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U.S. - SOVIET RELATIONS:
FROM BAD TO WORSE

of development assistance through trade and aid, since the bottom line would no longer be an issue.

But even an imaginative world economic policy would not by itself plug the philosophical gap in the West's armor. The answer, if one is to be found, will not lie in some instant new "ism". The ability of the Western countries to overcome their social, economic, energy and environmental problems and to demonstrate that free societies can be stable, just and successful will indeed be very important. That may involve quite radical changes away from the centralization of power in large and remote public and private bureaucracies. But, to be philosophically successful, the West will also have to identify more clearly with the general and specific goals of the Third World. It will have to offer a world political and economic order that makes small countries feel secure, poor countries confident of development, aggressive countries fearful of retribution, and all countries properly independent within their necessary interdependence. The order must offer better prospects than disorder.

Many of these concepts already underlay the postwar order built round the U.N. Charter and organization, international law, an open world economy and world development institutions. The American contribution to them has been preeminent. But too often the United States has allowed that initiative to be taken away from it by its perceived failure to demonstrate sustained fidelity to them or by excesses perpetrated implausibly in its name. The Carter Administration has done much in its U.N. role, if not in the North-South dialogue, to reestablish the American willingness to play by the rules of a system of international law and collective deliberation, most notably in its handling of the Iranian seizure of American hostages late in 1979. But the threads of a particular action have not been woven together into a generally understood Carter doctrine or strategy to capture the imagination and respect of a suspicious, cynical and unstable world. That will be a worthy task for a new year, a new decade and, perhaps, a new presidential term.

All happy families are alike," wrote Leo Tolstoy at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*. "But an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion." A similar melancholy generalization applies to good and bad years in Soviet-American relations: the good ones are often alike in the deceptiveness of what seem to go right, while the bad ones are as varied as the possibilities for something going wrong in a relationship of such fundamental mistrust, misunderstanding and enmity. The future is not inclined to honor promises made in such a relationship, or so the past has shown.

There have been few good years in Soviet-American relations; and those that may have seemed relatively good at the time tend, in retrospect, to be distinguished more by false hopes and missed opportunities than by genuine and lasting improvements. Either that, or they are memorable to historians writing now for reasons that were largely overlooked by commentators writing then. 1933, when the United States ended its snub of the Bolsheviks and recognized the Soviet government, also saw the promulgation of the Second Five-Year Plan and the consolidation of Stalinist totalitarianism—hardly an auspicious turning point for the world. 1941, when the United States and the U.S.S.R. suddenly found themselves allies, was a dark hour in a world war that their common enemy seemed to be winning. In 1959, when Premier Nikita Khrushchev rollicked across the United States preaching peaceful co-existence, the Soviets were deploying their first intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the United States was conducting U-2 reconnaissance missions overhead—two developments that augured ill. In 1972, Richard Nixon became the first American President to visit Moscow, where he and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev signed a code of conduct for Soviet-American relations; but four months before, Nixon had visited Beijing (Peking), then signed the Shanghai Communiqué—the original China card in what was to become a long and deadly serious

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game of three-hand poker among the world's two nuclear superpowers and its largest nation.

Yet even by the rather dismal standards of the preceding six decades, 1979 was an especially bad year in Soviet-American relations, and it was bad after its own fashion. It was worse than any since the very beginning of the first Nixon Administration—when Soviet troops were still conspicuous in the streets of Prague, when the Vietnam War was still ablaze, when détente was a fancy French word largely unknown on the western side of the Atlantic, and when salt, even if capitalized, meant only sodium chloride to most people. Looking back over 1979, optimists could only hope that it would prove to have been just another dip in the perennially troubled relationship, perhaps even a nadir. Pessimists, for their part, had reason to fear that future historians would see 1979 as the end of the post-1972 détente era and the beginning of a new, protracted phase characterized by an increase in political tension and military competition, quite possibly unconstrained by strategic arms control agreements, or even by ongoing talks.

II

Having gone from bad to worse all year long, Soviet-American relations plummeted into a full-blown crisis in the final days of 1979 and the first days of 1980, when the U.S.S.R. invaded Afghanistan and the United States retaliated with an array of diplomatic protests, economic sanctions and political threats. But that crisis—sudden and dramatic as it seemed—had been building for a long time.

The Soviets had been an obtrusive presence in Afghanistan since the Marxist coup in April 1978. Right after that event, twenty months before the Soviet invasion, General (later President) Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan was telling almost every foreigner he met that “the Russians are now at the Khyber Pass.” By early 1979 there were Soviet advisers in every important Afghan ministry and down to the company level in the armed forces. Despite—and in some ways because of—the U.S.S.R.’s backing for the leaders in Kabul, a rebellion by Muslim tribesmen, disgruntled leftists and secessionists grew into a seemingly intractable challenge to the authority and even the survival of the Marxist regime. In early August 1979, the United States indirectly warned the Soviet Union to halt its military intervention in Afghanistan, citing “prudent” American restraint during the Iran crisis as a

model for the Russians to follow. President Carter’s National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, said, “We expect others similarly to abstain from intervention and from efforts to impose alien doctrines on deeply religious and nationally conscious people.”

The Soviets ignored this counsel. In November, they tripled their garrison inside Afghanistan and reinforced their troops along the border. And in December, the Soviet Army played a key role in overthrowing and executing President Hafizullah Amin, a nationalist with whom the Kremlin had grown increasingly impatient. Amin was replaced by Babrak Karmal, the leader of a rival Marxist faction more obedient to Moscow, who had been living in exile under Soviet protection. President Carter denounced the invasion and coup as “a grave threat to peace” and sent a message to Leonid Brezhnev over the Washington-Moscow “hot line” warning of serious consequences if the U.S.S.R. did not withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. The Soviets seemed to have no intention of doing so any time soon. If Amin had been a recalcitrant patron, Babrak Karmal seemed a dutiful puppet—but he needed massive assistance. Having already turned the traditional buffer state into a Soviet satellite, the Soviets now set about turning it into a virtual 16th republic of the U.S.S.R., complete with what amounted to a Dari-language edition of *Pravda* and the ruble as an acceptable currency in the shops of Kabul. The Soviet occupiers also moved quickly to crush the rebellion with a vengeance.

Some Americans took comfort from the Afghan war, saying that the Russians were doomed to experience their own Vietnam in the desolate mountain passes. Journalists and even some political scientists dusted off their Kipling and consoled themselves with the nostalgic recollection that in the Great Game between the Tsars and the Raj in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan had remained a no-man’s-land defying pacification and repelling invaders from north and south alike. But there was little reason for confidence that this time the Russians would lose. Wars of attrition can work both ways, including against the guerrillas. The Afghan rebellion was mostly a patchwork of localized resistance, aided by China, Pakistan and a number of other foreign countries, but with no national figure to galvanize the tribesmen in their ragtag struggle against the full might of a Soviet expeditionary force.

The American response was swift, firm and sweeping, although only time would tell how effective. Carter summoned home from Moscow his ambassador, Thomas J. Watson, Jr.—a step the

White House had not taken even during the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. The President also sharply cut back on the sale of grain and advanced technology to the Soviet Union, and he asked the Senate to postpone indefinitely its consideration of the strategic arms limitation treaty. The Administration also mobilized support in the United Nations for a demand that the Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan—an initiative that the U.S.S.R., to no one's surprise, vetoed in the Security Council, but which was approved by the General Assembly by an overwhelming 104-18 vote.

Commentators and government spokesmen alike called the Afghan crisis a "watershed" in Soviet-American relations. It was certainly a turning point in Jimmy Carter's own thinking about Soviet-American relations. In a series of statements that were characteristically ingenuous to the point of naïveté, Carter said he had been shocked that Brezhnev would lie to him about the invasion (the Soviet leader claimed that his armies had been "invited" into Afghanistan). "My opinion of the Russians," Carter told a television interviewer, "has changed most drastically in the last week—[more] than even in the previous two and a half years before that."

Yet in many respects the Soviet-American clash over Afghanistan climaxed, rather than contradicted, the trends of the year. Even before the crisis, developments in a variety of areas had conspired to generate a vague but pervasive sense in both the United States and the U.S.S.R. that something had gone profoundly wrong between them. If détente is a shared belief in the rewards of mutual accommodation and the risks of confrontation, then détente had long since been eroded by changes in the environment of the relationship. These adverse developments were, for the most part, continuations of gradual trends or consequences of earlier events. Still, in many cases 1979 brought a quantum leap in the intensity or the complexity of the problem. Afghanistan was only the most spectacular example.

There was certainly nothing new in American concern over what was widely seen as Soviet mischief-making if not outright intervention in the Third World. Soviet involvement in Angola and Ethiopia had elicited protests from the White House not just during the first two years of the Carter Administration but during the previous Republican Administrations as well. In fact, some fronts were quieter than in years before. In 1979 the Kremlin launched no military adventures in Africa similar to the Soviet-Cuban action in Ethiopia during 1977-78. Nor did the U.S.S.R.

play as vigorously obstructive a role in southern Africa as Western statesmen and analysts had feared. Rather, as the conflict in Zimbabwe Rhodesia edged toward a precarious but still almost miraculous settlement in December, the Soviets were relatively restrained in their goading of the Patriotic Front.

Yet, while there were dogs that did not bark—or at least did not bite—the headlines that dominated the news in 1979 were still profoundly unsettling to many Americans, even before the Soviets' de facto annexation of Afghanistan. The United States had long since been gripped by anxiety about its standing in the world—its moral authority, its military power and its political will. Before the Soviet tanks rolled in at the end of the year, many Americans felt that the most memorable and outrageous event in Afghanistan during 1979 had been the death of the U.S. Ambassador to Kabul, Adolph Dubs. He was killed in February in a shootout between his guerrilla captors and Afghan police—with Soviet advisers standing by. That incident, like so many others during the year, seemed to symbolize what many decried as the "impotence" of American power in the face of sometimes subtle, sometimes brutal, but always sinister Soviet expansionism.

Another outrage occurred in November, in neighboring Iran. When youthful Iranian radicals, with the full blessing of Ayatollah Khomeini, sacked the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held its staff hostage, Soviet behavior was ambiguous. The U.S.S.R. gave grudging support to the United States in the U.N. Security Council for a condemnation of Iran's violation of diplomatic immunity. But a Farsi-language Soviet radio station in Baku broadcast inflammatory anti-American propaganda into Iran during the occupation of the Embassy; commentaries in the official Soviet and East German press expressed sympathy for the Iranian revolution even as it lurched into anarchy, terror and breach of international law; and there was considerable evidence that the captors of the U.S. Embassy were led by Iranian radicals seeking to push Khomeini to the left. Then, in early January 1980, after the Afghan invasion, the U.S.S.R. turned around at the U.N. Security Council and vetoed a resolution for economic sanctions against Iran—an issue on which it had appeared ready to abstain as recently as the New Year.

Whatever the motivation, Soviet behavior, combined with the crisis over the hostages, greatly aggravated Americans' sense of foreboding. The year had already seen the Shah of Iran and President Somoza of Nicaragua flee into exile, leaving their countries in the throes of revolutions that were raucously anti-Ameri-

can, even if not exactly pro-Soviet. Stunned by the spectacle of client dictators being routed by Muslim clergymen in Iran and of Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua, many Americans asked, more urgently than ever before, whether the United States was not on the geopolitical retreat—and whether it did not face rout in precisely that part of the world on which the industrialized West most depended for its economic life-blood—oil.

In the Middle East, the Soviet Union continued to play the spoiler in President Carter's effort to mediate an Israeli-Egyptian settlement. In March, TASS called the Camp David Agreements, signed at the White House, a "betrayal" of Arab interests.

Throughout the year, the U.S.S.R. denounced Egypt and encouraged Libya, Algeria, Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization to follow a rejectionist line. Seeking further to exploit Arab discontent with the Camp David process, the Soviets made overtures to Saudi Arabia, long the bastion of Arab conservatism and pro-Americanism. By the end of the year, however, their gambit seemed to have gone nowhere: the Saudi monarchy, which was more terrified than ever by the specter of radicalism and revolution, had no interest in a rapprochement with the principal sponsor of both.

Looking at the Third World as a whole, many in the West found reason to be alarmed at apparent Soviet advances beyond the U.S.S.R.'s traditional reach.¹ Vietnam, Ethiopia, Angola, Afghanistan, South Yemen—these and others had all come to rely increasingly on Soviet aid; they had joined the ranks of Cuba as radical leftist regimes that were unabashedly beholden to Moscow even as they pledged allegiance to the quarter-century-old Non-aligned Movement. At a summit meeting of ostensibly nonaligned nations in Havana in September, Cuba assumed both de facto and de jure leadership of the movement, and it did so without the slightest softening of its radically pro-Soviet, anti-American line.

In short, Soviet-American competition in the Third World regained an urgency that it had lost in the 1960s.² By that standard, a new cold war was setting in. In that competition, the Soviets and Cubans have had a natural advantage (though not necessarily a permanent one). Because their military and political

¹ For an excellent analysis of where the real advances end and the seeming ones begin, see "The Super Rivals: Conflict in the Third World," by Robert Legvold, *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1979, pp. 755-778.

² There was an increased sense of competition in Eastern Europe, too. Carter Administration officials, giving background briefings to the press in 1979, hinted broadly that they were on the lookout for opportunities to nurture the self-assertiveness of both ruling and dissident political forces among the Soviet satellites.

intervention has traditionally been on the side of insurgents and radicals, the Soviets and Cubans have been able to feed off of trouble, which is always in copious supply. The United States, for its part, has tried to intervene diplomatically in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere—to midwife peaceful settlements based on negotiated compromise, which by nature is a much more difficult and often thankless task. The United States has been further hampered by its reputation in the eyes—and certainly in the rhetoric—of many Third World countries as a "neo-colonialist" and even "imperialist" power. That stigma is unavoidable, given America's close ties with the former colonialists of Western Europe and its notoriety as the home of many multinational corporations, which are the object of perverid resentment in less developed nations.

By the end of 1979, the forces of moderation seemed to have won a round in southern Africa, thanks to the restoration of caretaker British rule in Salisbury; but almost everywhere else—notably in the Middle East and Central America—militants and radicals seemed to be getting their way. That impression, while simplistic, was widespread in the United States, and it fanned American fears that Soviet advances around the world are somehow inexorable—that this inexorability is rooted in raw military power, which is a Soviet specialty. Moreover, the perception of Soviet encroachments on a broad front in 1978-79, especially the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, struck many Americans as making a mockery of the compact Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev had entered into in 1972: "Both sides recognize that efforts to obtain unilateral advantages at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, are inconsistent with" the objectives of the 12-point Declaration of Principles signed at the first Moscow summit that year.

iii

Bilateral trade and emigration from the U.S.S.R.—two aspects of the Soviet-American relationship that are quantifiable and that therefore sometimes serve as indices of the political climate—had relatively little importance in 1979. There were some tentatively encouraging developments in both areas, but those improvements neither reflected, nor effected, an improvement in the overall relationship. Trade and emigration are linked in American law by the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment which made most-favored-nation (MFN) status for the Soviet Union contingent on free, or at least freer, emigration. In practice this meant emigration

of Jews. At the beginning of 1979, one of the co-authors of the law, Representative Charles Vanik of Ohio, indicated that he might favor the removal of legal restrictions on trade with the Soviet Union and some other communist countries.

In April, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry reported that a record 4,418 Soviet Jews had been permitted to emigrate the previous month, and by the end of the year the annual rate was approaching an all-time high of 50,000. A number of Jewish activists were released from labor camps, five prominent Soviet dissidents—Aleksandr Ginzburg, Eduard Kuznetsov, Mark Dymshits, Valentin Moroz and Georgi Vins—were exchanged for two convicted Soviet spies, and there were also a number of defections by artists. Notwithstanding this unprecedented exodus—by exit visa, swap and defection—the bilateral talks on MFN status, resumed in April, were still far from resolution by the end of the year. (China, meanwhile, was well on its way to achieving MFN status.)

Despite the numerical improvement in emigration—and the fact that there had been no cause célèbre in 1979 to compare with the trial of Anatoly Shcharansky in 1978—the prevailing sense in the United States was that the human rights situation in the Soviet Union was as bad as ever. The American Jewish community was concerned about a perceived rise in anti-Semitism in Russia and about the continuing repression of well-known dissenting intellectuals, including the continued incarceration of Shcharansky. Protests on their behalf resonated with the mounting American mood of anger and anxiety about Soviet behavior and intentions in general.

All this carried a special irony for Jimmy Carter. Like most incoming administrations, his had been determined to preside over a breakthrough in Soviet-American relations. But somewhat less typically, Carter and Brzezinski had vowed to relegate Soviet-American relations to a less central position in the scheme of U.S. foreign policy. They criticized their predecessors, particularly former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, for allowing their attempts at management of the superpower relationship to obscure, distort or altogether prevent consideration of other issues: “trilateral” ties with Western Europe and Japan, the North-South dialogue, the evolution of a new economic order, and the search for peaceful settlements geared to local needs rather than geopolitical goals in southern Africa. Carter and Brzezinski sought a “differentiated”—i.e., nonideological—approach to the problem of how to deal with accelerating and often destabilizing political

change in Third World societies. They wanted to distance themselves from the we/they, East/West view of the world that marked, in different ways, Dean Acheson's containment, John Foster Dulles' brinkmanship and Henry Kissinger's Realpolitik. More specifically, the Carter team entered office eager to normalize relations with Cuba and Vietnam, despite their close ties with Moscow.

By the end of 1979, those declared hopes of three years before echoed with a distinctly futile and even unrealistic ring. Deemphasizing the Soviet-American relationship necessarily meant injecting it with a new degree of stability, if not placidity. Yet just the opposite had occurred: the relationship had deteriorated. It had acquired new elements of uncertainty, instability and mutual recrimination. Both the negotiation of a second strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II) and the fight for its ratification required far more of the Administration's attention, and at a higher level, than had been anticipated. The impulse to build bridges to Havana and Hanoi was moribund, a casualty of continuing Cuban adventurism in Africa and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. By the autumn of 1979, Carter and Brzezinski were no longer calling the Cubans just “proxies” of the Soviet Union; they were calling them “puppets.” In short, by the end of 1979, the United States was more preoccupied than ever with the problem of how to deal with the Russians.

IV

One of the most sensitive and challenging aspects of managing U.S.-Soviet relations has been the fine-tuning of synchronous policies toward Moscow and Beijing. Ever since the Nixon-Kissinger opening to the People's Republic in 1971 and 1972, there has been a danger that U.S. policymakers, in their enthusiasm for the new relationship with Beijing, would underestimate Soviet paranoia where China is concerned. If, as it is prone to do, the Kremlin sees the United States as conspiring with China against the U.S.S.R., American efforts to exploit the Soviet neurosis about China are likely to be ineffective or even counterproductive. There has also been a danger that American officials, in their occasional over eagerness to use the connection with China to curb Soviet pugnacity and treachery, would inadvertently allow American foreign policy to seem a tool of the Chinese in their own anti-Soviet policy—an appearance that would be neither efficacious nor dignified. Nixon and Kissinger sought to avoid these dangers

by pursuing détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with China simultaneously, on the theory that if the two policies proceeded in parallel, the Kremlin would be more likely to see improved U.S.-Chinese relations as an inducement to further improvements in U.S.-Soviet relations—which in turn would depend on restrained, constructive Soviet behavior.

The main problem with the *triangular relationship* during the Carter Administration has been that, generally speaking, U.S.-Chinese relations and U.S.-Soviet relations have moved in different, sometimes opposite, directions. While the United States drew closer to China, it drew further apart from the U.S.S.R. When President Carter announced in December 1978 that the United States and the People's Republic of China would normalize diplomatic relations, he predicted, "Our new relationship with China will not put any additional obstacles in the way of a successful SALT agreement and also will not endanger our good relationship with the Soviet Union."

His confidence on that score betrayed a fundamental miscalculation. One week after U.S.-PRC normalization was announced, SALT hit a last-minute snag. Soviet officials hinted broadly that part of the problem was their annoyance over the announcement. The SALT negotiations dragged on for another five months—a delay that threatened to be fatal to the treaty, since the ratification debate in the Senate consequently became entangled in the presidential campaign. In mid-January, Carter acknowledged in a television interview that the Soviets appeared to have delayed completion of SALT II to demonstrate their displeasure over Washington's strengthened ties with China.

The most dangerous interaction among U.S., Soviet and Chinese interests was in Indochina. Here there was a chain reaction that might very well have led to war between at least two of the three major powers. At the end of 1978, the Soviet military newspaper, *Red Star*, complaining about the friendship and cooperation treaty that China and Japan had signed in August, warned against an emerging Sino-Japanese-American "axis" in Asia. The U.S.S.R. signed a friendship treaty of its own with Vietnam in November of that year. Then, after a period of sputtering border war between Vietnam and Cambodia, 100,000 Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in December, expelled the Chinese-backed regime of Pol Pot from Phnom Penh and dug in for a lengthy occupation. The United States condemned the invasion, and urged restraint on both Moscow and Beijing, but in mid-January the Soviets vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodia.

At the end of that month, the Chinese Deputy Premier, Deng Xiaoping, arrived in the United States to celebrate normalization. His nine-day tour of the country lived up to the Soviets' worst expectations. Sino-Soviet enmity was at least as prominent in his statements as Sino-American amity. "We consider that the true hotbed of war is the Soviet Union, not the U.S.," he said—over and over again. Secretary of State Vance sought, rather forlornly, to dissociate the Administration's policy from Deng's rhetoric, and no sooner was Deng out of town than Vance summoned Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin to assure him that the new relationship between Washington and Beijing was not aimed against Moscow.

But Soviet observers could be forgiven their skepticism. The Deng visit was clearly stage-managed by Brzezinski and the National Security Council, not by Vance and the State Department, and Moscow viewed Brzezinski now more than ever as the *blêe noire* of Soviet-American relations. A communiqué released at the end of the Washington portion of the Deng visit contained a ritualistic denunciation of "hegemony," which had long since become an anti-Soviet code word. Brezhnev publicly accused Deng of "attempting to gain the support of the military forces of imperialism," and Prime Minister Kosygin took advantage of a courtesy call by Presidential Science Adviser Frank Press at the Kremlin to reiterate in the strongest terms Soviet displeasure over the Carter Administration's handling of the Deng visit.

Deng had used his American tour as a platform not just for general rhetorical attacks on Russia, but for a very specific threat: the Vietnamese occupiers of Cambodia were "the Cubans of the Orient," and it was time to teach them "some necessary lessons." Both the American and Soviet governments got the message. The State Department issued a statement expressing concern about the possibility of a Chinese attack on Vietnam, adding that the United States was "not taking sides in the struggle between two communist states in Asia." The Soviet press rumbled that China was in danger of "overstepping the forbidden line in Vietnam.... The snubbed dragon wants to show its claws." The Russians made clear that they would hold the United States responsible if Deng carried out his threat to attack Vietnam.

Less than two weeks after his return from the United States, Deng did just that. A Chinese army of about 80,000 invaded the northern part of Vietnam. Washington and Moscow escalated their own battle of public warnings. On February 17, the State Department cautioned the U.S.S.R. against intervening, either directly in the Vietnam conflict or with a punitive attack on China itself: "any steps which would extend the conflict would

have serious consequences not only for the region but for a larger sense of peace generally. . . .” The next day, the Soviet government warned China to withdraw from Vietnam “before it is too late,” and vowed that the Soviet Union would honor its obligations under its treaty with Vietnam. Fortunately, those obligations were not spelled out either in the treaty or in the Soviet propaganda. The Soviets confined themselves for the most part to increased arms shipment to Hanoi. That aid proved sufficient. The Chinese succeeded neither in humiliating the Vietnamese militarily nor in prying them out of Cambodia. The Chinese effort to teach Hanoi a lesson actually left Vietnam a formidable power in the region and more dependent than ever on its Soviet ally. Neither consequence was a triumph for the Chinese. Moreover, China was widely criticized for aggression, while the U.S.S.R. got international credit for self-restraint.³

SALT, meanwhile, slowed dramatically and almost came crashing to a halt, even in the back-channel negotiations between Vance and Dobrynin in Washington. For almost the entire month of February, there was no significant progress. Then, in a speech in Minsk at the end of the month, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko gave a generally favorable evaluation of relations with the United States at “playing the ‘China card’ . . . in no way meet the purposes of the [SALT] agreement [or] the goals of peace in general.”

In an effort to influence whatever deliberations may have been going on in Moscow, Vance took Dobrynin to see Carter. The President told the Ambassador that Sino-American normalization and the Sino-Vietnamese border war must not determine the course of Soviet-American relations; the United States bore no responsibility for the Chinese invasion of Vietnam; in fact, the United States had a much more valid grievance with Moscow over the recent attack by South Yemen, a Soviet client, against North Yemen; but these and other irritants must not prevent the conclusion of SALT II negotiations. Two days later, on March 2, Brezhnev in effect said he agreed. He gave a speech calling again

³ However, the Soviets neither got nor deserved credit for their Indochina policies later in the year, when the rest of the world recognized the brutality of the Vietnamese leadership's expulsion of its ethnic Chinese minority, and later the magnitude of the suffering in Cambodia, where the Vietnamese-backed regime used starvation of the civilian population as a weapon to stamp out Pol Pot's resistance movement. The Soviets were obtuse in the face of appeals that they cooperate with international relief efforts and use their considerable influence with the regimes in Hanoi and Phnom Penh to ameliorate the twin tragedies of the boat people and the land refugees.

for Chinese withdrawal from Vietnam but he was conciliatory and optimistic on SALT.

However, the withdrawal of the Chinese army from Vietnam shortly afterwards and the conclusion of SALT II at the Carter-Brezhnev summit in June left unresolved the problem of how the United States should use its connection with China to induce flexibility on the part of the Soviets rather than stiffening their backs. Throughout 1979, the Carter Administration adhered to its policy of not selling arms to China, but there were recurring indications that the United States and the PRC might be moving, ever so cautiously, toward some kind of cooperation in the realm of security.⁴ This possibility was appalling to the Soviets—and intriguing to those American officials who felt that the Soviet Union had only itself to blame for the Sino-American common interest in countering the global Russian military buildup.

That build-up was particularly evident and worrisome in the Far East. The Soviets had been strengthening their Pacific fleet, based in Vladivostok, for some years, and in the wake of the Sino-Vietnamese war in February there was a notable increase in the number of Soviet warships and aircraft operating in and out of Vietnam. A Chinese military official told a visiting Senate delegation that Beijing favored a countervailing American naval buildup in the Pacific and would welcome port calls by the U.S. Seventh Fleet. When the Iranian revolution deprived the United States of its intelligence-gathering ground stations near the Caspian Sea, Deng Xiaoping suggested that the United States might be able to recoup the loss by monitoring Soviet missile test launches in Central Asia from new facilities just across the border in China. These heady offers caused the Carter Administration to shy away and look nervously over its shoulder at the Soviets, who glowered and sputtered as expected. But the United States continued to circle tentatively around the notion of developing some kind of security relationship with China. In late October, the Administration announced that Secretary of Defense Harold Brown would visit Beijing early in the new year. While Brown had held talks with his Soviet counterpart, Dimitri Ustinov, during the Vienna summit in June, no American defense secretary had ever traveled to Moscow for consultations of the sort Brown

⁴ Administration policy foreclosed direct arms sales to the PRC but tacitly encouraged Chinese leaders to shop for weapons in Western Europe. The coy formulation, as uttered by Marshall Shulman, Special Adviser to Vance, in congressional testimony in October, was this: “We have made it clear that we do not intend to supply military equipment to China, but we have not attempted to speak for our allies on this matter.”

was about to have with the Chinese. And the massive Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December led Brezezinski to hint publicly that the option of formal Sino-American military cooperation had become more tempting than ever.

On his arrival in Beijing in January 1980, Brown publicly invited his hosts to explore with him "complementary actions" that China and the United States might undertake to counter Soviet expansion; both he and the Chinese specifically indicated that the discussions had focused extensively on Afghanistan. While Brown also spoke of "wider cooperation on security matters in the future," he precluded, at least for the time being, direct American arms sales to China. The most notable immediate commitment was to supply only ground-handling equipment to receive information from an American satellite system of great use for agricultural and economic purposes but only limited military application.

Nonetheless, it was clear that the Carter Administration had, in the wake of the Afghanisthan crisis, abandoned its policy of "even-handedness" toward Moscow and Beijing. The United States had now formally associated itself with the position trumpeted by Deng Xiaoping during his American tour at the beginning of the year: that the "polar bear" was the greatest threat to peace in the world.

V

For SALT II, the second round of the ten-year-old strategic arms limitation talks, 1979 represented both a consummation and a crisis, with the crisis threatening to negate the consummation. The year was bracketed by uncertainty in January over whether the treaty would ever be signed by the heads of state and uncertainty in December over whether it would ever be ratified by two-thirds of the U.S. Senate, as the Constitution requires. Halfway in-between, in June, Presidents Carter and Brezhnev met in Vienna. But it was symbolic of the mutual mistrust and minimal expectations that this meeting was held on neutral ground. (Protocol made it Brezhnev's turn to visit the United States, but pleading his ill health, the Soviet side asked for a site that would not require a long flight.) Neither in rhetoric nor in reality did the summit generate a "spirit of Vienna." It did not even produce an updated version of the declaration of principles that Nixon and Brezhnev had signed as a companion piece to SALT I seven years before in Moscow. Carter and Brezhnev signed only the SALT II agreements, which already faced tough opposition in the United

States. And that opposition was destined to grow much tougher before the year was out.

The single biggest problem that beset SALT II as it approached its moment of truth in the Senate was not any substantive weakness in the treaty itself, although there were some controversial compromises embodied in the document; nor was it any single instance of "negative linkage" between the Senators' disposition toward the treaty and their desire to punish the U.S.S.R. for misbehavior on some other score, although there were plenty of such instances. Rather, the single biggest problem with SALT was delay. The negotiations had dragged on for too long. The saga of SALT II had become a shaggy dog story of anticlimaxes and missed deadlines. To mention just one, the expiration of the SALT I interim agreement on offensive weapons had occurred two years before, in October 1977; the deadline had been extended artificially, by an exchange of "unilateral" statements of open-ended intent to continue adhering to the SALT I limits. But American domestic support for a new treaty lost much of its momentum, while opposition gained steadily, in a political climate of growing anger, fear and frustration directed at the Soviet Union.

The delay in the negotiations was partly the consequence of the Soviet tendency to bargain glacially and stubbornly. But the process had been further prolonged and complicated by a number of U.S. initiatives earlier in the Carter Administration: notably, the vigorous public defense of Soviet dissidents by the White House in the first three months of 1977; the comprehensive SALT proposal in March of that year; and the playing of the China card in December 1978.⁵

Although the negotiations were once more squared away by the summer of 1977, it took another two years to resolve all aspects of disagreement. The pact that Carter and Brezhnev finally signed in Vienna was, as the Soviets had insisted, based largely on the Vladivostok accord of 1974, and it was similar in some features to the compromise that Henry Kissinger had hammered out with

⁵The Administration's opening bid in SALT II sought to leap boldly beyond the framework of equal ceilings (2,400 total strategic launchers, of which 1,320 could have multiple warheads) that Gerald Ford and Brezhnev had agreed to at Vladivostok in 1974. The Carter comprehensive proposal would have required the Soviets to make immediate, drastic cuts in their nuclear arsenal, including a 50 percent reduction in their heavy intercontinental ballistic missiles. In exchange, the U.S. offered to sacrifice some programs that were contemplated but still far from deployment, including the MX, or "Missile-Expendable," a much larger successor to the Minuteman ICBM. In March 1977, the Soviets rejected the proposal out of hand, insisting that the Vladivostok framework remain intact in SALT II. Two months later, the United States came back with a three-tier proposal: a treaty that would run until 1985, a shorter term protocol, and a statement of principles to govern the next round of negotiations, SALT III. The Soviets accepted that format, but disputed which weapons should be covered in which tiers.

the Kremlin in early 1976, only to be overruled by Gerald Ford. But the final SALT II agreement was more complex, more ambitious and in a number of respects more favorable to the United States than its predecessors. It required the Soviets to reduce their total arsenal of strategic launchers from the Vladivostok ceiling of 2,400 to 2,250—a token reduction but useful nonetheless as a precedent for future rounds. It established two new limits unforeseen at Vladivostok: 1,200 for total intercontinental land-based (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers with multiple warheads (MIRVs), and 820 for MIRVed ICBMs alone. There was also a freeze on the number of multiple warheads per type of ICBM at the number already tested. These provisions—the 820 subceiling on MIRVed ICBMs and the MIRVing freeze—were intended to slow down the rate at which the Soviets could add to their land-based multiple warheads, which constituted the most powerful and accurate, therefore the most threatening, aspect of their arsenal. The agreement also contained some modest limits on the modernization of ICBMs and a variety of rules that would make it easier for the United States to monitor the testing and deployment of Soviet rockets in order to verify compliance with the treaty.

Nonetheless, the agreement was, if anything, more controversial than ever in the Senate. Henry Jackson of Washington and Howard Baker of Tennessee, the Republican leader, criticized the Administration for agreeing to restrictions on cruise missiles, an American specialty; for failing to eliminate the Soviet advantage in “heavy” ICBMs (a disparity resulting from differences in the unilateral strategic-rocket programs of the two sides back in the 1960s); and for failing to force the Soviets to count the **Backfire bomber** as a strategic weapon (instead, Brezhnev accepted collateral limits on the production rate and range of the bomber). John Glenn of Ohio was concerned that the treaty did not go far enough in circumscribing the Soviets’ right to use code in the transmission of electronic data during missile tests. But the most serious doubts about SALT concerned the way in which the treaty and the arms-control process in general fitted into what were widely seen as dangerous trends in Soviet-American relations and the strategic balance. **Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia and Henry Kissinger** were the most authoritative and influential advocates of making the ratification of SALT II contingent on an American arms buildup to match Soviet deployments and to thwart presumed Soviet designs. The Administration was willing to accept some conditions along these lines, and by the end of the summer, as the Senate broke for its August recess, the treaty seemed to be

moving toward ratification before the end of the year, without “killer” amendments that would require renegotiation with—and very likely provoke rejection by—the Kremlin.

Then, in late August, an incident occurred that was in some ways aberrant, but in other ways illustrative of the hair-trigger mistrust between the superpowers—and of the extreme vulnerability of SALT to the vicissitudes of the overall Soviet-American relationship and the vagaries of U.S. domestic politics. After having assured the Senate that Soviet military personnel in Cuba were not there in a combat role, the Administration belatedly discovered that some 2,600 Soviet troops in Cuba (approximately one-third of the total Soviet contingent there) had in fact been organized into a combat brigade for a number of years; their mission involved maneuvers on their own rather than the training of Cubans.

The revelation touched off a firestorm of controversy and recrimination. **Senator Frank Church**, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a key supporter of SALT ratification, felt misled and even betrayed by the Administration; he also felt exposed politically with his constituency in Idaho, since he faced a difficult reelection campaign against a conservative Republican. Seeking to seize the initiative in the controversy, Church postponed his committee’s hearings on SALT, then proclaimed: “I see no likelihood that the Senate would ratify the SALT II treaty as long as Soviet combat troops remain stationed in Cuba.” The Carter Administration itself proclaimed the “unacceptability” of the “status quo,” although there was general agreement that the presence of Soviet ground troops did not violate the understanding between Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy that had ended the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In a strongly worded editorial in *Pravda*, the Soviets denied that they had combat troops in Cuba. **Ambassador Dobrynin** and Foreign Minister **Andrei Gromyko** reiterated this denial in private talks with **Secretary of State Vance**, saying that the sole function of the brigade in question was to train Cubans. By now, both Senator Church and the Administration had begun to back away from their original insistence that the brigade be removed or fundamentally altered. By October, the Administration was warning that it would be monitoring the brigade’s activities carefully to make sure it behaved like a training and not a combat unit, and Church was sponsoring an amendment to the treaty requiring the President to certify that Soviet troops in Cuba “are not engaged in a combat role.” Those finesses satisfied enough Senators for the ratification debate to resume, although with consid-

erably less promise of success than before the Cuban imbroglio. Meanwhile, diplomats from Embassy Row and visiting statesmen from Western Europe joined forces with the Administration in lobbying Capitol Hill on behalf of the treaty. The West Germans and Belgians were particularly active. There was nothing new about allied support for the Administration in this regard: the year had begun with the Guadeloupe summit, at which both Prime Minister James Callaghan of Great Britain and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany had released statements in support of SALT II; France's President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing made a similar statement a few days later; Margaret Thatcher forcefully committed her government to support of SALT II after she defeated and replaced Callaghan in May; the NATO defense ministers issued a warning that the defeat of the arms treaty would be "disastrous," and the alliance foreign ministers issued their own endorsement.

The West European concern had both a general and a specific dimension: first, an increase in Soviet-American tensions, a virtual certainty if SALT II failed, was sure to create fallout on Europe, which was caught both geographically and politically between Moscow and Washington; second, NATO was seeking to modernize its theater nuclear forces (TNF) in order to counter the threat of the SS-20, a mobile, multiple-warhead intermediate-range missile, and the Backfire bomber, both of which the Soviets had recently deployed against Western Europe. TNF modernization meant that the West Germans and others must agree to the stationing on their soil of American Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles. That prospect had already touched off intense domestic debate in a number of European countries, with left-of-center politicians agitating against what they saw as a twin evil: escalation of the arms race, and deployment of weapons that would make their territory a more likely target of Soviet attack in the event of war. It would be far easier for the political leaders of the nations in question to rebut such arguments if they could point to the promise of mutual Soviet-American reductions in theater nuclear forces as part of SALT III. But without SALT II, there would be no SALT III, therefore no such promise.

West European visitors to Washington sought out key Senators and asserted that the failure of SALT II would undercut transatlantic confidence in the reliability of the American political system and therefore in American ability to lead the alliance; there would be increased receptivity in Europe to separate deals with the Russians. As though underscoring precisely that possibility, Leonid Brezhnev gave a speech in East Berlin in early

October announcing a unilateral, although mostly symbolic, withdrawal of some Soviet forces from East Germany. The goodwill gesture was part of a package inducement to block TNF modernization: if the West Europeans would resist American pressure to deploy Pershing IIs and ground-launched cruise missiles, the Soviets would reduce some of their own theater nuclear weapons.

That particular Soviet ploy failed to divide the United States from its transatlantic partners, at least in the short run. After complex and suspenseful deliberations in Brussels in mid-December, the NATO foreign and defense ministers approved the American plan for TNF modernization. But the Dutch and Belgian representatives attached restrictive qualifications to their approval, in effect calling on the United States to negotiate with the Soviet Union mutual reductions in theater nuclear weapons before the new weapons would be ready for deployment in Western Europe. The communiqué released at the end of the December NATO meeting explicitly instructed the United States to seek such reductions in SALT III. Thus the Western European allies found a way to reiterate yet again their endorsement of SALT II. That beleaguered treaty, meanwhile, had staggered out of committee onto the floor of the Senate. On November 9, after four months of deliberation, the Foreign Relations Committee approved the treaty, along with a host of non-killer amendments and resolutions. The Committee's final vote was nine to six—more than the simple majority required to send the treaty to the full chamber, but less than the two-thirds majority that would be required for ratification there. As the captivity of the American diplomats in Tehran dragged on, the Administration and its Senate allies realized that floor debate could not begin until after the year-end recess—when the presidential state primaries would be in full swing. Both camps, advocates and opponents of SALT, predicted a long and bitter fight in 1980. Each predicted it would win, although the opponents seemed considerably more confident than the proponents.

Nevertheless, the Administration had already set up an interagency task force to prepare for SALT III. Other arms-control negotiations also dragged on: those aimed at a comprehensive test ban, mutual balanced force reductions in Europe, conventional arms transfer limitations, anti-satellite arms control, and the prohibition of chemical and radiological weapons. But all those enterprises were marking time until the Senate decided the fate of SALT II, and there was considerable question whether they would continue, not to mention thrive, if the Senate turned thumbs down. Arms control had often been called the linchpin, anchor or

bellwether of détente, and SALT was unquestionably the centerpiece of arms control. Four American administrations had wrestled with the problem of the extent to which SALT and Soviet behavior should be linked. Henry Kissinger had often said, when he was the chief negotiator and seller of SALT, that arms control agreements should not be seen as American favors to the Russians or as rewards for Soviet good conduct. Even as the Soviet invaders began their all-out search-and-destroy missions against Afghan rebels and as Soviet infantrymen patrolled the streets of Kabul in early January 1980, Zbigniew Brzezinski echoed Kissinger's point: "I hope that the Senate will eventually ratify SALT because SALT is needed whether American-Soviet relations are good or bad." But Brzezinski added, "I regret their actions because of the adverse impact they have had on SALT."

Adverse indeed. The very next day President Carter asked the Senate to "delay consideration" of the treaty in light of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter was reluctantly bowing to political reality: if he and those Senators who agreed that SALT was especially necessary in periods of tension had forced the issue, they almost certainly would have seen the treaty defeated. Better, they decided as a matter of tactics, to put SALT II on the shelf for a while.

However, whether it could sit there undisturbed, later to be taken down and ratified, was at best problematic. For one thing, the Soviets were clearly impatient and disillusioned with SALT. They were already bumping their heads against the SALT I ceiling on offensive strategic weapons, an accord which had technically expired; and they would soon be bumping their heads against the SALT II subceiling on MIRVed ICBMs, a limit which was not—and might never be—in force. The Kremlin's political leaders were sure to come under pressure from the Soviet military to treat SALT II not as though it was merely put aside on the shelf, but as though it were swept into the dustbin of history. If the Soviets proceeded with their all-out proliferation of warheads on their land-based missiles, unfettered by the limits that SALT II would have imposed, the U.S. leadership might very likely come under pressure from its own military to protect American ICBMs with anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses. That, in turn, could mean that 1980, a year which began with an impending debate over whether to ratify SALT II, might end with a debate over whether to abrogate the SALT I ABM treaty, a pact of indefinite duration signed by Nixon and Brezhnev at the 1972 Moscow summit.

Thus, at the beginning of a new decade, Soviet-American

relations were haunted by the specter of the undoing of the most important accomplishment in the history of arms control—the agreement to forswear a spiralling, and lethally destabilizing, ABM race. Even if the old SALT I restrictions on defensive weapons survived the imperatives of the Pentagon and the new SALT II restrictions on offensive arms survived the skepticism of the Senate, those pacts would do little by themselves to lessen America's self-doubt, self-criticism, alarm and rearmament—each of which had its mirror image in the Soviet Union. Hardly an auspicious prospect for détente, by that or any other name.

VI

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the shelving of SALT II inevitably fueled an already vigorous debate within the United States on policy toward the Soviet Union. Domestic politics had played a significant role in the negative trends of 1979, and with the presidential free-for-all just beginning its strident crescendo, 1980 threatened to be even worse—perhaps much worse. Carter's extreme political vulnerability caused the campaign to get underway earlier than usual, and with more entrants, and there was a pronounced theme of anti-Sovietism in the attacks on Carter's stewardship of foreign policy. Not that it was unprecedented for would-be presidents in an election season to sound the tocsin about the Soviet threat. Candidate John F. Kennedy had discovered a "missile gap" for which to blame the incumbent Republican Administration almost two decades before the Committee on the Present Danger produced its charts and graphs on the throw-weight gap and megatonnage gap—documents that Carter's political opponents have been citing in their assaults on his presidency and "his" SALT treaty. In 1976, détente, SALT and Henry Kissinger had fallen out of favor with the right wing of the Republican Party, so Gerald Ford tacked sharply to starboard, repudiating the SALT deal Kissinger had struck with the Kremlin and expunging from the vocabulary of his Administration the very word détente ("peace through strength" was the official substitute).

But in a number of respects, the disruption of Soviet-American relations by U.S. domestic politics in 1979 was more severe than in 1976 or 1960, or ever before. For one thing, the Carter Administration in its third year continued to be plagued by division within its own ranks over policy toward the Soviet Union. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Secretary of State Vance and Vance's principal

adviser on Soviet affairs, Marshall Shulman, all insisted that press reports of a split between the National Security Council and the State Department were much exaggerated. But their disclaimers did little to counter the impression that the Administration lacked a cogent strategy for dealing with the U.S.S.R.—or that it was burdened with a multiplicity of strategies.

The problem was not so much bureaucratic or personal rivalry. In a way, it was more serious: it was a matter of profound disagreement over the tone and substance of policy. Breznevski clearly favored and vigorously promoted a more confrontational, competitive approach, while Vance and Shulman seemed more concerned with finding those issues on which Soviet and American interests coincided and those areas where compromise and cooperation were still possible. This high-level ambivalence had negative effects on both the domestic and the international aspects of Soviet-American relations. At home, the impression of an Administration that could not quite make up its collective mind about what to do in foreign policy enhanced the opportunity for Carter's numerous political opponents to offer their criticisms and prescriptions.

In its response to the events in Afghanistan, the Administration did seem to speak with one voice at the end of the year and in the early days of 1980. If in theory the pendulum had swung toward the view identified with Breznevski, there seemed little doubt that Vance and Shulman were just as strongly convinced of the gravity of the Soviet move and the need to counter it not only by specific actions in the Middle East but by some clear-cut measures to increase American military capabilities across the board.

For the moment at least, public opinion strongly supported the initial measures taken by the President, even if a number of presidential candidates in both parties did not. An election year would hardly be the ideal environment for bipartisanship, but the Administration was encouraged about the possibility of restoring not just unity within its own ranks but a measure of consensus in the country over what to do now. Nevertheless, the debate on whether the Administration's policies had contributed to what happened in Iran and Afghanistan was sure to continue. So would the debate over whether Breznevski's toughness toward the Soviets over the previous three years had been part of what provoked them to hostile obstreperous behavior which, paradoxically, in turn seemed to vindicate his hard-line position.

But, at least until late December 1979, there was no doubt that, in the eyes of the Soviets, the seeming unpredictability of Ameri-

can policy was both infuriating and suspect. It was infuriating because the Soviet leaders, for all their claims to being custodians of a revolution, are among the most conservative on earth, at least in the sense that they are inclined to view sudden shifts in American policy as deliberate provocations, diversionary tactics or the manifestations of long-hatched plots. Accidents, improvisations and failures of coordination often assume, from the Soviet perspective, a sinister though illusory coherence.

In 1978 Brezhnev and other high-ranking Russians had complained about the "vacillation and inconsistency" of American policy. But already by the end of that year, and throughout 1979, that complaint gave way to dark speculations in the Soviet press and in the analyses of the *instituchki* that the "enemies of détente" were getting the upper hand in the United States; that the fabled military-industrial complex had achieved some massive clandestine victory; and that "ruling circles" were now on a footing for a new cold war. (Such Soviet commentaries never hinted at even the slightest recognition that whatever was occurring in the United States might be in response to Soviet military programs or political activities, such as the continuing buildup in highly accurate, multiple-warhead intercontinental missiles and vigorous, often provocative support for radical regimes in the Third World.)

By the spring and summer of 1979, American officials dealing regularly with Soviets at a senior level picked up recurring signals that the Kremlin leaders might be embarked on a fundamental and far-reaching reassessment of their own policy of détente. First there were Soviet hints, directed particularly to the State Department, that the Politburo was reassessing the relationship in view of what the Soviets claimed to see as an American tilt toward China. One must always be suspicious when self-professed Soviet doves confidentially caution Americans about what the hawks back home in the Kremlin might do if the United States does not mend its ways. Such talk can be disinformation intended to exert pressure in negotiations and to exploit known differences inside the Administration, such as the much-publicized schism between Vance and Shulman on the one hand and Breznevski on the other. Nevertheless, these straws in the wind could not be wholly disregarded, and there were more to come. During the summer, when the Carter Administration committed itself to the deployment of a mobile missile with immense destructive power and stepped up its campaign on behalf of theater nuclear force modernization in Europe, there were renewed Soviet hints that these and other developments might have emboldened those members of the

Politburo and Central Committee who were skeptical about seeking further accommodation with the United States. There was speculation, in short, that the hardliners were on the ascendant in Moscow.

Proponents of that view found confirmation in the Soviet thrust into Afghanistan. Ten months before, in February, the U.S.S.R. had stayed out of the Sino-Vietnamese border war, restrained perhaps in part by a desire not to scuttle SALT II during the climactic months of the negotiations; yet now here were the Soviets in December invading a sovereign nation on the very eve of the full Senate's debate over the controversial treaty. Surely the Kremlin leaders must have known they were forcing the indefinite postponement of ratification, if not dooming it altogether.

Yet whether that meant Leonid Brezhnev himself had lost influence in the leadership could not be deduced from the events in Afghanistan. After all, no matter how closely Brezhnev had identified himself with SALT and détente, he was no softliner—and no stranger to invasions. In 1968 he had ordered the tanks of the Warsaw Pact into Czechoslovakia despite the inevitable consequences: cancellation of a summit meeting with Lyndon Johnson and delay in the opening of SALT I. (In that sense, SALT had temporarily been a casualty of linkage even before it began, just as it would be one again nearly a dozen years later.) The paradox of Brezhnev's simultaneous sponsorship of arms control with the United States and armed intervention in neighboring countries had come full circle, from the end of the Prague Spring in 1968 to the Kabul Winter in 1979-80.

Nevertheless, speculation about changes in the Kremlin hierarchy was highly germane, for the United States and the U.S.S.R. seemed to be entering separate leadership crises almost simultaneously. The long-awaited post-Brezhnev transition might be imminent. The Soviet leader's health was unquestionably failing, and for about 24 hours in October, rumors of his death circulated widely in the West, with a tantalizing, inexplicable delay before Soviet authorities officially refuted the report. Kremlinology had become largely an exercise in remote medical examination; the prognosis for Brezhnev's surviving the long, harsh Russian winter was not good. Moreover, he was the first among equals in a gerontocracy, a fact that raised the possibility of a multiple succession crisis. That possibility—underscored by the revelation in November that Alekssei Kosygin had been incapacitated by a heart attack—gave additional weight to more pessimistic projections about the composition and orientation of the Soviet leader-

ship in the coming decade.

It would be an ominous development indeed if a succession crisis in the Soviet leadership, the conclusion of a Politburo-level reassessment of Soviet-American relations, a U.S. presidential campaign dominated by anti-Soviet themes, a deepening political crisis, heightened military competition and the collapse of arms control were all to occur in 1980. Regardless of whether such an inauspicious concurrence was in the cards, by the end of 1979 both nations seemed headed into a period when each would give new emphasis to worst-case planning about the likely behavior of the other. And worst-case planning has always carried with it the risk of prophecies that fulfill themselves.