

U.S.-SOVIET "DÉTENTE"

NIXON - Report to Congress - May 3, 1973 (Excerpt)

36 The SALT Agreements. Of historic significance were the two agreements which General Secretary Brezhnev and I reached limiting strategic arms: a treaty limiting anti-ballistic missile systems, and an interim agreement limiting certain strategic offensive weapons. These agreements are discussed in detail in the Arms Control section of this Report. Technical aspects of arms control were at the core of the negotiations, but the significance of the agreements transcends specific provisions and goes to the heart of the postwar competition between us.

Some years ago, when the United States was strategically predominant, an agreement freezing the strategic balance was unrealistic. It was highly improbable that the Soviet Union would resign itself to permanent inferiority. Indeed, after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union began a major expansion in its strategic weaponry. Had this expansion continued unabated through the 1970's, the United States would have had no choice but to launch a massive new strategic armament program. The present moment thus offered a unique opportunity to strike a reasonable balance in strategic capabilities and to break with the pattern of unlimited competition.

Such an opportunity posed a fundamental question: could both sides accept the risks of restraint explicit in arms limitations? In the defensive field, new programs offered some element of protection but beckoned a new round of competition. Offensive systems were required to guarantee security, but their steady accumulation created a momentum toward capabilities that threatened strategic equilibrium.

Each of us had the power singlehandedly to destroy most of mankind. Paradoxically, this very fact, and the global interests of both sides, created a certain common outlook, a kind of interdependence for survival. Although we competed, our conflict did not admit of resolution by victory in the classical sense. We seemed compelled to coexist. We had an inescapable joint obligation to build a structure for peace. Recognition of this reality has been the keystone of United States policy since 1969.

Obviously, no agreement could be reached involving weapons that guaranteed national survival if both sides did not believe their interests were served despite the risks. No decision of this magnitude could have been taken unless it was part of a broader commitment to place relations on a new foundation of restraint, cooperation, and steadily evolving confidence. Even agreements of such overriding importance cannot stand alone, vulnerable to the next crisis. Their tremendous historical and political significance is guaranteed, in part, by the fact that they are woven into the fabric of an emerging new relationship that makes crises less likely.

There is reason to hope that these accords represent a major break in the pattern of suspicion, hostility, and confrontation that has dominated U.S.-Soviet relations for a generation.

Principles of U.S.-Soviet Relations. The fourth area of major progress at the summit was the agreement on twelve Basic Principles signed on May 29, 1972. This far-reaching step placed all our other efforts on a broader foundation. A new relationship would require new attitudes and aspirations. It was appropriate that this change be reflected in a formal statement. These principles codify goals that the United States had long advocated, as I did for example, in my address to the United Nations in October 1970. The main provisions state that both sides will:

- do their utmost to avoid military confrontations and to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war;
- always exercise restraint in their mutual relations and will be prepared to negotiate and settle differences by peaceful means. Discussions and negotiations on outstanding issues will be conducted in a spirit of reciprocity, mutual accommodation, and mutual benefit.
- recognize that efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, are inconsistent with these objectives;
- make no claim for themselves, and not recognize the claims of anyone else, to any special rights or advantages in world affairs.

These are specific obligations. They meet some of our fundamental concerns of the postwar period. They are the elements that made it possible to summarize one general principle governing Soviet-American relations:

"They will proceed from the common determination that in the nuclear age there is no alternative to conducting their mutual relations on the basis of peaceful coexistence. Differences in ideology and in the social systems of the United States and the Soviet Union are not obstacles to the bilateral development of normal relations based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual advantage."

What we have agreed upon is not a vain attempt to bridge ideological differences, or a condominium of the two strongest powers, or a division of spheres of influence. What we have agreed upon are principles that acknowledge differences, but express a code of conduct which, if observed, can only contribute to world peace and to an international system based on mutual respect and self-restraint.

These principles are a guide for future action, not a commentary on the past. In themselves, they will have no meaning if they are not reflected in action. The leaders of the Soviet Union are serious men. Their willingness to commit themselves to certain principles for the future must be taken as a solemn obligation. For our part we are prepared to adhere to these principles, and hope that the Soviet leaders have the same serious intention.