The span of Soviet foreign policy that is the subject of this chapter covers two distinct periods, 1962 to 1964, and 1964 to 1975. The first period consists of Nikita Khrushchev’s last three years in power; the second covers the first eleven of Leonid Brezhnev’s. Because of the centralized nature of the Soviet system, with so much power concentrated in the Communist Party Politburo, and especially in the hands of the top party boss, Khrushchev and Brezhnev had immense influence over Soviet policy. But the two men were very different leaders with contrasting approaches to governing: by 1962 the impulsive, explosive Khrushchev hardly listened to his Kremlin colleagues. Brezhnev, on the other hand, had to struggle to consolidate his power for the first few years, and even after that, he preferred to preside over the Politburo instead of dominating it. Moreover, the Brezhnev regime came to power determined to alter, although not entirely reverse, the foreign-policy pattern Khrushchev had followed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the two sub-periods are notable for significant differences of both substance and style. Yet, there is an overall trend that characterizes the whole period – movement from the Cold War’s most dangerous episode, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, to the high point of détente in 1975.

This trend reflects various Soviet domestic and international circumstances, which helped to convince both Khrushchev and Brezhnev that the USSR needed more than a short-term respite from the kind of Cold War over which Stalin had presided. Escalating numbers of nuclear weapons on both sides, along with the dangers they posed of a catastrophic war, placed a premium on limiting tensions, while Moscow’s achievement of strategic parity with the United States, obtained under Brezhnev, gave him the confidence to negotiate arms-control agreements from a “position of strength” that Khrushchev lacked. The vulnerability of Soviet allies in Eastern Europe, dramatically visible in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and again in the Prague Spring of 1968, heightened Soviet interest in European détente. In contrast to
Khrushchev, who responded to Chinese charges of being soft on capitalism by getting tough with the United States, Brezhnev moved toward a new relationship of détente with Washington. The détente achieved by Brezhnev and company stabilized Cold War competition in Europe while braking the arms race and expanding East–West ties. But it contained the seeds of its own eventual disintegration. The growing power and prestige of the USSR, sharply contrasting with America’s retreat from Vietnam, offered new opportunities to expand Soviet power and influence in the Third World. Marxist–Leninist ideology helped to ensure that Moscow would try to exploit those new opportunities, thus seeming to confirm to many in the West that Moscow was engaged in another round of global expansionism. As a result, even as détente reached its peak, it began to unravel.

Khrushchev’s last years in power

When the XXIInd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party convened on October 17, 1961, Khrushchev seemed at the height of his powers. He delivered two long reports, taking a total of ten hours, on the general state of the Union, and on the new party program. That program, prepared under his close supervision, promised that within twenty years “Communism in our country will be just about built,” and that after “steadily winning victory after victory” in economic competition with the United States, the USSR would “rise to such a great height that, by comparison, the main capitalist countries will fall far below and way behind.” Before the Congress closed, Brezhnev hailed Khrushchev’s “indefatigable energy and revolutionary passion,” while Nikolai Podgorny, who was to join Brezhnev in a successful anti-Khrushchev conspiracy a mere year and a half later, extolled Khrushchev’s “indissoluble bond with the people, humanity, simplicity, his ability to learn constantly from the masses and to teach the masses …”¹

Although the Congress seemed Khrushchev’s hour of glory, problems were growing at home and abroad. The 1961 harvest proved disappointing, although not as bad as the year before when Khrushchev warned, “If we don’t take measures, we could slide back to where we were in 1953.”² Particularly devastating was the sharp contrast between the resulting food shortages and the new party program’s promise of abundance. Relations with

¹ Pravda, October 20, 1961, 2; October 21, 1961, 2.
China, already tense, further deteriorated when Zhou Enlai walked out of the XXIInd Party Congress. As for Soviet relations with the West, Khrushchev’s Berlin ultimatum, first proclaimed in November 1958 and then renewed in the summer of 1961, had borne little if any fruit.

In the winter of 1961–62, it appeared as if Khrushchev were still intent on forcing the German issue. He sounded desperate in a November 9, 1961 secret letter to President John F. Kennedy: “You have to understand, I have no ground to retreat further, there is precipice behind me.” When Kennedy’s December 2 reply took no notice of Khrushchev’s plight, the latter accused the United States of “megalomania,” and swore, “We must conclude a German peace treaty and we will conclude it even if you do not agree.”

These and other Khrushchev signals on Berlin form the basis for one interpretation of why Khrushchev decided in the spring of 1962 to send missiles capable of striking the United States to Cuba. When a U-2 overflying Cuba on October 14 discovered those missiles, Kennedy himself guessed the rockets were somehow linked to Berlin, a hypothesis later developed by scholars who believe, among other things, that Khrushchev sent them there in preparation for talks he hoped to hold with Kennedy in Washington in November. If such speculation seems strained, that is partly because of the vast geopolitical distance between Berlin and Cuba, but also because another explanation focused on Cuba itself seems more likely.

After Fidel Castro declared himself a Communist, Khrushchev viewed Cuba as “a beacon, a hopeful lighthouse for all the unfortunate, exploited peoples of Latin America.” Khrushchev feared an American invasion designed to finish the job US-supported Cuban émigrés had botched at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. Former Soviet policymakers and Russian historians have insisted that the missiles sent to Cuba were supposed to prevent that. If so, Khrushchev clearly meant to deter the Americans, not actually to fire the missiles, an approach that reflected his longstanding attachment to diplomatic bluster backed by nuclear bluff.

3 Ibid., 538–39.
Khrushchev possessed a rich imagination,” his former foreign-policy assistant Oleg Troianovskii later observed, “and when some idea took hold of him, he was inclined to see in its implementation an easy solution to a particular problem, a sort of ‘cure-all’” for many problems. Other international challenges to which Khrushchev imagined Cuban missiles could serve as a response were the apparent strategic superiority the United States had attained by 1962, and the doubts the Chinese were spreading that Khrushchev was strong enough to stand up to the Americans. But the results of Khrushchev’s Cuban gamble were disastrous.

Khrushchev depicted his retreat as a triumph, with Pravda claiming that the Soviet government’s “calm and wisdom” saved the world from a “nuclear catastrophe.” But as his Kremlin colleague Petr Demichev later recalled,

8. The Cuban leader Fidel Castro was a particularly welcome guest for the Soviets; here with Leonid Brezhnev (left) and Nikita Khrushchev at Khrushchev’s dacha in April 1963.

7 For more details on the crisis, see James G. Hershberg’s chapter in this volume.
8 Pravda, December 13, 1962, 2.
Khrushchev “made a show of having been brave, but we could tell by his behavior, especially by his irritability, that he felt it had been a defeat.”

Castro’s angry sense of betrayal when Moscow withdrew the missiles helps to explain Khrushchev’s dismay. So did the initial failure of Khrushchev’s attempt, which began even before the crisis ended, to parlay a Cuban settlement into broad new negotiations with the United States. His letters to Kennedy on October 27, 28, and 30 proposed talks on a nuclear test-ban treaty, liquidating military bases, and even “general and complete disarmament.”

Impressed by Kennedy’s handling of the crisis, Khrushchev was ready at last for the sort of relationship of mutual restraint that Kennedy had offered at the June 1961 Vienna summit but that he, Khrushchev, had spurned. Unfortunately for Khrushchev, Kennedy was no longer in a hurry. Only during the following summer was a treaty banning nuclear weapons testing in the air, underwater, and in outer space negotiated by the United States, USSR, and the United Kingdom concluded. Khrushchev assumed he had six more years (if the president were reelected) to build a real partnership. But several months later, Kennedy was assassinated, and before his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, could get serious about seeking a summit, Khrushchev was ousted from power on October 14, 1964.

Other setbacks contributed to that outcome. Sino-Soviet peace talks, begun in Moscow on July 5, 1963, dissolved in mutual recriminations several weeks later, with the polemics soon culminating in clashes over the Sino-Soviet border and in violent personal attacks on both Khrushchev and Mao Zedong. When the USSR’s 1963 grain harvest proved disappointing (only 107.5 million tons compared with 134.7 in 1958, and with the Virgin Lands producing their smallest crop in years, although the sown area was now 10 million hectares larger than in 1955), Khrushchev had no choice but to buy grain from the very capitalists he had once promised to “bury.”

The conspiracy to remove Khrushchev was set in motion as early as March of 1964, when Brezhnev and Podgorny began approaching other Presidium members. Over the summer and early autumn, the plotters secretly secured the support of Central Committee members so as to avoid the fate of Khrushchev’s “anti-party group” rivals, who outvoted him in the Party Presidium in 1957, only to be trounced when Khrushchev succeeded in transferring the issue to the larger Central Committee for final resolution. The head of the KGB joined the plot, and the Soviet military, disenchanted with

9 William Taubman’s interview with Petr N. Demichev, Moscow, August 1993.
10 See Taubman, Khrushchev, 583.
what they regarded as Khrushchev’s precipitous arms cuts, his emphasis on nuclear as opposed to conventional weapons, and his reckless risk-taking in Berlin and Cuba, stood aside.

On October 13, 1964, Khrushchev returned to Moscow from a vacation on the Black Sea to face a withering indictment, which his accusers later summarized publicly as “subjectivism and drift in Communist construction, hare-brained scheming, half-baked conclusions and hasty decisions and actions divorced from reality, bragging and bluster, attraction to rule by fiat, [and] unwillingness to take into account what science and practical experience have already worked out.”11 Most of the charges concerned his sins in domestic policy, but in a report prepared for delivery at the October 14 Central Committee plenum that ratified his ouster, Politburo member Dmitrii Polianskii said the following: During the Suez crisis, “We were a hair away from a big war,” yet “we didn’t have a mutual assistance agreement with Egypt, and hadn’t even been asked to help them.” As for Berlin, “only a fool would have thought it necessary to fight a war to make Berlin a ‘free city.’” And the main effect of sending missiles to Cuba “was to produce a global crisis, bring the world to the edge of war, and terrify the very organizer of this dangerous undertaking.”12

The next day the Central Committee named Brezhnev to replace Khrushchev as Soviet party leader. Khrushchev comforted himself by saying to Anastas Mikoyan, his only remaining friend in the party leadership, “I’ve done the main thing. Could anyone have dreamed of telling Stalin that he didn’t suit us anymore and suggesting he retire? Not even a wet spot would have remained where we had been standing. Now everything is different. The fear is gone, and we can talk as equals. That’s my contribution.”13

Khrushchev was correct. In his time in power, he had succeeded in curbing the worst of Stalinism. At home, he had ended arbitrary terror, revived agriculture, allowed a cultural thaw, and fostered renewed social optimism. Abroad, he had ended Soviet isolation, eased the Cold War, and opened new contacts with the Third World. But by 1964, he had alienated all sectors of Soviet society; even the working class itself, in whose name the party had ruled since 1917, was in near revolt – witness riots in Novocherkassk in June 1962, provoked by food price rises, increased work-norms, and terrible working conditions, which were crushed by police and army troops at the cost of twenty-six dead and nearly a hundred injured. In foreign affairs as well, despite

11 Pravda, October 17, 1964.
Khrushchev’s efforts to ease East–West tensions, the Soviet leader had provoked the Berlin and Cuban crises, and escalated the arms race he had set out to slow down.

Brezhnev’s rise

Leonid Brezhnev came to power as a member of the “collective leadership.” His major colleagues/rivals were Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, Politburo member Mikhail Suslov, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Podgorny, and former KGB chairman and Politburo member Aleksandr Shelepin, whose nickname in the Kremlin was “Iron Shurik.” Early in his tenure, some well-placed observers regarded Brezhnev as a transitional figure. But as Anatolii Cherniaev, who worked for Brezhnev before he became Mikhail Gorbachev’s chief foreign policy assistant points out, once Brezhnev took full command of Soviet foreign policy, he became the driving force for détente. According to Cherniaev, Brezhnev “believed in the possibility of ‘peacemaking with imperialism.’ … He differed from his colleagues in that, as General Secretary, he was less dependent on ideological stereotypes … and it was permissible for him, unlike the others, to ignore sacred cows, when necessary.”14

The role of ideology in shaping Brezhnev-era foreign policy should not be underestimated. The cause of “world revolution” had long helped to legitimize Soviet rule in the USSR itself. But equally important were national interests, including a stake in “peaceful coexistence” with capitalist states, because to lead the world to socialism, the Soviet Union itself had to survive as a great power. This dual nature of Soviet foreign policy persisted into the 1970s. Moreover, ideology provided a framework for interpreting and advancing national interests themselves. It portrayed the West as inevitably hostile to the Soviet camp, but also prescribed ways of coping with the class enemy – by playing off one capitalist country against another (especially the West Europeans against Americans), and by collecting allies in the Third World.

In domestic politics, too, ideology loomed large. To be sure, discontent was emerging, reflecting the frustration of many that Khrushchev’s de-stalinization campaign had not been completed. Intellectuals were attracted to the idea that the rival social systems might yet converge, and many young people, exposed to Western influence through music and literature, had lost faith in

Marxism–Leninism. The second half of the 1960s gave rise to the human rights movement in the Soviet Union. In 1968, a dissident journal, the *Chronicle of Current Events*, appeared in Moscow with the cover page titled “Human Rights Year in the Soviet Union,” and quoting Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. In May 1968, Andrei Sakharov, the famous Soviet nuclear physicist and father of the Soviet thermonuclear bomb, wrote “Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom,” in which he promoted the idea of East–West convergence based on “democratization, demilitarization, and social and technological progress.”

But the Soviet political system was still guided by a class of ideological “clergy,” apparatchiks who staffed ideological departments and positions at every level of the Communist Party and Soviet state, and ideology was still entrenched in the minds of the Kremlin leadership, as many memoirs of the late Soviet period, even of the most enlightened functionaries, like Anatolii Cherniaev, attest. Aleksandr Iakovlev himself, who was to become Mikhail Gorbachev’s prime ally in transforming the Soviet Union, did not question the “socialist choice” that Russia made (or, rather, one should say, had had made for it by the Bolsheviks) in 1917. The new dissidents, who were mostly from the intelligentsia, hardly made up a mass movement. But the potential for mass unrest, on the model of the 1962 Novocherkassk riots, alarmed the Kremlin, prompting the post-Khrushchev leadership to try to energize the economy, and especially agriculture.

Brezhnev’s highest foreign-policy priority was to prevent war. He had experienced enough of it in World War II (beginning on the Southern Front in July 1941, and ending in May 1945 in Prague with the rank of major general) to resolve never to allow another one. Above all else, Brezhnev was concerned about peace and stability in Europe. For him and other Soviet leaders, the blood of Soviet soldiers sanctified the postwar European borders that they were determined to preserve. It also cemented the new socialist alliance, making it impossible for the Soviet leadership until Gorbachev to “lose” any of its East European allies.

Brezhnev wanted to be seen as a peacemaker. In addition, as former Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatolii Dobrynin notes in his memoirs, by the late 1960s, “the party establishment gradually began to realize the need to satisfy the population’s basic requirements more fully and to narrow the gap

16 Aleksandr Iakovlev, *Sumerki* [Twilight] (Moscow: Materik, 2003), 32, 587.
with the West in technology and the economy itself.” Brezhnev was especially interested in expanding trade ties with the West but also believed that the resources spent on the arms race could be reoriented toward production of consumer goods if stability and a relaxation of tensions were achieved. However, the fear of a sudden attack brought on by “inferiority” in armaments and the Soviet military-industrial complex’s sense of having to “catch up” with the West made serious pursuit of détente impossible without first achieving full strategic nuclear parity.

The result was a rapid military buildup. In comparison to the Khrushchev period, Soviet defense spending rose 40 percent between 1965 and 1970, and the US–Soviet ratio of strategic nuclear missiles fell from a seventeen to one US advantage during the Cuban missile crisis to rough parity in 1972. By 1967, the USSR was deploying about 200 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) a year in an attempt eventually to pull ahead of the United States in this category. The United States developed multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) technology and, therefore, had more warheads, but the Soviets possessed more deliverable nuclear firepower atop its bigger land-based heavy missiles.

In the early 1970s, the USSR finally achieved the goal that had eluded Khrushchev. Achieving strategic parity, in the view of Soviet leaders, established the Soviet Union as a true superpower, able to expand its power and influence globally, while actively pursuing détente with the West. Moreover, building up the Soviet military for the purpose of making the country invulnerable to any adversary was hard to argue against in the leadership, and it was acceptable to and understandable by ordinary people. Brezhnev’s promotion in 1956 to candidate member of the Politburo in charge of the defense industry had strengthened his already existing ties with the Soviet military-industrial complex. Having been alienated by Khrushchev, the military was quick to give its support to Brezhnev.

Before he could pursue his domestic and foreign priorities, Brezhnev had to prevail in the Kremlin competition for power, and it took him several years to do so. He did not challenge his rivals openly but gradually undermined their political base and removed them from power while refraining almost entirely from persecuting them. With the exception of Kosygin, all his opponents were more conservative than he. According to Georgii Arbatov, at the time a Central Committee consultant, a “struggle for the soul of Leonid Brezhnev

17 Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (New York: Times Books, 1995), 217–18.
took place in the Central Committee in 1965–1967 as the conservatives tried to co-opt him.”

Brezhnev came to power without any experience in international relations, a fact he readily confessed to his colleagues, especially in the early years. He quickly learned to rely on policy experts among his colleagues, like Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. At the start of the Brezhnev period, Prime Minister Kosygin represented the Soviet Union in meetings with foreign leaders. His June 1967 summit meeting with President Johnson in Glassboro, New Jersey, seemed to establish him (at least in Western eyes) as Brezhnev’s equal, if not superior. The main issue at Glassboro was Vietnam, but the meeting did not bring the Soviet cooperation that the United States was hoping for. Kosygin’s hopes for increased East–West trade proved to be stillborn when the next planned summit between the two leaders and the start of arms-control negotiations were both canceled because of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

As Brezhnev gradually prevailed in the Kremlin, he elevated himself over Kosygin. His consolidation of power culminated in April 1973 at a Central Committee plenum that endorsed East–West détente and reconfirmed the highly publicized Peace Program that had been adopted at the XXIVth Party Congress in April 1971. The plenum also removed from office the last members of the Shelepin group – Gennadii Voronov and Petr Shelest – and promoted Brezhnev’s allies, Gromyko, Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, and KGB chairman Iurii Andropov, to full Politburo membership. After this, Brezhnev’s dominance in domestic and foreign policy was never challenged again.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

If the post-Khrushchev leadership’s goals included maintaining domination over Eastern Europe, as well as firm control at home, the Prague Spring of 1968 challenged both. Brezhnev felt he had to intervene to prevent the “domino effect” in the Warsaw Pact and to nip in the bud the liberalizing influence of Czechoslovak reforms on Soviet society. Soviet intervention was also a show of strength to the West – a reaffirmation of the postwar spheres of influence in Europe. However, the decision to intervene was made only after

sharp disagreements within the Soviet Politburo and agonizing indecision by Brezhnev himself.\textsuperscript{19}

As Czechoslovakia moved toward reform, Moscow initially played the role of a concerned but supportive outsider. When Brezhnev visited Prague in December 1967, his intention was to save Antonin Novotný, the conservative first secretary, who was under heavy criticism within the Czechoslovak leadership, but in the end the Soviet leader agreed to have Novotný removed from power, and Alexander Dubček was elected first secretary.

On January 18, 1968, the Soviet ambassador to Prague, Stepan Chervonenko, characterized Dubček as an “unquestionably honest and dedicated person, a very loyal friend of the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{20} By March 15, however, after the gradual removal of censorship in Czechoslovakia, which coincided with student protests in Poland, KGB chairman Andropov compared the events in Prague to the upheaval in Hungary in 1956, which he experienced as the Soviet ambassador: “The situation is really very serious. The methods and forms, which are being used now in Czechoslovakia, are very reminiscent of the Hungarian ones. In this seeming chaos, … there exists a certain order. This is how it began in Hungary.”\textsuperscript{21}

The threat to stability of the socialist bloc was an especially sensitive issue for Brezhnev because he was embarking on arms-control negotiations with the United States and envisioned a European security system linking the two blocs. Throughout the winter and spring of 1968, East European Communist leaders repeatedly expressed their concerns about Dubček’s ability to maintain control. They and their Soviet counterparts were particularly alarmed by his gradual recognition of non-Communist parties in Czechoslovakia, and by the “Program of Action of the Czechoslovak People’s Army,” which called for a reassessment of the country’s military policy and its membership in the Warsaw Pact.

Practically every Soviet Politburo session in the spring and summer of 1968 registered alarm about Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev, who maintained close contact with Dubček, and Kosygin were cautious, preferring to rely on Dubček to limit the reforms. However, Andropov, Gromyko, and Shelest were inclined toward more radical measures, hoping to find replacements for


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, 275.
the current reformist leaders among Central Committee members who were closer to Moscow, such as Vasil Biłak.\textsuperscript{22} On March 21, 1968, Andropov went so far as to propose to his Politburo colleagues that “we should undertake measures along the military line, at least we should prepare them.” Documents justifying a military intervention were prepared by July, and in early August, during a meeting of leaders of Communist parties in Bratislava, Biłak’s group asked for military assistance.

Meanwhile, not only Soviet dissidents, but the Soviet liberal intelligentsia were looking at Prague with awe and hope to see whether socialism could be reformed peacefully, some even learning Czech in order to be able to read \textit{Rude Pravo}. Petr Shelest expressed concern about possible disturbances in Ukraine because of its proximity to Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{23}

After a last conversation between Brezhnev and Dubček on August 13, which persuaded the Soviet leader that Dubček was not in control of the situation, the Politburo decided to use military force. Warsaw Pact leaders met in Moscow on August 18 and agreed to send troops to Prague. Forces of five countries invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, encountering no armed resistance from the Czechs. Up to the very end, Brezhnev was reluctant to use force and modified his position many times, but as a consensus-oriented leader, he eventually sided with his Politburo colleagues (in particular Andropov, Shelest, and Podgornyi). According to Arbatov, Brezhnev was convinced he would have been forced to resign as general secretary if he had “lost Czechoslovakia.”\textsuperscript{24}

The formal basis for the invasion, which subsequently became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine, was the claim that in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, every Communist party was responsible not only to its own people, but also to “other socialist countries and to the entire Communist movement.” In fact, the intervention was a fiasco in the sense that the Soviets were unable to find any reliable allies in the Czech leadership, and at first had to keep Dubček at least nominally in power. In addition to shattering the image of the Soviet Union in the eyes of the Czechoslovak population, the invasion alienated many in the Soviet public and among the party elite itself. Intellectual circles in Moscow reacted with shock, considering the invasion a crime and seeing it as the end of their hopes for reform. Arbatov reports that the invasion “played an important role in the growth of the conservative tendencies that eventually led to the period of stagnation.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Valenta, \textit{Soviet Intervention}, 20–22
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, xvii, 15, 21.
\textsuperscript{24} Arbatov, \textit{The System}, 141.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.
The invasion had wider implications for Soviet foreign policy. The lack of a strong Western response to the invasion “proved to Moscow that Western governments were not prepared to commit themselves militarily on the territory of the Warsaw Treaty powers.”\(^\text{26}\) This was a huge relief for Brezhnev. It meant that existing European borders were, in effect, final, and that it was now time to render that \textit{de facto} situation \textit{de jure} in an international agreement.

**Détente in Europe**

The first steps toward détente in Europe were taken before the Prague Spring. In March 1966, Brezhnev blasted the United States in his report to the XXIIIrd Party Congress, but also called for “achieving European security” on the basis of the territorial status quo.\(^\text{27}\) That same year, President Charles de Gaulle of France, responding to repeated Soviet appeals for broader cooperation, visited Moscow. While de Gaulle was seeking an independent role for France in bridging the East–West confrontation, Brezhnev and Gromyko saw France as the key to a new relationship with Europe.

French–Soviet détente survived the test of Czechoslovakia. It was invigorated by President Georges Pompidou’s visit to Moscow in October 1970 and Brezhnev’s visit to France in the spring of 1971. France and the Soviet Union signed a declaration on relations between the two countries, which became a tentative model for European security principles. France then became the first country officially to endorse the Soviet proposal for a European security conference.

As for West Germany, it was slowly moving away from its earlier policy of no contact with the Eastern bloc, while not abandoning its ultimate goal of unification. When Willy Brandt was elected chancellor of West Germany in October 1969, he launched a program of \textit{Ostpolitik} aimed at relaxing tensions in Europe by recognizing East Germany, along with post-World War II territorial changes in Europe. Brandt chose to deal directly with the Soviet Union first (rather than with its East European allies) as a way of allaying Moscow’s concerns about West German–East German rapprochement.

\(^{26}\) Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 184.

As a result of very fast-moving and productive negotiations, the USSR and West Germany signed a non-aggression pact (the Moscow Treaty) in 1970. Next, Brandt signed similar treaties regulating the borders of the two Germanys with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The process was completed in 1971 by a Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin signed by the USSR, the United States, Britain and France. The Soviets, for their part, pressured the Stalinist East German leader Walter Ulbricht to step down and be replaced by a more open-minded Erich Honecker. After this leadership transition, the two Germanys extended recognition to each other and signed a bilateral treaty in December 1972. In this way, Brezhnev and company achieved through careful, steady negotiation what Khrushchev had failed to achieve through ultimatums, bluster, and bluff.

Sino-Soviet relations

After Khrushchev was removed, the new collective leadership reconsidered the USSR relationship with China. China seemed poised to usher in the beginning of multipolarity on the international stage – by emerging as a challenger both to the Soviet Union and the United States. The Chinese detonated their first nuclear device in the fall of 1964 and successfully tested a ballistic missile in 1966. In the same year, responding in part to this development, the USSR began deploying the first elements of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system around Moscow.

At the heart of the Sino-Soviet split, which began under Khrushchev but grew deeper in the late 1960s, was the struggle for ideological leadership of the Communist bloc, with the Third World being the main target of that competition. The Chinese leadership came to believe that the Soviet Union was abandoning the purity of the Marxist–Leninist teaching and the idea of world revolution for the benefits of cooperating with the imperialists. Yet, several members of the post-Khrushchev leadership sought to mend the relationship. While Brezhnev was not overly enthusiastic about reaching out to Mao, Kosygin saw improvement of relations with the Chinese as one of his personal priorities.28

Kosygin anticipated that a rapprochement with China would be easier because of the growing American involvement in Indochina, which underlined the need for the two Communist states to defend their common ally. During a February 1965 trip to Hanoi, with a stop along the way in China, Kosygin failed to persuade the Vietnamese Communists to abstain from open hostilities against the South once the United States got involved, and failed to reach any agreement with the Chinese. It did not help that while Kosygin was in North Vietnam, the United States bombed Hanoi and Haiphong. The Chinese criticized the Soviets for their “revisionism” and declined to attend the XXIIIrd Party Congress in March of 1966. Later the same year, China officially launched its Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and relations with the Soviet Union dramatically worsened.

Mao made no secret of his extensive territorial claims to Soviet Siberia. Alarmed by these demands, as well as by the radical character of the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet Union began a massive buildup of forces along the Chinese border. This buildup, which continued through the end of the 1960s, suggested to the Chinese that Soviet forces might be used in a preemptive attack. In 1969, major border clashes erupted between the Soviet and the Chinese forces on Damansky Island. Responding to the Chinese attack, Soviet troops made a short but deep intrusion into Chinese territory. Moscow’s last illusions about the possibility of improving relations with China were dispelled by the Damansky hostilities.

During the same year, the administration of Richard M. Nixon began trying to open channels to Beijing through Pakistan and Romania. In July 1971, Henry Kissinger made a secret visit to China, where he explicitly discussed the Soviet threat with the Chinese and even provided them with some sensitive intelligence information on Soviet military activities. President Nixon himself visited China in February 1972.

The Soviets repeatedly urged the United States not to exploit the Sino-Soviet split, but the very possibility that Washington might do so prompted Moscow to try to improve relations with both the Americans and the Chinese. On October 20, 1969, the same day that Dobrynin informed Nixon of the Soviet agreement to open Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) talks, the USSR and China resumed talks on their disputed border. By the early 1970s, with Sino-Soviet relations seeming beyond repair for the time being, Moscow moved to prevent a possible US–Chinese rapprochement by proposing just such a détente between itself and Washington.

29 See also Sergey Radchenko’s chapter in this volume.
Superpower détente

Although the drive toward détente was mutual, the United States and the USSR entertained quite differing views of it. Neither of the two countries was willing to forgo competition in pursuit of its interests internationally. For each of them, détente meant a limited accommodation that would allow those interests to be pursued at a lower level of tension.

For Soviet leaders, détente would confirm not only military, but political, parity with the United States. That meant that, like US policymakers, Soviet officials wanted to exert their influence and support their allies globally while relying on the other side to accept such actions as a military and political reality. The Soviet concept of “peaceful coexistence,” understood as a form of “class struggle,” would allow Moscow to promote proletarian internationalism and support national liberation movements in the Third World. The two main pro-détente arguments in Moscow – that the Soviet Union needed the West to improve its own economic situation, and that its growing military might could produce geopolitical gains at the West’s expense – were not seen as contradictory in the Kremlin.30

On the US side, President Nixon and his national security adviser and later secretary of state Henry Kissinger wanted to prevent US–Soviet competition from escalating into confrontation, while at the same time gaining Soviet assistance in resolving international conflicts in Vietnam and the Middle East. Nixon, Kissinger, and Brezhnev resembled each other in their aspiration to be great statesmen and peacemakers, in their generally Realpolitik worldview, and in their preference for secrecy and personal diplomacy in conducting policy. That is why the idea of regular summity was so attractive to both sides. The presence of a very talented Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatolii Dobrynin, who also shared those views, contributed significantly to the rapid development of US–Soviet détente.

Just one month after Nixon’s inauguration, in February 1969, a secret personal “back channel” between Kissinger and Dobrynin began to function, with arms control being the first subject under consideration. With the Soviet Union on the verge of pulling ahead of the United States in ICBM launchers, and the United States actively engaged in developing the MIRV technology, both sides recognized that without agreed limits, the nuclear-arms race threatened international stability and imposed significant economic costs on both countries.

30 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 40–73.
Signed on May 26, 1972, during President Nixon’s visit to Moscow, SALT I did not actually reduce any armaments; rather, it froze the number of nuclear weapons at the levels existing on both sides, while failing to address the most destabilizing issue, MIRV technology. That technology allowed the side that employed it to increase the actual throw weight of its warheads many times without adding any new launchers, thus rendering the nuclear balance less predictable and therefore less stable. When the treaty was signed, MIRV technology gave an advantage to Washington because the Soviet Union was falling far behind the United States in this area. However, potentially, it was the Soviet side that could gain most from this technology because of its bigger ICBMs.

Along with SALT I, the US and Soviet leaders signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty limiting strategic defenses, which in the future came to be perceived as critical to nuclear deterrence by both sides. Yet, even though arms control soon became the centerpiece at the summits, the May 1972 meeting did not produce other key results the two sides hoped for: “for the U.S., a definitive pledge of Soviet help in settling the Vietnam war, for the USSR some kind of understanding concerning China.”

SALT II negotiations began soon after the signing of SALT I. However, the negotiations were more difficult than expected because of increasing tensions in overall US–Soviet relations, growing doubts about détente in US domestic politics, plus the sheer difficulty of limiting forces that had very different components and structures. After President Nixon resigned in 1974, Gerald Ford moved quickly on SALT II, picking up where Nixon and Brezhnev left it. In late November 1974, Ford and Brezhnev met in the Soviet Far East, near the city of Vladivostok, and negotiated the basic framework of the treaty.

Brezhnev made a significant concession in Vladivostok against the advice of his own defense minister, Andrei Grechko. He agreed to an overall ceiling of 2,400 strategic launchers (including ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and strategic bombers), of which 1,320 could be equipped with MIRV technology, while not counting either American nuclear systems “forward-based” in Europe or the nuclear weapons of other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, to the dismay of Soviet leaders, President Jimmy Carter soon abandoned the Vladivostok framework.

Proletarian internationalism and competition in the Third World

Détente began to unravel in the Third World. Khrushchev had reached out to national liberation movements in an ostentatious but tentative fashion. In the early 1960s, the Soviet Union had almost no specialists on Africa: a subsection on Africa was just being created in the International Department of the Central Committee in 1961. Under Brezhnev, Soviet support for real or potential Third World allies shifted in emphasis from economic to military aid. The Kremlin sold arms, sent military advisers, and sought bases in some Third World Countries. Moscow’s most important Third World allies were Cuba, India (after the signing of the Soviet–Indian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971), and Vietnam. In the Middle East, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Egypt were particularly significant. While there was no Soviet master plan for the Third World, the Soviet Union, trying to emulate the United States, was becoming a global power, with a growing naval presence in
all parts of the world. However, there was a strong perception of a Soviet master plan within the Carter administration, championed by national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had significant influence on the new president’s thinking, especially through his weekly national security reports.32

Even as Soviet aid to Third World countries grew, some in the Soviet leadership, especially Kosygin, tried to limit it. He hoped to make relations with Third World countries more “mutually beneficial,” by basing them on the “distribution of labor.” Kosygin was especially interested in expanding Soviet influence in South Asia. During the September 1965 hostilities between India and Pakistan, Kosygin successfully mediated the conflict and persuaded the two countries to sign the Tashkent Declaration in January 1966. In the late 1960s, especially after the Soviet–Indian Treaty was signed, Moscow’s Indian connection helped to balance the US–Chinese rapprochement. The alliance between the USSR and India was cemented during the Indo-Pakistani war of December 1971, which India fought successfully with Soviet armaments. The Chinese were deterred from intervening on Pakistan’s side by the Soviet–Indian alliance.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the post-Khrushchev leadership initially tried to deemphasize the former leader’s support for Arab states as the main source of Soviet influence in the region. Kosygin’s successful mediation of the conflict between India and Pakistan kindled Soviet aspirations to replace the United States as the main Middle East peace mediator. However, Egypt, the most important Soviet ally in the area, resisted this idea.

In the spring of 1967, the Soviets found themselves being manipulated by Syria and Egypt. Soviet arms sales to these two countries encouraged their belligerence toward Israel, while Soviet pressure on them to be more conciliatory had no effect. Shortly before the outbreak of the June 1967 war, the Soviets allowed Egypt to mobilize troops to deter a possible Israeli attack against Syria, about which Podgorny informed the Egyptian government in May 1967. Strong rhetorical support for the Arabs then undermined Soviet ability to serve as a mediator.

Once hostilities broke out, and the devastating defeat of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan became apparent, Moscow felt it had no choice but to threaten intervention if Israel did not stop its advance. At the same time, however, the Kremlin turned to the United States for joint mediation. The shift from seeking to be the sole peacemaker in the Middle East to understanding the

32 Melvyn P. Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 269–84 See also Nancy Mitchell’s chapter in volume III.
need for US–Soviet cooperation was a turning point in Soviet Middle East policy. In July 1967, the Soviet Union and the United States successfully collaborated on UN resolution 242, which envisioned an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied lands in exchange for Arab recognition of Israel’s right to exist. In 1970, Brezhnev even proposed a gradual restoration of relations with Israel, but Suslov and Gromyko opposed it. They insisted that Soviet policy toward the Middle East stay the same until a full peace settlement in the region was reached. According to Dobrynin, Brezhnev gave in and continued the pro-Arab policy.33

Notwithstanding the lessons learned during the 1967 war, and the newly found joint mission with the United States in the region, the Soviet Politburo, acting in response to the urgent requests of its Arab allies, decided to resupply their armies. Thousands of Soviet military personnel were sent to Syria and Egypt, and the Soviet Union acquired naval rights in Arab countries. Although Egypt and Syria were resupplied with up to $5 billion worth of military equipment, Egypt wanted even more, and so during the war of attrition in 1969–70, Soviet fighter pilots were dispatched there. A treaty with Egypt was signed in May 1971, and a similar treaty with Iraq in April 1972. Driven by fear that the United States would marginalize Soviet efforts to be a leading mediator in the region, Moscow was seeking to consolidate its own sphere of influence in the Middle East,

Soviet interests suffered a major setback when, just six weeks after the Moscow Brezhnev–Nixon summit, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat expelled over 20,000 Soviet military advisers, technicians, and military aircraft from Egypt. Sadat had pursued secret contacts with Kissinger for a long time before that decision was made, apparently exploring a more promising alliance. His turnaround made it even more important for the Soviet Union to reach an understanding with the United States on their joint role in the Middle East, an effort that jibed with Brezhnev’s personal dream of joining with Nixon to exert pressure on Soviet and American allies in a crisis situation. During his second American summit with Nixon in San Clemente, California, in June 1973, Brezhnev had a famous middle-of-the-night three-hour session with the president. Among other things, Brezhnev proposed that it was time for the two leaders to reach an agreement on the Middle East among themselves and then to “bring to bear [their] influence” on their respective allies to reach the settlement that would bring a lasting peace to the region. Brezhnev was

33 Dobrynin, In Confidence, 162.
passionate and unrelenting, urging Nixon to step in personally before it became too late.  

Nonetheless, US–Soviet collaboration failed its first test in the region just a couple of months after the summit. After the Egyptian and Syrian attack against Israel on October 6, 1973, Moscow and Washington accused each other of using delaying tactics in order to assist their allies in gaining more territory. When the ceasefire collapsed, and the Arabs seemed to have gained momentum, the United States put its forces on a very high level of alert, precipitating a crisis that threatened a direct US–Soviet clash. The ceasefire was eventually reestablished and hostilities ended, but this episode undermined Washington’s reliability as a partner in Moscow’s eyes, thus compromising the overall health of US–Soviet détente.

Conference on security and cooperation in Europe: the Final Act

Arguably the most important diplomatic process of the period between 1964 and 1975, at least symbolically, was the ambitious attempt to bring the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Europeans together within one new integrative security framework. This process, which unfolded in Europe in the early 1970s, resulted in what came to be known as the Helsinki Accords of 1975.

The idea of a European security conference, which would legitimize the postwar borders in Europe and reconfirm the Soviet Union’s status as a great European power, was one of the top priorities of the post-Khrushchev leadership, and one which especially suited Brezhnev in his role as a peacemaker.

A secondary Soviet goal was to expand trade relations and achieve some degree of integration into the European economy. Initial Soviet proposals did not include humanitarian issues, which later were commonly referred to as Basket III of the Helsinki Accords. Basket III, which included human rights provisions and other nonmilitary aspects of security such as domestic security of citizens, freedom of information, freedom of movement, and availability of cultural and educational contacts between citizens of different countries, provoked sharp differences of opinion among Soviet leaders. Brezhnev and Gromyko cautiously favored including Basket III in the negotiations, Suslov

34 Memorandum of conversation, President Richard Nixon’s Meeting with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, June 23, 1973, San Clemente, California. document no. 00766, Kissinger Memcons Collection, National Security Archive, Washington, DC.
was against, and Andropov took a cautious position. He understood the need to confirm borders and expand economic contacts, but sensed the potential dangers of the human rights provisions. According to Melvyn Leffler, the Soviet leaders were faced with the “tradeoff: recognition of human rights in return for recognition of the territorial status quo.”

The attention that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) negotiations received at the highest level is evident in the fact that April 1973 and April 1975 Central Committee plenums – the only ones from 1973 to 1980 that dealt specifically with foreign-policy matters – discussed the CSCE negotiations, and that several Politburo sessions addressed CSCE-related issues, with at least one meeting, on January 7, 1974, largely devoted to it.

The Final Act of the CSCE was signed in Helsinki on August 1, 1975, and printed in full in Pravda. Brezhnev’s goals seemed to be achieved: postwar European borders were confirmed in an international agreement; the Soviet Union was recognized as a member of the European great power concert; and relations with the United States were firmly set within the framework of arms-control agreements. Upon signing the Final Act, Brezhnev probably felt he was at the peak of his political career. Yet, even as Soviet leaders were celebrating the Helsinki Accords, the fruits of the perceived victory were beginning to turn sour.

Soviet human rights activists quickly began using the Helsinki Final Act as a way to make their case abroad. The first Helsinki Watch Group was established in Moscow on May 12, 1976, by the prominent dissident, physicist Iurii Orlov. The Soviet government cited other provisions of the act to accuse foreign governments of interference in Soviet domestic affairs. The dissidents retorted that the Helsinki Accords legitimized human rights movements in the USSR and other socialist countries.

Western support for the new wave of human rights movements combined with other irritants, which by the mid-1970s had accumulated in US–Soviet bilateral relations and in the Third World, to start pulling détente apart just as it seemed to reach its apogee. Instead of becoming the year that consolidated détente, 1975 became the watershed between détente and what seemed like a second round of the Cold War.

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35 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 249
37 See Marc Trachtenberg’s chapter in this volume and Olav Njølstad’s chapter in volume III.
The end of détente

The period of 1962–75 was when the Central European theater of the Cold War stabilized. The European status quo was affirmed, first, in a series of treaties with two German states, and, finally, by the Helsinki Accords. At the same time, arms-control agreements were signed, which, while not reducing armaments, put significant brakes on the arms race. The fear of nuclear war subsided. East–West ties of all sorts—economic, political, social, and cultural—expanded.

The Soviet leadership seemed to have learned the lessons of the almost disastrous Cuban missile crisis. Brezhnev’s ascendance meant moderation in foreign policy, and the achievement of détente. But détente did not remove competition in the Third World. If anything, Moscow’s growing international prestige, as well as its growing arms sales to developing countries, made the Soviet Union a more attractive ally for Third World leaders at a time when the United States was suffering a major defeat in Vietnam. As more opportunities presented themselves in the Third World, the Soviet Union gradually got sucked into conflicts. When African and Asian leaders employed Marxist revolutionary rhetoric and called themselves countries of a “socialist orientation,” the Soviet Union, as the leader of the socialist camp, felt it had to respond.

The fall of the last colonial empire—the Portuguese—at the very peak of détente triggered just such a Soviet response in Angola. The USSR and the United States came to support two opposing sides in the civil war there, and China also meddled in the strife to thwart Soviet influence in Africa. When the Cubans pushed the Soviets to widen their military involvement in the civil war, and the first battles were won by the faction favored by the Kremlin, Brezhnev took that to confirm that class struggle could proceed in the Third World while superpower relations improved. In reality, however, the Soviet role in Angola strengthened the perception in the United States that the Soviet Union was using détente to lull the West into a false sense of security while driving for global dominance.

A truly cooperative relationship between East and West required a deeper consensus on basic values and principles that would not be within reach for

38 See Vladislav Zubok’s chapter in volume III.
39 For the most recent detailed account of US and Soviet involvement in Angola, see Odd Arne Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222–36; see also Piero Gleijeses’s chapter in this volume.
another ten years. Such a consensus, as détente had shown, could not come about while the two main ideologies – capitalist democracy and Communism – continued to clash. Only after 1985 would Mikhail Gorbachev transform the Soviet approach to international relations, reining in the ideological clergy and the military-industrial complex, and resisting temptations to expand Soviet power in the Third World. Until then, the conflict would not only continue but worsen. As Robert Gilpin pointed out in his analysis of US–Soviet relations, “in the absence of shared values and interests, the mechanism of peaceful change [had] little chance of success.”\footnote{Robert Gilpin, War and Change in World Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 209.}