejection of atheistic Bolshevism in 1933, and the prominence of human rights issue now, overrode security and economic interests.

This development signaled the end of a Nixon-Kissinger Realpolitik policy toward the Soviet regime. And it launched a new transnational alliance between dissident intellectuals in the Soviet Union and American media, Zionists, and human rights organizations. The frustrated advocates of de-Stalinization, Jews, anti-Soviet nationalists, and liberal democrats in Moscow began to appeal to American journalists to apply pressure on the Brezhnev leadership. They saw the American enemies of détente, especially Senator Jackson, as their natural allies. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, along with American neoconservatives, believed that détente was a sinister Soviet plot and that there could be no compromise with the Kremlin.[26]

Suddenly, Brezhnev's détente was in trouble from within. Ideological conservatives in the Soviet apparatus could now argue that rapprochement with the West was dangerous for the regime, since it allowed the United States a Trojan horse inside Soviet society. Persecution by the KGB, arrests, and mental hospitals did not solve the problem of the dissidents but only added fuel to the fire. Jewish activists began to harass and later even bomb Soviet offices abroad. From time to time, Brezhnev called Andropov and told him to "be more careful."[27] The KGB chief was also surprisingly sensitive to international public opinion. He feared that, like Beria and KGB heads before him, he would never be able to have a statesman's career. As his confidant recalled, "Andropov's desire to leave the post

of the head of state security untarnished was so great that it very soon turned into a complex."[28]

Andropov's solution was resourceful: he advocated further Jewish emigration and favored forcing most vocal dissidents to go abroad as well. The KGB began to present dissidents, Jews and non-Jews, with a stark choice: long imprisonment or emigration via a "Jewish channel." During the 1970s, many figures of the liberal-democratic movement of the 1960s, writers, artists, and intellectuals, chose to leave the USSR. Some, like Vladimir Bukovsky and Alexander Ginzburg, were sent abroad from their prison cells. Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and his wife, opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya, were stripped of their citizenship when they were on artistic tour abroad. This solution, for all its cynicism, was bloodless, and Brezhnev liked it. It allowed the Soviet leader to balance between his hard-line friends at home and his "friends" in the West.

The icon of 1960s de-Stalinization, writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, remained the largest thorn in the regime's side. The writer publicly defied Soviet authorities. In September 1968, just a month after the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle* in Europe and America earned him world fame. In 1970, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. In contrast to Boris Pasternak, who had renounced the prize under immense pressure in 1958, Solzhenitsyn seemed to relish the state-organized campaign against him.[29]

The Politburo discussed several times what to do with Solzhenitsyn; his case became a flash point for clashing attitudes in the leadership regarding domestic dissent and détente with the West. Andropov recommended that the Politburo allow Solzhenitsyn to go to Stockholm to receive the prize and then use the opportunity to strip him of his citizenship. But Brezhnev's friend and Andropov's rival, Minister of Interior Shchelokov, objected. He proposed "to fight for Solzhenitsyn, not toss him out." On the eve of Nixon's visit to Moscow, the Politburo discussed Solzhenitsyn again. Andropov and Kosygin suggested he should be expelled, but again, nothing was done.[30] The Politburo procrastination demonstrated that de-Stalinization and cultural thaw had left a deep mark even on ideological conservatives. International uproar around the "Pasternak affair" in 1958 and the more recent trial and imprisonment of writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel in 1965 made the Politburo extremely reluctant to make martyrs of any figures from the Soviet cultural elites.

In the summer of 1973, Solzhenitsyn's case came to the Politburo again after the KGB confiscated Solzhenitsyn's mammoth manuscript about Stalinist terror and camps, *The Gulag Archipelago*. This discovery led to a denouement that perhaps

neither Solzhenitsyn nor Brezhnev expected. In September and October 1973, Brezhnev vetoed Andropov's proposal to expel the writer from the Soviet Union. He feared that negative fallout would have been a disservice to Brandt and Nixon and a complicating factor for his trips abroad. He postponed the issue again by appointing a special commission on Solzhenitsyn. But the writer, driven by missionary zeal as well as a desire to protect himself and his family, launched a preemptive public relations campaign in the West. He publicized "A Letter to the Soviet Leaders," in which he urged them to replace the Marxist-Leninist ideology with the Russian Orthodox faith. On the first day of 1974, the Western media announced the publication of the Russian version of *The Gulag Archipelago*.[31]

Seven days later, Brezhnev raised the issue of Solzhenitsyn's case after discussing Soviet diplomatic efforts at the Conference on European Security and Cooperation in Helsinki. Andropov returned to his old proposal to cut the Gordian knot by expelling the writer from the USSR. Gromyko supported Andropov but suggested another delay, until the conclusion of the conference in Helsinki. At this moment, Nikolai Podgorny demanded the immediate arrest of the Nobel laureate. "In China they publicly execute people; in Chile the fascist regime shoots and tortures people; the British in Ireland use sanctions against working people, and we are dealing with a blatant enemy and just prefer to walk around. If we expel Solzhenitsyn, we reveal our weakness." Kosygin seconded this proposal and suggested that Solzhenitsyn should be put on public trial and then sent to the mines in eastern Siberia. "Foreign correspondents will not go there—it is too cold down there." Both, in essence, blamed Brezhnev for his softness and implied that Brezhnev's foreign trips and his toying with détente began to hurt other state interests. Even Brezhnev's old supporter, Andrei Kirilenko, said sarcastically: "Every time when we speak about Solzhenitsyn as the enemy of Soviet regime, this just happens to coincide with some important [international] events and we postpone the decision." In the end, Brezhnev, in a deft move, agreed that Solzhenitsyn should eventually be put on trial but did not make any decision about his arrest.[32]

At this point, Andropov concluded that the Politburo wanted to ruin his career by saddling him with Solzhenitsyn's case.[33] Through the secret channel to Egon Bahr, the KGB chairman quickly arranged an agreement with the West German government to provide an asylum to the unsuspecting dissident writer. In a personal memo to Brezhnev, Andropov warned that it had become impossible, "despite our desire not to harm our international relations, to delay the solution of the Solzhenitsyn problem any longer, because it could have extremely unpleasant consequences for us inside the country." The KGB chief concluded that failure to act might embolden numerous anti-Soviet opposition groups, and, in

the event that the authorities would have to put the writer on trial, it would cause even "greater damage." Brezhnev had to give his consent, and Solzhenitsyn was on the plane to Frankfurt am Main.[34]

Unfortunately for Brezhnev and Andropov, the issue of human rights and vocal dissidents did not go away with the celebrated writer. True, many dissidents vanished without a trace in the West or spent their energy in factional strife and struggle for positions and grants. But some stayed. Nathan Shcharansky organized the Zionist movement inside the Soviet Union and demanded full religious and cultural rights for Jews. A sizable group of Jews could not emigrate because of their security clearances and continued to provide grist for the anti-Soviet campaigns among American Jews. Andrei Sakharov and a number of other human rights activists refused to emigrate and continued their public activities.

The human rights issue surfaced again in the Politburo discussion of the draft of the Helsinki Final Act, the document to be signed soon at the Conference on European Security and Cooperation in Helsinki in July 1975. The head of the Soviet delegation, Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Kovalev, one of the "enlightened" diplomats, persuaded Gromyko to make concessions to Western Europeans who wanted to include in the draft Final Act a so-called third basket: provisions on the free movement of people, family reunification and visits, and informational, cultural, and educational openness. In return, Western countries agreed to accept the territorial and political status quo in Eastern Europe as it emerged after World War II. When the draft Final Act reached the Politburo, ideological conservatives there expressed outrage and dismay. Would the Soviet Union be open to subversion and interference from the outside? Kovalev prepared for the storm, but to his surprise Gromyko brought up a historical argument. He compared the Helsinki agreements to the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and Brezhnev to Czar Alexander. Gromyko cited his "understanding" with Kissinger that neither side should interfere with the other's domestic affairs, the Final Act notwithstanding. He concluded that the Soviets got what they wanted, and as far as human rights were concerned, "we remain the masters in our own house."[35] The conservatives withdrew their objections: after all, Stalin had also signed the Yalta Declaration of Liberated Europe, in exchange for other Western concessions.

On August 1, 1975, Brezhnev and Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, along with thirty-three leaders of other European countries and Canada affixed their signatures to the historic Helsinki Final Act. In the short term, the act did not lead to any liberalization inside the Soviet Union. Soviet propaganda touted this event as Brezhnev's greatest victory, and the general secretary presented it as such before the Party Congress. Personally, he regarded it as the culmination of his states-

manship. In the long run, however, the commitments to human rights embedded in the act proved to be a time bomb under the Soviet regime. Gromyko, who dismissed dissidents as having negligible power, was correct: they never played a significant role in undermining the regime. But his reading of global ideological and political trends was profoundly flawed. The triumph of czarist diplomacy at the Congress of Vienna was short-lived. Russia later became the bogeyman of liberal Europe, which prepared Russian defeat in the Crimean War in 1853–55. In 1975, the Kremlin once again celebrated geopolitical victory without anticipating its dire consequences.

TROUBLED PARTNERSHIP

The Brezhnev-Nixon partnership was challenged by the sudden outbreak of the Yom Kippur War on October 6, 1973. The Soviet role in this war has long been the subject of great controversy. Today this story can be analyzed with much more clarity, thanks to the recollections of ex-Soviet veterans, above all the senior Soviet diplomat Viktor Israelyan. A key player in this outbreak was Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who prepared the surprise attack against Israel in an effort to restore Arab pride and lost territories. He kept the Politburo and Soviet representatives in Egypt in the dark—although, of course, the KGB and the military must have known about the preparations. As with the North Vietnamese earlier, the Kremlin leaders could not control or restrain their foreign clients.[36]

After Nixon went to Moscow, the Egyptian leader, upset that the Soviet-American rapprochement might mean joint support of the status quo in the Middle East, began to contemplate a double game. He announced the eviction of 17,000 Soviet military advisers and experts from Egypt. Nixon immediately sent a personal word to Brezhnev via the back channel that he did not know anything about Sadat's decision and had had no secret contact with him. In reality, the United States quickly responded to the secret signals from Sadat.[37]

Brezhnev was concerned by Egyptian and Syrian preparations. He would have preferred to work with the United States to prevent another war in the Middle East. During his trip to Washington in the summer of 1973, he warned Nixon that Moscow could hardly control its Arab friends. Nixon and Kissinger did not take Brezhnev's warnings seriously and did not pursue the subject. Kissinger's goal was to undermine Soviet influence in the Middle East, and therefore he refused to accept Moscow's role as an architect of peace there. Besides, preoccupied with the American exit from Vietnam, the Americans did not see the gathering clouds in this other region.[38] Facing American reluctance to act together, the Soviet leadership did not see any reason to alert Israel about the impending Arab attack.[39]

Soviet political and military leaders wanted to help Anwar Sadat defeat Israel and to regain Egyptian territories. At the same time, they were certain from the start of the war that the Arabs would lose it. This forecast proved correct, and they moved to prevent a complete collapse of their Arab allies. During the roller coaster of the Yom Kippur War, Brezhnev had to wear two hats: one as Politburo leader and another as the détente statesman. He accomplished this with surprising skill. He deftly neutralized the hard-liners who wanted drastic actions. For instance, he sent Kosygin, who demanded action, on a secret mission to Cairo; there the Soviet premier wasted his time and energy trying to get Sadat to follow Soviet advice. And he cut out Podgorny, whose belligerence was rivaled only by his ignorance.[40] The Kremlin leader consistently asserted his priority to be that of working together with the U.S. administration in the spirit of détente, the Basic Principles, and the agreement to prevent nuclear war. Kissinger admitted in a narrow circle of his advisers that the Soviets "have tried to be fairly reasonable all across the board. Even in the Middle East where our political strategy put them in an awful bind, they haven't really tried to screw us."[41]

One reason for this behavior was Brezhnev's desire to continue his special relationship with Nixon. During the crisis, the two men exchanged handwritten amiable notes for the first time, and Brezhnev happily boasted to the Politburo: "Nixon feels a deep respect for all Soviet leaders and for me personally." By that time, however, Nixon was engulfed by the Watergate scandal, and Kissinger, already confirmed as the secretary of state, ran U.S. foreign policy on his behalf. Kissinger and his staff did not miss the chance to exploit Egypt's defeat to undermine Soviet influence in that country. During the last stage of the war, Kissinger ignored Soviet offers of cooperation to gain time for victorious Israeli advances into Egyptian territory.[42] Brezhnev and his colleagues began to grumble about "the growing role of Zionism in the United States." On October 19, Andropov warned Brezhnev that "the threat of impeachment for Nixon now has become more real than several months ago. It cannot be excluded that under present conditions the Jewish lobby in the Congress will put serious constraints on Nixon's actions and his willingness to carry out the agreement reached during your visit to the United States."[43]

The Soviets had to do something to save Sadat and Egypt from a complete rout. After a long and heated discussion, the Politburo crafted an ambiguous message to Nixon, recycling the famous 1956 offer to Eisenhower to dispatch joint U.S.-Soviet forces to the Middle East to stop the war. Only at the last minute did Brezhnev agree to give some "teeth" to the message: in case the United States did not want to use joint force to stop the war, the Soviet Union "should be faced with the urgent necessity to consider taking appropriate steps unilaterally." Two

paratrooper divisions in the Caucasus were brought to a state of readiness and Soviet warships in the Mediterranean were instructed to move toward Egypt in a demonstration of force. At bottom, the Soviet gesture was a mild bluff, and it was carefully designed not to frighten the Americans.[44]

Kissinger, however, panicked. Without informing the Soviets via the back channel, he put American strategic forces on DEFCON-3, the condition just short of full nuclear alert. When the Politburo reconvened the next morning to discuss a possible reaction, many blamed this move on Kissinger's machinations. Grechko, Andropov, Ustinov, Kirilenko, and some others suggested Soviet mobilization.[45] Brezhnev, mindful of Khrushchev's brinkmanship, proposed to ignore the alert. Perhaps, he reasoned, Nixon's nerves were frazzled by the domestic campaign against him. "Let him cool down and explain the reason for the nuclear alert first." It was perhaps one of the finest moments of Brezhnev's statesmanship. In fact, Nixon was in a drunken stupor, and Kissinger was managing the Middle East crisis as a one-man show, ignoring the president. When Nixon woke up on October 25, he rescinded the alert and sent a personal conciliatory response to Brezhnev. Finally, joint U.S.-Soviet diplomacy found traction, Israeli armed forces stopped their advance, and the crisis began to wind down.[46]

The American unilateralism in the Middle East did not produce the decline of Soviet-American détente.[47] On the contrary, the Yom Kippur War left Brezhnev even more convinced that peace between Israel and the Arabs could only be built by joint Soviet-American actions. In a letter to Nixon on October 28, Brezhnev hinted at the machinations of some forces that sought to ruin "personal mutual trust between us." He no longer concealed his suspicions with regard to Kissinger.[48] And he was so irritated by Sadat's manipulative behavior that he began to think about establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. He told Gromyko that the Arabs could go to hell, if they wanted to make the Soviet people "fight for them." Chernyaev, a witness to this emotional outbreak, wrote: "This is realpolitik. But the society knew nothing about it." Soviet propaganda made the Soviet people believe that Israel was an aggressor again. As in 1967, newspapers stirred up anti-Zionist emotions, and party organizations arranged rallies of solidarity with the "progressive" Arab regimes.[49]

Brezhnev's attempts to act as a closet pragmatic in the Middle East proved to be fruitless. After 1974, the United States seized the initiative in the Israeli-Egyptian settlement and in the next four years worked out the Camp David accords. The Soviets had already pumped tens of billions of rubles into Egypt and bitterly resented Sadat's betrayal. The "loss of Egypt" had a lasting psychological impact on subsequent Politburo decision making with regard to African crises.

And in 1979 these memories would play a crucial role in fomenting Soviet suspicions that Hafizullah Amin could "do a Sadat" to them again in Afghanistan.[50]

Watergate and Nixon's resignation in August 1974 caused another lasting trauma to Brezhnev. During the last months of Nixon's presidency, his correspondence with the Soviet leader assumed an increasingly surreal nature. The isolated president began to view partnership with the general secretary as a peaceful island in the storm-tossed sea of the Watergate scandal. Nixon signaled via the back channel that the two leaders had common enemies, among them Jewish groups in the United States. He even talked, to the dismay of his staff, about "a Brezhnev-Nixon doctrine" as a solid foundation for world peace. Remarkably, Brezhnev never attempted to exploit Watergate for his own political purposes, as some of Nixon's advisers feared would happen. In fact, he was the last foreign leader continuing to support Nixon without reservations. Just as Stalin and Molotov in 1945 could not understand Churchill's electoral defeat, Brezhnev and his advisers could not fathom how the bugging of a suite in the Watergate Building could cause the resignation of such a formidable statesman after his landslide reelection. In their eyes, the only plausible explanation was that the enemies of détente chose a good pretext to get rid of its chief American architect.[51]

The blow was all the more painful since just three months earlier, in May, Brezhnev had lost another détente partner. West German chancellor Willy Brandt resigned in the wake of a sex scandal and the revelation that one of his closest aides, Guenther Guillaume, was a GDR spy. GDR leader Erich Honecker and chief of the East German secret police (the Stasi) Erich Mielke had kept Guillaume in Brandt's entourage, despite Soviet disapproval. East German leaders clearly had their own interests in spying on Brandt and compromising him. They detested the Soviet–West German back channel and the friendship between Brandt and Brezhnev that jeopardized the traditional leverage of the GDR on the Kremlin. Brezhnev was disappointed with his sudden resignation. He was also resentful of Honecker.[52]

Among the original architects of détente, only the Soviet leader remained in power, although his health was rapidly deteriorating. Earlier in his life, Brezhnev had had two heart attacks. During the 1960s, he was still in good physical shape, but toward the end of this decade he developed a gradual brain atherosclerosis that produced periods of asthenia after moments of strain. After the Czechoslovak crisis, Brezhnev had developed the habit of taking one or two pills of an opiate-based sedative. Sometimes he overdosed and ended up in a comatose state, followed by a period of general sluggishness.[53]

Brezhnev's foreign partners began to notice irregularities in Brezhnev's schedule and sudden disappearances. During Kissinger's trip to Moscow in April 1972, Brezhnev took the appalled American statesman on a crazy car race to shake off his grogginess after a bad overdose.[54] During the Yom Kippur War, when Brezhnev had to work day and night, his nerves began to give out again. Almost every afternoon, Sadat called on the Soviet ambassador in Egypt to tell Brezhnev of the catastrophic situation, demanding immediate assistance. Brezhnev had no time to rest. Andropov, aware of the leader's physical problems, demonstrated his concern in a bizarre way. He portrayed Kissinger and Sadat as acting in cahoots, trying to ruin Brezhnev's health by creating "an excessive strain."[55] He knew that Brezhnev was becoming a drug addict and ordered his personal guards and a nurse to secretly supply him with sedative pills. At first Andropov pretended to intercede, but in the end he averted his eyes. He might even have begun to help Brezhnev get the pills.[56]

The pills, of course, only aggravated the Soviet leader's progressive malaise. Brezhnev's attention span shortened and his grasp of details began to slip. Even his character changed, and he became more suspicious and peevish and less open to understanding and compromise. The top Kremlin physician, Evgeny Chazov, concluded that Brezhnev's addiction "contributed to the collapse of the national leadership." Chernyaev, from his vantage point in the party's International Department, deplored the transformation of "the great country built on the foundations of the great revolution" into a mediocre state without dynamic leadership and inspiring ideology, with a chronic shortage of basic consumer goods.[57]

Meanwhile, the arms race and technological developments on both the Soviet and American sides continued apace and in various aspects began to get ahead of the sluggish tempo of the arms control talks. U.S. deployment of multiple individual reentry vehicles (MIRVs), that is, many independently guided warheads on a single missile, spawned a quantum leap in strategic nuclear arsenals. The Americans also developed a high-precision cruise missile. Meanwhile, the Soviet military-industrial complex was also engaged in a feverish qualitative and quantitative race. It produced its own MIRVs, the "Pioneer" (SS-20) rockets, and a new medium-size Tu-22M bomber (called "Backfire" by the Americans). The Soviets developed new "Typhoon" class nuclear submarines and built a powerful navy. During the decade after 1972, the Soviets produced 4,125 land-based and sea-launched ICBMs, while the United States produced 929. What worried American strategic planners above all was a huge new ICBM that could carry ten warheads and be fitted into the available silos, thus replacing old, less powerful and reliable rockets. The Americans called it the SS-18. Its real name, "Satan," suggested that

Soviet rocket designers, despite their atheistic upbringing, found inspiration in infernal imagery. The Soviets began to deploy these missiles in 1975 and stopped only when their number in silos reached 308.[58]

Why did the Soviet side build these hellish missiles and in such great numbers? According to some authoritative sources, the Kremlin leadership continued to suffer from the Cuban missile syndrome, that is, the ignominious withdrawal after the 1962 crisis.[59] There were also factors of geography that, in the opinion of the Soviet general staff, favored the United States. The Soviet military believed they confronted not only U.S. forces on NATO bases near Soviet borders, but also the nuclear forces of Great Britain and France. They also had to deploy some missiles and conventional forces against China. Finally, the Soviet military-industrial elite still felt that their strategic stockpile was inferior to the American one in *qualitative* terms. This made them even more determined to make up the discrepancy with *numbers*. In 1994, Viktor Starodubov, former assistant to Dmitry Ustinov, explained with disarming logic that the Soviets built so many "heavy" missiles because "they were one of few things we could build well."[60] In retrospect, the Soviet buildup of the 1970s did not give the Kremlin strategic superiority, as neoconservative analysts warned. The Soviet Union did not have the capability to launch a surprise disarming strike against the United States; the Americans remained ahead of the Soviet Union in many ways, although without the huge advantages that Washington had enjoyed earlier.[61]

At Politburo meetings, Brezhnev never confronted Ustinov, Grechko, and the head of the Military-Industrial Commission, Leonid Smirnov, on the issue of the missile buildup. He was a believer in negotiations from the position of strength and did not see why the Soviet buildup of the 1970s could be viewed as threatening in Washington and other Western capitals. It is worth repeating that Brezhnev wanted to negotiate without blackmail, as Khrushchev had done. He continued to believe that arms control mechanisms and agreements, including SALT, could become a foundation for lasting cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States. His aim was to convene a conference on security and cooperation in Europe by the time of the next Communist Party Congress.[62] This would enable Brezhnev to validate the peace program he had proclaimed at the previous Party Congress in 1971 and boost his peacemaker image among the party cadres and the Soviet people.

Brezhnev sought to engage Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford, in order to work together to overcome the hurdles on the road to a comprehensive strategic arms treaty. After elaborate back channel consultations, Ford and Brezhnev agreed to meet at Vladivostok, the Soviet outpost in the Far East, in late November 1974. The Soviet guiding principle for the strategic talks was equal levels of security

with NATO. This, above all, meant counting the NATO "forward-based" nuclear forces, that is, American missiles, bombers, and submarines based around the Soviet Union, as well as the nuclear forces of Great Britain and France. These countries refused to add their systems to the equation, but Kosygin, Podgorny, several other Politburo hard-liners, and the entire military leadership insisted on this principle. Though Brezhnev felt exasperated by Western intransigence, he also believed his colleagues did not fully share his commitment to negotiate.[63]

In a one-on-one conversation with Brezhnev in October 1974, Kissinger suggested the idea of comprehensive and roughly equal levels for the strategic forces of both sides. The secretary of state, mindful of the waning support for détente in his country, asked Brezhnev to keep this idea secret. Otherwise, he warned, Senator Jackson "would get tipped off." The general secretary immediately agreed to use it as the basis for negotiations with Ford. His only condition was that any further American amendments would not be "in the nature of fundamental new proposals or anything new in principle."[64]

When Brezhnev and Ford met in Vladivostok on November 23 and 24, 1974, the general secretary was antsy and uncertain. Reenacting his first meeting with Nixon in Moscow, the Soviet leader invited Ford and Kissinger to his compartment on a special train to build a human relationship. To break the ice, he offered them tea with cognac. Brezhnev recalled the personal agreement he had had with Nixon "on one thing—not to interfere in each other's internal affairs." When Ford wondered how they should continue to negotiate, in a smaller or larger group, the general secretary interjected vividly: "This depends on the two of us. It is clear that the world is looking at us, and that the world public opinion is most interested in how to ensure that there will be no nuclear war." In the next few minutes, Brezhnev laid out his own view on the nuclear arms race: "We have not achieved any real limitation, and in fact we have been spurring the arms race further and further. This is wrong. Tomorrow science can present us with inventions we cannot even imagine today, and I just don't know how much farther we can go in building up so-called security. Who knows, maybe the day after tomorrow the arms race will reach even outer space. The people don't know all this, otherwise they would really have given us hell. We are spending billions on all these things, billions that would be much better spent for the benefit of the people."[65]

In 1985 and 1986, similar views in Moscow came to be known as "new thinking." Incidentally, Georgy Kornienko and Sergei Akhromeyev, two members of the arms control panel of experts that prepared the Soviet negotiating positions for Vladivostok, later became coauthors of Gorbachev's first comprehensive proposal on nuclear disarmament. At the moment, however, Ford's response was

evasive and formulaic, revealing his lack of vision. He became president without national elections, and his pardon of Nixon made him more enemies than friends. Besides, Kissinger warned him that the only thing on Brezhnev's mind was the idea of joint Soviet-American actions in the event that China behaved aggressively. Later Kissinger expressed regret that he and Ford "did not explore" Brezhnev's insight further.[66]

After the first talk on the train, Brezhnev suffered a seizure, and, although his physicians managed to control it, they recommended that he delay the talks. He refused. The talks were arduous and extremely intense. The American position hardened because of slipping domestic support for détente and growing skepticism about SALT in Congress and also due to the hard-line stand of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the end, Kissinger's earlier idea remained the last-resort option. If the Soviets agreed to exclude the NATO forward-based systems from the agreement, then the Americans would agree to waive limitations on the "Satan" missiles and the number of their warheads. Unfortunately, this was not part of the approved Politburo position.[67]

From Vladivostok, Brezhnev called his Moscow colleagues, who, eight time zones away, were still in bed. Andropov, Ustinov, and Kosygin took Brezhnev's side. But Minister of Defense Grechko, backed by Podgorny, refused to make concessions. Brezhnev yelled at Grechko, his wartime friend, so loudly that his assistants could hear it through the office walls. When no arguments helped, he suggested that he would break off the negotiations and come to Moscow for an emergency Politburo meeting. The deeply shaken Grechko gave up. The road to the SALT agreement seemed open after two years of deadlock. To return Brezhnev's favor, Ford softened the American stance and indicated to European allies that he would remove last objections to the creation of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe—a coveted goal of the general secretary.[68]

Both leaders made hard choices, and it seemed that an affinity was about to blossom. But Ford and Kissinger came home to vocal ideological opposition to the Vladivostok agreements. Soviet "heavy" missiles allowed critics in the United States to attack détente by arguing that the Soviet leaders were preparing for nuclear war, putting themselves in a position "to strike first if it appears imminent."[69] The Democratic majority in Congress elected in the wake of Watergate wanted to assert its supremacy over the White House. Senators and representatives reproached Ford and Kissinger for secret diplomacy and indifference to human rights. Ford's refusal to invite Solzhenitsyn to the White House caused a public uproar. In December 1974, the two-year-long debate about the U.S.-Soviet trade bill ended in victory for Jackson and his supporters. This was a slap in the face for the Soviets; now Soviet-American trade was subject to worse terms in the

Trade Act than before it had been passed. The Soviets could no longer get American credits for building oil and gas pipelines and had to turn to the Western Europeans. Moscow abrogated the trade agreements signed in 1972.[70] This humiliating setback ruined the détente expectations among Soviet captains of industry and economic managers.

After the Vladivostok talks, Brezhnev collapsed in his train compartment. He recovered after a few weeks but now could read only with difficulty, and only texts in an enlarged font typed with a special typewriter. During his trip to Poland at the very end of the year, he grabbed a baton from the orchestra's conductor during the ceremonial farewell and began to wave it to the music of the "International." At the Helsinki summit, Brezhnev was in a semi-coma and barely managed to affix his signature to the Final Act. He did not appear at the Politburo for weeks, even months.[71] In October 1975, Chernyaev noted in his diary that "Brezhnev exhausted himself in the struggle for peace."[72]

Brezhnev never again showed such passion and commitment to talks with the Americans as he did in Vladivostok. However, the fall of détente must not be related only to his loss of energy and initiative. From 1972 to 1975, the general secretary's increasing malaise did not prevent him from being a forceful and energetic negotiator. Perhaps active statesmanship remained the last thing to stand between Brezhnev and his addiction. In the close circle of his advisers and speechwriters in December 1975, preparing for the next Party Congress, Brezhnev complained: "Even after Helsinki, Ford and Kissinger and all kinds of senators demand to arm America even more. They want to make it the strongest power. I am against an arms race, but when the Americans declare they would build up, then the Ministry of Defense reports to me that in this case they cannot guarantee security. And what should I, as chairman of the Defense Council, do? Should I give them 140 billions or 156 billions? And I do give them money, again and again—money that disappears into the funnel."[73]

Brezhnev had not wanted to meet Ford without a guarantee that they would sign the SALT Treaty. Alexandrov-Agentov recalled that Brezhnev's guiding principle was to invest his political capital only when he saw "a promise of success." And Ambassador Dobrynin and KGB analysts wrote from Washington that the Kremlin should wait until the next presidential election to continue negotiations.[74] Not only Brezhnev, but Andropov, Gromyko, and all other advisers, failed to recognize that American politics entered a new phase after Watergate. The Kremlin leaders perceived Nixon "as some kind of American General Secretary." They could not understand why Ford could not reassert his power over Congress and why he kowtowed to various lobbies and public groups. Moreover, the Soviet

leadership did not see that the unique combination of political and personal factors that had led to détente up to 1974 was gone.

The success of détente from 1969 to 1973 reflected long-term trends in Western politics during the 1960s, including great social and cultural turmoil and the growth of American isolationism and European antimilitarism. Fragmentation of the home front and the domestic impact of the Berlin Wall and the Vietnam War made a new generation of statesmen in West Germany and the United States willing to negotiate with the Soviets from the position of equality. In contrast, the leaders in the Kremlin imagined détente in a completely different way. They believed that it was the reward for years of the costly military-strategic buildup that had changed the global correlation of forces in favor of the Soviets. This understandable misperception was a fatal flaw. Soon it became amply demonstrated once again on the fields of proxy battles between the superpowers in Africa.

SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

For all its fateful consequences, the escalation of Soviet intervention in Africa was a bizarre sideshow to the Kremlin's international agenda. Africa remained mainly on the periphery of Soviet foreign policy. Soviet experts later claimed that Soviet leaders had no specific doctrine or long-term plans for Africa.[75] Yuri Andropov once confided that the Soviets "were dragged into Africa" against their best interests.[76] How did it happen?

The Politburo "discovered" Africa at the same time it began its support for the radical Arab nationalists. From the beginning, the Soviets acted on the ideological premise that decolonization of the continent would be a major blow to world capitalism and a great victory for Communism. Ivan Maisky wrote to Khrushchev and Bulganin in December 1955 that "the next act of the struggle for global domination of socialism will unfold through the liberation of colonial and semi-colonial people from imperialist exploitation." He added: "At the same time, the loss of colonies and semi-colonies by the imperialist powers must accelerate the victory of socialism in Europe, and eventually in the USA."[77]

Khrushchev himself dreamed of transforming selected African countries into "windows of socialism" and bulwarks of the expanding socialist camp. Crucial for him and other true believers in the party was that many in Africa looked with hope and even enthusiasm at the Soviet model of industrialization and social modernization. African anticolonial leaders of the late 1950s saw the Soviet Union not as a totalitarian state but as a beacon of progress, an alternative to the much-hated former colonial powers and their capitalist ways.[78]

This ideological impulse was reinforced by Moscow's resentment at the Western penchant for considering Africa as its exclusive sphere of influence. Stalin's failure to obtain naval bases in Libya was not forgotten. A veteran Soviet diplomat had the feeling that the United States behaved "as if there was an extension of the Monroe Doctrine from America to Africa."[79] The extreme political volatility in postcolonial Africa after decolonization created a permanent possibility for the carving and recarving of spheres of influence between the two hostile Cold War blocs. Generally speaking, it was a recycling of the same sort of situation that had propelled European powers into carving up all of Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century. Karen Brutents, the expert on Africa in the Central Committee International Department, and Leonid Shebarshin, a top intelligence officer, compared the Soviet Union and the United States to boxers for whom the exchange of blows became the main motive and goal. The Congo crisis, involving Eisenhower and Khrushchev, as well as the UN secretary general, Dag Hammarskjold, and the Congolese leader, Patrice Lumumba, was at the center of Soviet domestic and world news for months.[80]

The results of this first Soviet offensive in Africa were sobering. After making considerable investments, the Soviets lost the battle over the Congo and were kicked out of Ghana and Guinea. The end of the experiment to turn Guinea into "a window of socialism" was especially painful and cooled Soviet faith in the possibility of Africa's transformation for a decade.[81] The Polyansky report of 1964 criticized Khrushchev's course of supporting African "progressive regimes." It concluded: "We often lack any practical knowledge of those countries, yet provide them across-the-board financial, technical-economic, military and other assistance." Soviet generosity in Africa in many cases "led to deplorable results: the leaders of those countries ate what we gave them, and then turned away from us. Capitalists laugh at us and they have reason to do so." At the same time, the Kremlin leaders never disavowed the ideological justification for Soviet involvement in Africa. They just believed that Khrushchev had been carried away and forgot to be selective "from the point of view of class criteria."[82]

Lessons were again forgotten during the 1970s. One may suspect that the rivalry between Moscow and Beijing for hegemony over "progressive forces" and national liberation movements around the world facilitated the Soviet return to Africanism. But by 1970, the KGB and the Central Committee International Department reported with confidence to the Politburo that the Chinese "offensive" in Africa was defeated. Brezhnev told Kissinger in April 1972 that a Soviet diplomat in Algeria once found a Chinese restaurant in the middle of the desert. "Anyone who came into the restaurant for a meal left with a bundle of free Chinese propaganda. This was the period when they tried to split the world

Communist movement. Well, when they lost in their attempt at hegemony over the movement and lost their foothold, they closed up this restaurant in Algeria."[83] Yet it was in the fall of 1970, after Moscow's struggle against China's "dumplings diplomacy" had ended, that Andropov's KGB proposed and obtained Politburo support for a more active African policy.[84]

The factors that brought the Soviets back to Africa were the revolutionary-imperial paradigm that still dominated Kremlin thinking, the political and ideological vacuum on the continent, and the active solicitation of Soviet involvement by African leaders themselves. As the KGB reported, after years of trying to secure aid from the United States and Western European powers, African nationalists concluded that "the Soviet Union was the only major power which could assist them in reaching their political and social goals."[85] Kremlin leaders could not miss another "historic opportunity" to influence the processes of decolonization and modernization on the African continent.

This time, however, Soviet intervention in Africa was not simply an ideology-driven crusade. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa became the site for the Soviet military to demonstrate their new power-projection abilities. The scramble for Africa between the Soviets and the United States, as it turned out, was a manifestation of a major reason for Soviet behavior in the 1970s: to act as a global power equal to others.[86] Since 1964, the Soviet Union had begun building a strategic navy and a sizable fleet of transport aircraft. During the Yom Kippur War these capacities came to the world's attention. The Soviet naval command, especially Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, itched to compete with the U.S. Navy and demanded bases in Africa. In 1974, they obtained one in Somalia.[87] As the future would soon reveal, this acquisition was not worth the trouble.

The picture of Soviet expansion in Africa would be incomplete without new socioeconomic factors. After the four-fold rise of oil prices after the Yom Kippur War, the Soviet Union became the main beneficiary of windfall profits that resulted from that development. Soviet production of crude oil had grown from 8 million barrels per day in 1973 to 11 million barrels per day by 1980, making the Soviet Union the leader on the world oil market. During the 1970s, Soviet annual hard currency revenues from selling oil and natural gas increased by 2250 percent and reached $20 billion. The rapid growth of this financial surplus enabled the Kremlin to pay the price for imperial expansion in Africa.[88]

The same years marked the emergence of Brezhnev's "little deal," an unwritten social compact between the regime, the Soviet elites, and the people. This was an elaborate system of perks, privileges, a "shadow economy," and various special ways of earning enough for a comfortable, even well-to-do existence. Numerous signs of affluence appeared in Soviet society. Soviet expansion in Africa opened

little-advertised but plentiful new possibilities for the "little deal." It created tens of thousands of highly paid positions for the Soviet military and many members of the Soviet nomenklatura. Embassies in African countries became favorite places of semi-exile for the members of the high party elite who had lost Brezhnev's favor. Sociologist Georgy Derluguian, who served as an interpreter for the Soviet embassy in Moputu, Mozambique, in the early 1980s, received a salary in special "foreign currency checks"; purchasing value of this salary was fifteen to twenty times higher than an average Soviet salary at the time. After a few years of "doing internationalist duty" in Africa, Soviet citizens could buy apartments in Moscow, cars, country houses (dachas), and Western-made consumer goods through the special chain of state stores, the *Beryozka*, where only foreign currencies, not rubles, were accepted. As a result, concludes Derluguian, these motives made Soviet ministries and agencies lobby for "international assistance" to various African regimes with an allegedly "socialist orientation." "As in many empires, elemental bureaucratic intrigues and the desire to create new lucrative positions stood behind the expansion of spheres of influence."[89]

The sparring between the superpowers in Africa helped to camouflage this profit seeking. The U.S.-Soviet scramble for Africa began to intensify at the same time as détente reached its peak. Intelligence services eyed each other in the remotest corners of the African continent. A senior American diplomat traveled on an inspection mission around Africa in 1974 and found that "the United States wanted to have a full presence everywhere, as befitting the leader of the Western world, and also in particular to keep an eye on Soviet representatives. The Soviet Union, for prestige and penetration, also then had resident embassies almost everywhere in Africa."[90] Pride and the logic of bilateral rivalry, not strategic or economic interests, put the two sides on a collision course.

Two events accelerated this course: the "carnation revolution" in Portugal in April 1974 and the fall of South Vietnam in April 1975. Chernyaev, in the International Department, enthusiastically compared the coup in Portugal to the end of the Romanov dynasty in Russia. "A huge event," he wrote in his journal. Another official in the same department suggested that Soviet involvement in Angola and the Horn of Africa and later the invasion of Afghanistan were the result of "a wrong conclusion from the American defeat in Vietnam."[91] Ford and Kissinger, under fire from domestic critics of détente, also became convinced that after the Vietnam fiasco some dominoes might start to fall. Kissinger, in particular, was concerned by the role of the Communists in Portugal and believed that the United States had to prevent the Soviets from filling the vacuum in Angola, Portugal's former colony. On the eve of the Helsinki Conference, Ford signed a secret order

to begin CIA covert operations in Angola, "to restore the balance" in this country in favor of the Americans.[92]

Soviet involvement in Angola in 1975, like the previous large-scale Soviet offensive in Africa, lacked any clear strategic plan or goal. This time, however, it also suffered from a dangerous drift in the decision-making process. Brezhnev had very little interest in African events and delegated daily affairs there to the apparatus in general and nobody in particular. In the absence of a dynamic leader, foreign and security policy was in the hands of the troika of Foreign Minister Gromyko, the KGB's Andropov, and Minister of Defense Grechko (after his death in April 1976 this post went to Ustinov). Yet the troika did not act as a cohesive team but rather as an uneasy alliance of aging functionaries, involved in mutual logrolling and back scratching. They all owed their positions to Brezhnev; at the same time (as Khrushchev's fall demonstrated), together they represented a political threat to the general secretary. Even the hint of a partnership among them beyond the official boundaries could make them suspect in the eyes of Brezhnev and mean the end to their careers. For that reason, the troika took great care to see each other only in formal settings, at Politburo meetings. They were also extremely reluctant to challenge each other's bureaucratic territory. As a result, Gromyko had the first say in diplomatic affairs. Grechko and Ustinov had a virtual monopoly in military matters. Andropov was knowledgeable in both fields, due to his intelligence information. However, he felt extremely insecure and preferred to go along with the other two in the areas of their interests.[93] All members of the troika had an interest in perpetuating the status quo, which was the increasingly fictitious leadership of Leonid Brezhnev. The general secretary, even in his weakened condition, remained the only authority that validated the troika's domination over other Politburo members, who could at any moment attempt to take over the policy-making process.

For these functional and personal reasons, the Soviet leadership was incapable of bold schemes and initiatives. It took other dynamic and ideologically motivated players to drag the Soviet leaders into the African gambit, including Angola's Agostino Neto and Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam, but especially Fidel Castro and his revolutionary colleagues in Cuba.[94] Contrary to U.S. belief, the Cuban leaders were not mere puppets or surrogates of Moscow. Since the 1960s, Fidel and Raul Castro, Che Guevara (until his death in 1967), and other Cuban revolutionaries had supported revolutionary guerrilla operations in Algeria, Zaire, Congo (Brazzaville), and Guinea-Bissau. The flight of the United States from Vietnam in 1975 was, Cubans believed, a chance for another round of anti-imperialist struggles in sub-Saharan Africa.[95]

Until the early 1970s, Cuban-Soviet relations remained very strained, as the shadow of Soviet "betrayal" in 1962 hung over Havana.[96] The KGB and the Central Committee International Department tried to restore close ties to the Cubans—Andropov and Boris Ponomarev, who headed these organizations, were the heirs of the Comintern internationalist revolutionary traditions. In 1965, Andropov told one of his advisers that the future competition with the United States would take place not in Europe but in Africa and in Latin America. After the Soviet Union gained bases there, it would be able to enjoy an equal status with the Americans.[97] Grechko and the military strongly supported this logic. Angola was an attractive target. Since 1970, the KGB had advocated assistance and training for the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), whose leader, Agostino Neto, was an old friend of the Castro brothers. From late 1974 on, Angola became the site of rapidly expanding Soviet-Cuban cooperation.[98]

The full story of the escalation of the Soviet presence in Angola is still buried in the archives. According to one version, Gromyko, Grechko, and Andropov recommended that the Politburo send modest nonmilitary assistance to the MPLA but cautioned against direct involvement in the Angolan civil war. A few days later, however, the International Department transmitted the Angolan request for arms to the Politburo. After briefly hesitating, the same troika reversed its position and supported the request. In early December 1974, immediately after the Vladivostok summit, the pipeline for military assistance was opened.[99] This reversal may have been the result of lobbying by Soviet and Cuban friends of Neto, as well as bureaucratic logrolling in the absence of Brezhnev's direct involvement. The same pattern of reversed decisions repeated itself on a bigger scale in 1979 with regard to Afghanistan.

The American decision to support the enemies of the MPLA narrowed the Kremlin's choices. Gromyko's first deputy, Georgy Kornienko, believed that the escalation of Soviet involvement in Angola was due only to American subversive policies. In the fall of 1975, the troika, supported by Suslov, argued that it was their "moral internationalist duty" to assist Angola. At one moment, as Brezhnev worked with his speechwriters at his dacha, Georgy Arbatov, one of the "enlightened" advisers, warned him that intervention in Angola would seriously affect détente. Alexandrov-Agentov angrily objected. He recalled the Soviet aid to the Republicans during the Spanish civil war in 1935. He also reminded Brezhnev how belligerently the United States had behaved when its client Pakistan was threatened in 1971. The general secretary, whose energy for and interest in détente was ebbing by that time, avoided taking sides in the debate. Later, however, he went along with the prevailing interventionist mood. In October 1975, Dobrynin informed Brezhnev about the growing negative fallout from the Angolan

events in the United States, but this only irritated the general secretary. He was convinced that the Americans failed to recognize Soviet "honest intentions." The Soviet Union, he said, did not seek any military bases in Angola but merely wanted to assist local internationalists.[100]

This situation provided more leverage to the Cubans. Two weeks after the signing of the Final Act in Helsinki, Castro sent Brezhnev a plan for transporting Cuban regular military units to Angola. At that time, Brezhnev flatly refused to expand Soviet military assistance in Angola or to transport Cubans there. Yet, by November, puzzlingly, the first Cuban combat troops were fighting on the side of MPLA. Kornienko later asserted that the Cubans outfoxed the Soviet military representatives in Cuba, making them believe that they had authorization from the Kremlin to fly them across the ocean. Gromyko, Grechko, and Andropov were surprised; they agreed that Cuban involvement could lead to a sharp American reaction, complications for détente, and even tension around Cuba itself. Meanwhile, the Cubans had already begun "Operation Carlota" to save the MPLA. What makes this story even more puzzling is the total absence of evidence coming from the Cuban archives in Havana.[101]

Two years earlier, Brezhnev had done nothing to assist the collapsing socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile and rejected his plea for loans. In the same year, the Soviets began to lose their influence in Egypt. In August 1975, the great expectations for Communist victory in Portugal were dashed.[102] In preparations for his report to the Party Congress, Brezhnev faced three visible international setbacks. Putting Angola on this list would be one too many. The Kremlin masters felt obliged "to save Angola" and support the Cubans, as Soviet prestige was now at stake. Kornienko recalls that "the reflex of internationalist duty was at work, especially since this episode occurred after the armed intervention into Angola on the part of the South-African Republic had taken place. This intervention was de facto supported by the United States, if not organized by them." Besides, abandoning Cuban troops fighting in Angola against enemy troops funded by American money and manned in part by foreign mercenaries would have meant sacrificing a small Caribbean ally for the second time—the first being the Soviet retreat during the Cuban missile crisis.[103]

In early 1976, Gerald Ford dropped the word "détente" from his lexicon. Kissinger, deeply concerned about the proxy use of Cuban troops by the Soviets, declared that the U.S.-Soviet partnership could not "survive any more Angolas." Meanwhile, with Soviet massive military assistance, Cuban troops cleared most of Angola of South African mercenaries and the CIA-backed National Front for the Liberation of Angola. African states began to recognize the MPLA-led Angolan regime. Nothing succeeds like success. Soviet and Cuban advisers began to

train South African blacks, the militants of the African National Congress. Soviet influence grew in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The Cuban victory allowed the Soviets to overcome the strain in Soviet-Cuban relations.[104] And this victory was a wonderful gift for Brezhnev and the Party Congress. It helped the Soviet leadership to win support in the nonaligned movement and from those groups in the world that supported the anticolonial and antiapartheid movements.[105]

WOES WITH CARTER

Despite the fracas over Angola, Brezhnev and others in the Politburo expected Ford to win the election and resume the détente partnership. Once again, the volatility of American politics dashed Kremlin expectations. In November 1976, the former governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, a little-known peanut farmer, defeated Ford. Carter had a curious combination of good intentions, strong ideas, vagueness in priorities, and micromanaging style. He had an urge to go beyond the "old agenda" of the Cold War and was committed to the idea of nuclear disarmament. The new president promised a "new foreign policy" that would be less secretive and opaque and more aware of human rights.

Publicly, Carter declared that it was time to overcome "the inordinate fear of communism." Privately, however, a major concern in the White House was whether the Soviet Union would test Carter in the manner Khrushchev had tested Kennedy in 1961. Brezhnev quickly assured Carter that there would be no testing this time.[106] The Kremlin had its own fears about Carter. Some Soviet experts believed that the new and inexperienced president could become a prisoner of anti-détente forces. Carter's secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, was known as a measured pro-détente figure. By contrast, the new national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, raised immediate concerns. Son of a Polish diplomat and a leading scholar of Soviet totalitarianism, he had gained notoriety in Moscow as an architect of strategies to weaken Soviet influence in Central Europe and as a mastermind behind the Trilateral Commission that sought harmony among the three centers of capitalism, the United States, Western Europe, and Japan.[107]

Carter's campaign for human rights immediately marred his relations with the Kremlin. Helsinki Watch groups, formed by activists of the democratic and nationalist movements after August 1975, were active in Moscow, but also in the Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia, and Armenia; they monitored Soviet violations of the Final Act and reported it to the foreign media. A veteran of the Moscow group recalls that "our most optimistic predictions now seemed within reach: it appeared likely that the new U.S. foreign policy would include insistence that the Soviets live up to the promises made in Helsinki. The alliance of Western politi-

cians and Soviet dissidents was starting to emerge." In retaliation, in January and February 1977, the KGB cracked down on the Helsinki Watch groups and arrested their activists, including Yuri Orlov, Alexander Ginzburg, and Anatoly Scharansky. On February 18, Dobrynin was instructed to convey to Vance that the new American policy fundamentally violated the Basic Principles that Brezhnev and Nixon had agreed to in 1972. Ten days later, Carter invited dissident Vladimir Bukovsky to the White House.[108]

For Brezhnev, the continuation of partnership and progress in arms control was more important than squabbles on human rights. On the eve of Carter's inauguration, the Soviet leader sought to send him a positive signal. Speaking in Tula, on January 18, 1977, Brezhnev, for the first time, presented the Soviet security doctrine in clear defensive terms. The Soviet Union, he said, does not seek superiority for delivering a first strike, and the goal of Soviet military policy was to build a defensive potential sufficient for deterring any potential aggressor. Brezhnev expected that his speech would neutralize a "Soviet military threat" campaign in the American media and help Carter. One of his speechwriters, however, realized that this gesture was not enough. "The noise about the Soviet threat is based on facts," wrote Chernyaev in his diary. "Periodic statements that we threaten nobody will not do the job. If we do not undertake a real change in our military policy, the arms race aimed at our economic exhaustion will continue."[109]

The Soviets longed for policy continuity and confidential relations with the White House, something they had grown accustomed to in the era of Nixon and Kissinger. Carter, however, showed the Soviets that the terms of partnership had to be changed. In vain, Dobrynin sought to reactivate the back channel to Carter via Brzezinski. The new president was determined to deal with the Soviets without secret diplomacy. He wanted to conduct foreign policy through Vance and the State Department. Also, he adopted the arms control proposal developed by Senator Jackson's neoconservative analysts, among them Richard Perle and Paul Nitze. This proposal envisaged "deep cuts" in some strategic systems, above all, the elimination of half of the Satan rockets.[110] This, of course, meant that the much-criticized Vladivostok framework for SALT would be discarded. It also meant that the Soviet side would lose half of its best and biggest missiles in silos, while the Americans would only make a pledge not to deploy future comparable systems. It also deferred the issue of limitations on American cruise missiles and Soviet Backfires, something that the Soviets believed was close to settlement.[111]

Brezhnev was enraged. He felt that he had paid with his own health for the Vladivostok agreement. A new proposal would have meant another round of domestic and international bargaining, something that the ailing general secretary could not afford to do. He instructed Gromyko, Ustinov, and Andropov to

draft a "tough letter" to Carter urging him to reach a fast agreement on the basis of his agreements with Ford at Vladivostok. In the letter, Brezhnev emphasized that this would open the road for their personal meeting, a matter of great importance for the Soviet leader. Carter, surprised by the stern tone of Brezhnev's message, nevertheless stuck to his guns. He announced that Vance would go to the Soviet Union with a big delegation and new proposals, one with "deep cuts" and another based on the Vladivostok framework, but without limits on cruise missiles and Soviet Backfire bombers. Both proposals were unacceptable to the Soviet military. Before Vance arrived in Moscow, the general secretary met with the troika at his dacha; in all probability all present decided it was time "to teach the Americans a lesson."[112]

Soviet rejection of the American proposals was inevitable, but its harshness came as a nasty surprise. At the first meeting on March 28, 1977, Brezhnev was peevish and irritated. He and Gromyko did not disguise their contempt for Carter's policies and some of their remarks were offensive to Carter personally. They interrupted Vance and did not even allow him to read the fallback proposal, which could have opened the road to a compromise. The U.S. delegation returned home empty-handed. Rubbing salt into their wounds, Gromyko denounced the American proposals at a specially convened press conference. As Vance later put it, "We got a wet rug in the face, and were told to go home."[113]

Brezhnev's health was definitely a factor in the Moscow fiasco, but the new gap between political priorities of the two sides was much more important. Particularly crucial was the fact that the Soviets wanted to achieve a numerical parity, and this was intolerable to the American side, which previously had had a clear superiority. Even ten years later, when Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed a treaty eliminating intermediate range missiles, they failed to agree on a comprehensive framework for the remaining strategic armaments.[114]

The clash on human rights also was another symptom of the widening gap between the Kremlin and the White House. After the years of dealing with the pragmatic Kissinger, the Soviet leaders were convinced that Carter just wanted to take cheap propaganda shots at their expense. The Soviet leaders, products of Stalinist political culture, simply could not conceive why the president paid so much attention to the fate of individual dissidents. Gromyko even forbade his aides from putting information on this matter on his desk. In a conversation with Vance, he wondered: How can the explosion of propaganda hostile to the USSR be explained? Why would the White House not stress the constructive aspects of Soviet foreign policy the way Moscow was doing?[115] Andropov had long insisted that the human rights campaigns were nothing but "attempts of the adversary to activate the hostile elements in the USSR by means of providing them financial

and other material assistance."[116] Nobody realized at the time that the failure of the Moscow talks meant the end of the top-level Soviet-American partnership, a major engine of détente. In February 1977, Brezhnev, on Gromyko's advice, wrote to Carter that he would meet him only when the SALT agreement was ready for signing. As a result, the next Soviet-American summit did not take place until June 1979, in Vienna, when Brezhnev was already on the verge of physical and mental disintegration.[117]

It is easy now to look at the years after 1977 as the period of the inexorable worsening of Soviet-American relations. Scholars have analyzed major areas and developments that, in their various opinions, contributed to this outcome: continuing Soviet interventionism in Africa; a slow and ultimately fruitless arms control process; and a growing anti-Soviet mood in American domestic politics. Yet all those problems and difficulties had existed before, and still détente had blossomed. And even greater obstacles would not prevent Reagan and Gorbachev from becoming negotiating partners later in the 1980s. One comes to the conclusion that détente would have continued, despite all these problems, had Brezhnev still been willing to make a determined effort to maintain a political partnership with the American leadership. This conclusion does not mean to diminish the complexity of international relations and the decision-making processes in the Soviet regime and the American democracy. It highlights, however, the crucial role of top personalities and their political will at a critical juncture of international history when new opportunities and dangers were arising.

Jimmy Carter's lack of clear assumptions about the Soviet Union played as much a part in the undoing of détente as Brezhnev's beliefs had in conceiving it. Under the influence of Brzezinski and neoconservative critics, the U.S. president began to suspect that the Soviet Union was a reckless, unpredictable power, confusing the aging and reactive Kremlin leadership with the activist rambunctious leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. In May 1978, Carter wrote to Brzezinski that "the combination of increasing Soviet military power and political shortsightedness fed by big power ambitions might tempt the Soviet Union both to exploit local turbulence, especially in the Third World, and to intimidate our friends, in order to seek political advantage, and eventually even political preponderance. This is why I do take seriously Soviet action in Africa, and this is why I am concerned about the Soviet military buildup in Europe. I also see some Soviet designs pointed toward the Indian Ocean through South Asia, and perhaps toward the encirclement of China." In order to contain the Soviets in Africa, Brzezinski and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown came up with a Realpolitik move, a rapprochement with Beijing in order to use "the China card" against the Soviets. Vance opposed such a policy as dangerous for Soviet-American relations, but

Carter sided with Brzezinski and Brown. He sent Brzezinski to Beijing with broad authority to normalize relations with the Chinese Communists. This, Raymond Garthoff observed, set in motion developments that had much broader and deeper consequences than Soviet behavior warranted at the time. About the same time, Dobrynin told Averell Harriman, who attempted to defend the policies of the administration, that nothing would help any longer "to change the emotional atmosphere that existed in Moscow today."[118] The action-reaction cycle, so pronounced in Soviet-American relations before Nixon's trip to Moscow in May 1972, was back in force.

The Politburo, for its part, completely failed to understand the depth of Carter's motivation to develop arms control and reduce tensions. Instead, Brezhnev and his associates thought that the president was a pawn in the hands of his advisers. Gromyko remarked privately to Vance that "Brzezinski has already surpassed himself" in making statements that "are aimed at nearly bringing us back to the period of the Cold War." In June 1978, Brezhnev complained at the Politburo that Carter "is not simply falling under the usual influence of the most shameless anti-Soviet types and leaders of the military-industrial complex of the USA. He intends to struggle for reelection for the new term as president under the banner of anti-Soviet policy and return to the Cold War." Two months later another harsh assessment came to Moscow in the form of a quarterly "political letter" from the Soviet embassy in Washington. It concluded that Carter was reevaluating Soviet-American relations. "The initiative for this affair came from Brzezinski and several presidential advisers on domestic affairs; they convinced Carter that he would succeed in stopping the process of worsening his position in the country if he would openly initiate a harsher course vis-à-vis the Soviet Union." The report quoted the leader of the U.S. Communist Party, Gus Hall, who referred to Brzezinski as the "Rasputin of the Carter regime."[119]

The Vienna summit in June 1979 demonstrated that under different circumstances Brezhnev and Carter might have become good partners. The president was considerate and patient—he visibly tried to find some kind of emotional bond with the Soviet leader. After signing the SALT agreements, the president suddenly reached out to Brezhnev and embraced him. He passed discreetly to Brezhnev the draft of proposals for the next round of arms control talks that proposed reductions of strategic systems. He even refrained from the customary reference to human rights. Brezhnev, despite his asthenia, was moved and later remarked to his associates that Carter was "quite a nice guy, after all." During the farewell, Carter turned to Soviet interpreter Viktor Sukhodrev and said with his famous smile: "Come back to the United States and bring your President with you."[120] Six months later, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

Politburo members, particularly the troika of Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov, continued to misunderstand détente as primarily and even exclusively the result of a "new correlation of forces" and Soviet military strength. For a while, these misperceptions did not look fateful. But Afghanistan changed everything. The military coup in distant Kabul in April 1978 brought sectarian leftists to power. They immediately proclaimed the "April revolution" and appealed to the Soviet Union for assistance. The Soviets had nothing to do with this development and were poorly prepared to deal with it. According to the most recent evidence, even the KGB learned about the leftist coup ex post facto. As Raymond Garthoff observed, Richard Nixon and his regional ally, the Shah of Iran, may have thrown the first pebble that led to the avalanche of events in Afghanistan. In 1976 and 1977, the Shah persuaded President Mohammed Daoud of Afghanistan to move away from his alignment with the Soviet Union and crack down on Afghan leftists.[121] Ironically, the Shah's regime collapsed soon after the situation in Afghanistan began to unravel. The regional balance was destroyed, with disastrous consequences for many years ahead.

From the Kremlin's viewpoint, the proximity of Afghanistan to Soviet borders and Central Asia made "revolution" there different from otherwise similar cases in Africa. The growing instability on the southern frontiers only increased a temptation to turn Afghanistan into a stable satellite firmly under Soviet tutelage. The shadowy Cold War mentality prevailed in the KGB. As a former senior KGB officer recalls, he viewed Afghanistan as a Soviet sphere of interest and believed that the Soviet Union "had to do whatever possible to prevent the Americans and the CIA from installing an anti-Soviet regime there." After the 1978 coup, Soviet-Afghan contacts quickly mushroomed via the channels of the Defense Ministry, the KGB, the Foreign Ministry, and a host of other agencies and ministries dealing with, among others, economy, trade, construction, and education. Party delegations and many advisers from Moscow and the Central Asian Soviet republics flocked to Kabul. No doubt the same motives, as during the scramble for Africa, were driving the Soviet political leadership and bureaucracies. Incidentally, the Soviet representatives and advisers in Afghanistan enjoyed the same high salaries in foreign currency as their colleagues had in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Yemen, and other countries of the third world, where they performed "internationalist duty" to "assist the regimes with socialist orientation."[122]

Very quickly, the Soviet advisers and visitors fell into the trap of fractious revolutionary politics. The leaders of the Khalq faction, Prime Minister Nur Mohammad Taraki and his entrepreneurial deputy, Hafizullah Amin, began to purge the

rival Parcham group. The Afghan leaders believed in revolutionary terror and drew inspiration from the Stalinist purges. In September 1978, Boris Ponomarev, of the International Committee, undertook a secret mission to Afghanistan, to warn Taraki that the Soviet Union would turn away from him if he continued to destroy his fellow revolutionaries. These warnings, as well as Soviet appeals for unity, fell on deaf ears. The Afghani revolutionaries correctly believed that the Soviet Union simply could not afford to let them down. Shortly before Ponomarev's mission, the head of the KGB's intelligence directorate, Vladimir Kryuchkov, visited Kabul and signed an agreement on sharing intelligence and cooperation. The main purpose of the agreement was "to fight the growing CIA presence in Kabul and throughout Afghanistan."[123] On December 5, 1978, Brezhnev and Taraki met in Moscow and signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation. Taraki returned to Kabul convinced that Brezhnev personally supported him. Indeed, Brezhnev liked the deceptively debonair leader of Afghanistan.[124]

In March 1979, a cruel wake-up call reached Moscow. The city and area of Herat had rebelled against the Khalq regime, and an insurgent mob had brutally killed Kabul's officials, Soviet advisers, and their families. Taraki and Amin made desperate calls to Moscow pleading for Soviet military intervention "to save the revolution." It was the first strong sign that another force, militant Afghan nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, had come on the scene. The Politburo, once again, was caught by surprise and was not adequately equipped to analyze this new development. The Kremlin discussions reveal with startling clarity the perils of the fictitious Brezhnev leadership in a crisis situation. At the start of the discussion, the foreign policy troika advocated Soviet military intervention to save the Kabul regime. They agreed that "losing Afghanistan" as part of the Soviet sphere of influence would be unacceptable, geopolitically and ideologically. Brezhnev was absent, resting at his dacha. The interventionist tide gained momentum fast.[125]

The next day, everything changed: all support for intervention literally evaporated overnight. Ustinov was the first to spell out the truth: the Kabul leadership wanted Soviet troops to fight Islamic fundamentalism, a danger they had themselves created by their radical reforms. Andropov argued that "we can uphold the revolution in Afghanistan only with the aid of our bayonets, and that is completely impermissible for us." Gromyko came up with another argument: "All that we have done in recent years with such effort in terms of détente of international relations, arms reductions, and much more—all that would be overthrown. China, of course, will receive a nice gift. All the nonaligned countries will be against us." The foreign minister also reminded the Politburo that military

intervention would lead to cancellation of the summit with Carter in Vienna and also the visit of French president Giscard d'Estaing, scheduled for the end of March.[126]

Why this shift? New information, particularly a telephone conversation between Kosygin and Taraki, clarified the realities in Afghanistan. An even more decisive factor, however, must have been Brezhnev's personal intervention and the position of his foreign policy assistant, Alexandrov-Agentov.[127] As Gromyko spelled out, Brezhnev maintained a stake in détente. His interest in signing the SALT agreement with the United States and avoiding anything that might complicate his meetings with other Western leaders carried the decisive weight. He also, by nature, regarded any military intervention as a weapon of last resort. Brezhnev appeared in person at the Politburo, which was in session continuously for three days, against intervention. After a Soviet military plane brought Taraki to Moscow, he was informed that Soviet forces would not be deployed in Afghanistan. The Soviets pledged additional assistance to the Afghan army and put pressure on Pakistan and Iran to limit the penetration of Islamic radical forces into Afghanistan. After listening to Taraki's brief reply, Brezhnev stood up and left, as if to say that the matter was closed.[128]

The decision against intervention, however, did not seem final. The initial interventionist stand of the troika spelled trouble for the future. The illusory project of leading Afghanistan "along the path of socialist reform" was not renounced. In fact, Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev reaffirmed it in their memorandum to the Politburo soon after Taraki left Moscow. As a result, Soviet material investments in the Kabul regime increased, and the number of Soviet advisers, mostly of the military and the KGB, reached an estimated 4,000 people.[129]

All this proved fateful when the next power struggle in Afghanistan took place between Taraki and Amin. Indeed, the outcome could have been predicted. Hafizullah Amin was a much more shrewd and efficient leader, with personal attributes and style that strongly resembled those of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Amin's role model was Joseph Stalin; he relied on brutal force in building the regime and was prepared to take big risks in pursuing his ambitious goals. His energy in building the Afghan army and putting down the revolt in Herat won him the sympathies of Soviet military advisers. Brezhnev, however, was on Taraki's side. In early September 1979, the Afghan prime minister stopped in Moscow on the way home after a meeting of nonaligned countries in Havana. Brezhnev and Andropov told him that Amin was planning a coup against him and had just removed his people from the key positions in the security services. There is reason to believe that after that conversation the KGB, together with the Soviet

embassy in Kabul, attempted to remove Amin but that the plot backfired. Whatever happened, Amin arrested Taraki and on October 9 ordered him strangled in his prison cell. After that, Amin expelled the Soviet ambassador.[130] The assassination of Brezhnev's favorite suddenly involved the general secretary personally and emotionally in the affairs of the Afghan revolution. Brezhnev allegedly told Andropov and Ustinov: "What kind of scum is this Amin—to strangle the man with whom he participated in the revolution? Who is now at the helm of the Afghan revolution? What will people say in other countries? Can one trust Brezhnev's words?" The momentum for Soviet military intervention and the removal of Amin began to grow from that point on. Very soon after Taraki's murder, Brezhnev's foreign policy assistant, Alexandrov-Agentov, reportedly told one official of the International Department that it was necessary to send troops to Afghanistan.[131]

The quick escalation of the revolution in Iran after January 1979, proclamation of the Islamic Republic in Iran on March 31 of the same year, and rapidly growing Iranian support of fundamentalist rebels in southwest Afghanistan probably contributed to the reassessment of the nonintervention decision. The Kremlin leaders could not know that the Iranian revolution would introduce a new era of radical Islam that would outlive the Cold War and the Soviet Union. They suspected and, initially, grossly exaggerated an American involvement with the growing fundamentalist movement in Afghanistan. Ustinov, Andropov, and Alexandrov-Agentov in particular began to think about Afghanistan exclusively in the light of Soviet-American zero-sum competition.[132] The introduction of U.S. forces into the Persian Gulf after the capture of the American embassy by Islamic radicals on November 4, 1979, alarmed the General Staff. General Valentin Varennikov recalled that at that time "we were concerned that if the United States were forced from Iran, they would move their bases to Pakistan and seize Afghanistan." Minister of Defense Ustinov reportedly wondered: If Americans do all these preparations under our noses, why should we hunker down, play cautious, and lose Afghanistan?[133] Under these circumstances, the KGB reports from Kabul that Amin was playing a double game and meeting secretly with Americans were particularly disturbing. Sadat's betrayal a few years earlier prepared a fertile ground for suspicions to grow.

The Soviet decision to eliminate Amin and "save" Afghanistan is a remarkable case of "group think" at the very top of Soviet leadership, above all among the policy-making troika. At some point in October and November, Andropov supported Ustinov's position and the two began to plot an invasion. Then Gromyko and Alexandrov-Agentov gave their consent. The principals kept the preparations in deep secret from the rest of the Politburo and from their own staff analysts.

From the viewpoint of the troika, the most important task was to get Brezhnev on board. In early December 1979, Andropov presented arguments to him in favor of the invasion. He wrote: "Now there is no guarantee that Amin, in order to secure his personal power would not go over to the West." The letter proposed staging a coup against Amin and bringing the exiled faction of Afghan revolutionaries to power in Kabul.[134]

Recent research has shown that Andropov's basic contention about Amin's imminent treason stemmed from amazingly tenuous evidence. The KGB chief seems to have played the same role he had played in 1968 during the Czechoslovak crisis: he used information and misinformation to steel Brezhnev's resolve for intervention. On December 8, Andropov and Ustinov told Brezhnev about the possibility of deployment of U.S. short-range missiles in Afghanistan that might target Soviet military installations in Kazakhstan and Siberia. Ustinov suggested taking advantage of Amin's repeated requests for Soviet troops and sending several divisions into Afghanistan, to ensure a smooth takeover. The original intention was to withdraw these troops immediately after a new regime had been established.[135]

Even at this point, concerns about serious consequences for détente could have overruled, once again, the arguments for intervention. But this time neither Brezhnev nor Gromyko objected. In the fall of 1979, détente seemed to be sinking to its nadir. The little dose of goodwill generated by the Brezhnev-Carter summit had evaporated. At the prodding of several Democratic senators, the White House raised a false alarm about the presence of a Soviet brigade in Cuba, a completely trumped-up charge. This contributed to Moscow's suspicion that somebody in Washington had decided to challenge the Soviet Union across the board.[136]

The "last straw" that tipped the scales in favor of intervention was NATO's decision to deploy a new generation of strategic nuclear weapons in Western Europe—Pershing missiles and cruise missiles. The decision officially made at a special meeting of NATO foreign and defense ministers in Brussels on December 12 was forecast by Soviet analysts a few days ahead. It gave validity to the arguments of Ustinov and Andropov, who, at their meeting with Brezhnev on December 8, emphasized that the Afghanistan problem became part of a worsening strategic situation and that American short-range missiles could also be deployed in Afghanistan.[137]

The top Soviet military brass was the last group that tried to voice objections to the planned intervention. The General Staff's chief, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, expressed his and his colleagues' reservations to Brezhnev and the troika in an informal exchange on the eve of a Politburo meeting on Afghanistan on December 10. He cited the perils of Soviet troops mired in unfamiliar and difficult

conditions and reminded the political leaders that the fears of hostile American activities in the region were imaginary. Instead of discussing Ogarkov's concerns, Ustinov, whose relations with the marshal were strained, told him to shut up and obey the leadership. Minutes later, at the Politburo session, Ogarkov tried again to warn of serious fallout from the invasion. "We would align the entire Islamic East against us and suffer political damage around the world." Andropov cut him off: "Focus on military affairs! Leave policy-making to us, the party, and Leonid Ilyich!" On that day, the Politburo did not come to a decision. Two days later, on December 12, Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko learned that NATO had decided to deploy Pershing missiles and cruise missiles in Europe. This time the Politburo approved the Ustinov-Andropov plan to "save" Afghanistan through the combination of a coup and military intervention. Brezhnev, very feeble but visibly emotional, affixed his signature to the decision to intervene.[138]

The crude incompetence of the Soviet invasion blew away Moscow's official cover that the Kabul government had actually requested the Soviet Union to defend them. The clumsiness of the KGB contributed to the problem. At first, Soviet agents attempted to poison Amin, but when the poison failed to work, commandos stormed Amin's palace, causing a bloodbath. Fierce American and international reaction to this bloody coup caused the entire edifice of superpower détente to crumble. There is evidence that Brezhnev took the dismantling of détente by Washington personally and dimly understood that the intervention in Afghanistan was a gross error. His foreign policy adviser recalled that the general secretary once complained to Andropov and Ustinov: "You got me into this mess!"[139]

Brezhnev's career as a statesman was at its end—a very bleak one. Chernyaev wrote in his diary: "I do not believe that ever before in Russian history, even under Stalin, was there a period when such important actions were taken without a hint of discussion, advice and deliberation. We entered a very dangerous period when the ruling circle cannot fully appreciate what it is doing and why."[140] Chernyaev and other "enlightened" functionaries waited for a miracle that could help the Soviet Union weather this dangerous stretch.