Getting Your Message Across: Costly Signaling Success and Failure During the Cold War

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Policymakers are faced with filtering, understanding, and assessing an overwhelming, and often conflicting, amount of information on a constant basis. States signal resolve over issues, such as during a crisis, or to demonstrate intentions by sending reassurance signals of benign or defensive intentions. But states also have incentives to keep some information private or manipulate the information it sends. Whether or not policymakers believe an adversary's signals influences, and often determines, the prospect of cooperation or competition. This dissertation examines how policymakers believe the reassurance signals of an adversary.

Costly signaling theory argues states can cut through these issues by attaching costs to their signals. Only a sincere state would attach and accept these costs, thus demonstrating the sender is sincere and credible. I argue costly signaling theory is unable to explain variation in why policymakers believe signals in certain situations and not others, despite having costs attached. In this dissertation, I argue policymakers look to see whether sender policymakers risk their own political position to send signals. To risk political vulnerability, sender policymakers must demonstrate they have reduced their control over domestic political processes to send reassurance signals. This is done by sending signals which go against the interests of important domestic constituencies, such as the military or members of the elite. In doing so, sender policymakers demonstrate they are committed to the success of the signal, and will not deflect the costs imposed by signaling failure onto the population or state itself. When sender policymakers demonstrate political

vulnerability, target policymakers will believe the signal is genuine. If sender policymakers do not demonstrate political vulnerability, target policymakers will not believe the signal is genuine.

I test the domestic political vulnerability thesis by examining how U.S. policymakers believed Soviet reassurance signals during the Cold War. Studying cases of reassurance signaling also allows me to examine for the ability, or inability, of U.S. policymakers to update assessments of Soviet intentions. I select nine cases of Soviet reassurance signaling across three signaling strategies identified by costly signaling theory: strategic arms control (tying hands); conventional troop reductions (sinking costs); and de-escalation signaling. The cases were chosen to test the explanatory power of my theory against the alternative explanations. I use extensive archival research and process tracing to study these cases and find support for the theory of domestic political vulnerability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
ALCM	Air-Launched Cruise Missile
BPA	Basic Principles Agreement
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CPD	Committee on Present Danger
CL	Carter Presidential Library
CSCE	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CST	Costly Signaling Theory
DDEL	Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library
DPV	Domestic Political Vulnerability
FBS	Forward Based Systems
FL	Ford Presidential Library
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IMEMO	Institute of World Economy and International Relations
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
ISKAN	Institute for US and Canadian Studies
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KGB	Committee for State Security
MBFR	Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions
MFN	Most Favored Nation
MIRV	Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicle
MRV	Multiple Reentry Vehicle
NA	National Archives
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NPL	Nixon Presidential Library
NSC	National Security Council
PD	Presidential Directive
PNW	Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War
RL	Reagan Presidential Library
RVSN	Strategic Missile Force
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SCC	Special Coordinating Committee
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Talks
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

TABLES AND FIGURES

1.1   TABLES

1.2   FIGURES

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this dissertation are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, or any other institution. All errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

1.0   CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In world politics, states, policymakers, and negotiators look for signals of what

the other side is thinking and planning. The process of searching, filtering, and

understanding signals is constant and beset with uncertainty, conflicting information, and

endless assessments of credibility. This process happens at all levels of politics, from

alliances and states, to leaders and negotiators. Sometimes, even identifying what

constitutes a signal can itself be a challenge. In March 1972, the U.S. and USSR were

negotiating what would eventually become the SALT I agreement. In one instance,

President Nixon and his chief negotiator Gerald Smith tried to understand if the Soviets

were truly serious. The signal they were trying to understand; the Soviet delegation's

drinking.

> *Smith: The Russians are working more reasonable—working more—*
> *Nixon: [unclear] They used to work a lot at night.*
> *Smith: —and they're drinking less.*
> *Nixon: They what?*
> *Smith: Because, they're drinking less, and they're working—*
> *Nixon: Are they cutting the drinking?*
> *Smith: —a more normal day, yeah.*[1]

Unfortunately, most of international politics cannot be understood by looking at

the opponent's drinking habits. Most signaling is to demonstrate resolve or convey

defensive intentions.[2] Yet, sending a signal does not mean the target will believe the

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[1] "Conversation Among President Nixon, the Chief of the Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (Smith), and the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig)," Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1969–1976, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 1969–1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d242

[2] Fearon, James, "Signaling and Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands Versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68-90; Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seeker's Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7, vol. 1 (1997): 114-155.

sender. Since states have incentives to misrepresent their true intentions and positions, in order to gain the best outcome possible for themselves, states will lie, deceive, and manipulate information to their advantage.[3] This often makes signaling one of the most notoriously difficult endeavors in world politics.

Costly Signaling Theory (CST), however, argues by attaching costs to signals, which separate sincere from insincere senders, states can credibly convey their message and, the theory argues, intentions.[4] And there have been impressive advances among recent literature, including attention to variation in signaling strategies and the influence of psychology in processing signals.[5] Despite these advances, there are several methodological and theoretical shortcomings that prevent a more complete understanding of the signaling process. In particular, there has been less attention paid to reassurance signaling, where the sender seeks to convey defensive or benign intentions to the target.[6]

The empirical record itself presents serious challenges to understand signaling. During the Cold War, despite similar situations, there is large variation in how U.S.

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[3] Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414; Slantchev, Branislav L. "Feigning Weakness," *International Organization* 64, no. 3 (2010): 357–88.

[4] Jervis, Robert, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Morrow, James D. "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds. *Strategic Choice and International Relations (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 77- 114; Kydd, Andrew, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[5] Yarhi-Milo, Keren, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Carson, Austin and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 124–56; Kertzer, Joshua D., Brian C. Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun. "The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations." *International Organization*, 74, no. 1 (2020): 95-118; Yoder, Brandon K. and Kyle Hanes, "Signaling Under the Security Dilemma: An Experimental Analysis.*" Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 4 (2021): 672-700; Quek, Kai, "Four Costly Signaling Mechanisms," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021): 537-549.

[6] There are, however, recent contributions to the study of reassurance signaling. See Wheeler, Nicholas J. *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Haynes, Kyle, "A Question of Costliness: Time Horizons and Interstate Signaling," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 8 (2019): 1939-1964.

policymakers believed Soviet reassurance signals. For example, in 1955 the U.S. ignored Soviet overtures for arms control negotiations, but 17 years later the two adversaries concluded the SALT agreements, one of the largest and most comprehensive arms control agreements in history. Why would U.S. policymakers not believe the Soviets were sending genuine reassurance signals in 1955, but then sign the SALT agreements in 1972? Additionally, the U.S. remained uncertain over Soviet intentions despite interacting constantly over the course of the Cold War, the incentives to correctly understand each other due to nuclear weapons, and a familiarity with each side's signals and strategies. Only the fall of the Soviet Union ended debates over Soviet intentions, but was soon replaced with US uncertainty over Russian intentions. The U.S. and Russian relationship transitioned from close coordination in the aftermath of 9/11, to confrontation with Russia's invasion of western-leaning Georgia in 2008.[7]

Thus, despite significant scholarly attention, much is still not known about when and why signaling succeeds or fails. When states send signals, why do target policymakers believe some signals and not others? To answer these questions and provide insight into signaling, this dissertation looks as cases of Soviet reassurance signaling during the Cold War. By studying reassurance signaling, in contrast to signaling resolve during crises, this dissertation seeks to better understand the signaling process and the ability, or inability, of senders to convey defensive or benign intentions. In this dissertation, success is defined as target policymakers *believing* the sender's reassurance signals are credible and genuine attempts at conveying benign or defensive intentions. Specifically, I ask why, and under what conditions, did U.S. policymakers *believe* costly

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[7] Bowen, Andrew S. and Cory Welt, *Russia: Foreign Policy and U.S. Relations*, Congressional Research Service, April 15, 2021.

Soviet reassurance signals, and why, and under what conditions, did they not? To answer these questions, I investigate how U.S. policymakers assessed Soviet reassurance signals. That is, I seek to explain how U.S, policymakers evaluated and ultimately came to believe, or disbelieve, Soviet reassurance signals as sincere and credible.

The goal of the dissertation is to not only explain the empirical variation in U.S. policymaker belief of Soviet sincerity, but also to examine the causal process of signaling. I advance a domestic political vulnerability theory to explain why target policymakers believe some reassurance signals and not others. The theory argues that when target policymakers assess signals, they look to see whether sender policymakers risk their own position or political standing to send the signal. Specifically, target policymakers look for indicators the sender leadership is personally invested in target policymakers believing reassurance signals are genuine. If target policymakers perceive sender policymakers are accepting costs themselves, and not deflecting potential costs onto the population or state, then target policymakers will believe the signal is sincere.

In this dissertation I test my theory by examining how U.S. policymakers came to believe, or not believe, Soviet reassurance signals were genuine. Specifically, I seek to understand the strategies and limitations of successful reassurance signaling during peacetime. That is, signaling a state has benign, defensive intentions outside of conflict or a crisis. In contrast to crisis signaling which seeks to convey resolve, reassurance signaling speaks to larger assessments of an adversary's intentions and prospects of cooperation or confrontation.[8]

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[8] Kydd, Andrew, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (2000): 325-357.

1.1   THE PROBLEM

Negotiation and manipulation, as well as overwhelming and conflicting amounts of information, are features of world politics.[9] This makes it difficult for a state to credibly signal true intentions because the target cannot be sure the sender isn't merely bargaining. There are also issues of information processing, such as psychological biases or domestic constraints which affect the extent to which signals can be understood.[10] Nevertheless, both sender and target have incentives to make sure the signal is accurately understood.[11] Therefore, CST argues there is a theoretically parsimonious way to cut through all those hurdles. CST believes that by attaching costs to signals (whether economic, reputational, or political) senders can demonstrate they are sending a genuine signal.[12] Costs allow the sender to highlight and demonstrate sincerity since the sender accepted costs no manipulative sender would. For scholars, the theory makes intuitive sense and describes the processes states seek to reduce uncertainty in world politics.[13] For policymakers, CST provides a straightforward metric to help manage processing information and assessing an adversary's intentions.

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[9] Rathbun, Brian, "Uncertain About Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2007): 533-557; Friedman, Jeffrey A. *War and Chance: Assessing Uncertainty in International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Kaplow, Jeffrey M. and Erik Gartzke, "The Determinants of Uncertainty in International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2021): 306-319.

[10] Wohlstetter, Roberta, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1962).

[11] Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Snyder, Glenn and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977).

[12] Fearon, James D. "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 2 (1994): 236-269; Schultz, Kenneth A. "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998): 829–44.

[13] Morrow, 1999.

CST focuses on the necessity of attaching costs to allow the target to differentiate between sincere and insincere signals. However, scholars, such as Evan Braden Montgomery, argue states will only accept costs to a certain level.[14] Since increasing costs also increase the sender's vulnerability, the sender will only tolerate enough vulnerability to demonstrate credibility, but not so much as to undermine security. An additional issue is that even if states send adequately costly signals, a target state could believe the sender merely has a higher "pain" threshold and can bear those costs, regardless of size. In the context of reassurance signaling, that means the target can assess the sender's actions not as a genuine attempt to demonstrate benign intentions, but a manipulative effort.

Unfortunately, CST can only partly explain the signaling process. Theoretically and empirically, CST cannot satisfactorily explain why states correctly assess signals in certain situations, and incorrectly in others. CST scholarship primarily focuses on the strategies of the sender, and struggles to articulate a plausible explanation beyond making signals "costlier."[15] As a result, CST have overlooked other sources of cost and conceptions of costliness. Furthermore, CST has failed to adequately theorize the causal process and assumes all targets understand and assess costs and signals in the same

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[14] Montgomery, Evan Braden, "Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 151-185.

[15] Recent scholarship, however, argues that private or "costless" signals can be just as effective in signaling messages as public, costly signals. See Yarhi-Milo, Keren, "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance," *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (2013): 405–35; Trager, Robert F. *Diplomacy: Communication and the Origins of International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Katagiri, Azusa and Eric Min, "The Credibility of Public and Private Signals: a Document Based Approach," *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 1 (2019): 156-172.

manner.[16] This has led to less study of the causal process, potentially ignoring other causes of signaling failure, and an incomplete understanding of the signaling process.

Methodologically, CST's large, theoretically elegant literature has predominantly relied on formal and quantitative methods.[17] While quantitative methodology has been crucial to developing CST, it is unable to provide a nuanced study of the mechanisms and process of signaling. Without such nuance, scholars are left with an incomplete understanding of how the signaling process breaks down, and why there is variation in signaling outcome amongst similar cases. The lack of historically informed case studies has resulted in an inability to understand the actual operation of costly signaling.[18] Therefore, qualitative research is needed to build on quantitative work's systematic study of signaling across time and cases. Qualitative research can provide insight into the actual operation of signaling and closely examine each step in the process.[19] This allows scholars to validate the proposed mechanisms of signaling and whether or not they contributed to signaling outcome. Moreover, qualitative research can provide insight into particular signaling strategies, and whether or not certain strategies are more effective.

Independent of CST, it is crucially important to understand how and why policymakers believe, or disbelieve, an adversary's signals. The outcome of signaling can determine the likelihood of conflict or cooperation, which means answers to these questions have important policy implications as well. Not only does understanding the

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[16] Jervis, Robert. "Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inference and Projecting Images." In K. R. Monroe, ed, *Political Psychology*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002): 293–312.

[17] Snyder, Jack and Erica D. Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 03 (2011): 437-456.

[18] Brooks, Stephen G. and William C. Wohlforth, "From Old Thinking to New Thinking in Qualitative Research," *International Security* 26, no. 4 (2002): 93–111; Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017: 133-135.

[19] Waldner, David, "Process tracing and causal mechanisms." In Harold Kincaid ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Social Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 65-84.

signaling process improve a policymaker's ability to understand an adversary's signals, it also can help inform what signaling strategy policymakers should use to send their own signals. Some strategies may be more or less effective for certain issues, and understanding the most effective strategy benefits all actors, both sender and receiver. For example, can states convey intentions through sinking costs, or are tying hands strategies more effective in reassurance signaling? Studying these questions provides insight into foreign policy decisionmaking and can potentially help policymakers reduce uncertainty.

Finally, the findings of this dissertation potentially have implications for crisis signaling. With a better understanding of the signaling process, comparisons can be made across reassurance and crisis situations. If tying hands signals (such as arms negotiations) are effective in reassurance signaling, is the same true for crisis signaling? Or are sinking cost strategies such as troop mobilizations are a more credible signal of resolve in crises? Or regardless of strategy and issue, are states unable to credible convey intent? The answers to these and other questions inform IR theory and policymaking.

1.2   ARGUMENT IN BRIEF

To build on CST's contributions and provide policy relevant findings, I advance a *domestic political vulnerability* theory—or DPV—which argues target policymakers actively search for indicators of sincerity by looking at the sender's domestic political situation. I argue CST has overlooked a key aspect of how target policymakers evaluate the cost of signals. Thus, DPV acts as a helpful condition which better explains signaling

outcome variation despite similar conditions.[20] DPV argues that while costs are important, the target's perception of who bears those costs (the state, population, or leadership) is just as important to explain signaling outcome.

This theory argues target policymaker perception of the sender leadership's willingness to risk domestic political vulnerability helps explain whether or not target policymakers believe the sender is genuine. If target policymakers perceive the sender's political leaders risk their own political position to send a signal, then they will believe the signal is sincere and credible. Specifically, target policymakers examine whether or not sender policymakers have weakened their *control* over domestic political processes, either by enacting policies that anger key constituencies and sources of political support, or empowering political opposition (primarily from within the elite) and potentially leading to ouster. More pointedly, weakened control refers to sender leaders reducing their ability to oversee domestic political processes and increasing the ability of domestic constituencies or elites to challenge the leadership, thus becoming more politically vulnerable. This means target policymakers can perceive the sender leadership willingly accepted a greater level of domestic vulnerability in order to ensure the reassurance signal is believed by the target. In doing so, the target is more likely to believe the sender is sincere. The sender perceives this vulnerability by looking for signs of domestic dissent or challenge to the leadership, or that the reassurance signal goes against the interests of important domestic constituencies, such as the military, defense industry, security agencies, or hardline members of the elite. However, senders need to be careful not to

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[20] DPV does not act as a replacement for CST. DPV seeks to advance CST by highlighting overlooked conceptions of cost, as well as incorporating the study of both the sender and target.

reduce their control too much, otherwise the target may believe the sender is at risk of being overthrown and thus unable to carry through on the reassurance signal.

To overcome these hurdles and force the target to recognize signal is genuine, target policymakers take a more nuanced view of costs than previously appreciated. I argue it is crucial to understand that targets assess the costs borne by the state and population separately from those of the political leadership. Rather than being an issue of insufficient cost, target policymakers assess whether the sender's costs will be borne by the state and population, leaving the political leadership deciding policies immune from repercussions of a failed signal—especially in autocratic regimes where the leadership is more insulated from the demands of the populace. If the target believes costs can be dispersed onto the state and population, allowing the sender political leadership to avoid bearing the costs of a failed signal, the target will believe the sender is insincere, even if the costs are significant. This dynamic undermines the cost of the signal, since the target believes the leadership can ignore, deflect, and ultimately sustain any costs. It does not necessarily make the signal costless, but appreciating how target policymakers assess who is bearing costs affects whether or not they believe the signal is sincere and genuine.

An example helps demonstrate the dynamic described. In the 1950s, U.S. officials began to sense the USSR was planning unilateral troop reductions to demonstrate benign intentions. In 1956, during a meeting between President Eisenhower's Special Representative for Disarmament Harold Stassen and Nikita Khrushchev in London, Khrushchev asked that "if the Soviet Union would reduce a million men…would the US make a reduction and if so, how much." When Stassen pushed back such a reduction was likely impossible due to concerns the Soviet military would not agree to such a reduction,

Khrushchev told Stassen not to worry and stated, "the Soviet government would handle its generals."[21] Not only did this statement confirm that there was opposition to some of Khrushchev's policies but that Khrushchev was willing to risk domestic opposition to send reassurance signals.

To fully examine the causal process, this dissertation builds upon recent research into the sender-receiver gap, and how signals can be viewed subjectively by both the sender and receiver.[22] As Robert Jervis states, "What we need, then, are studies that are two-sided in looking at both the actor and perceiver...Scholars can then look at the image an actor is trying to project, the behaviors that it adopts to do so, and then, shifting attention to the perceiver, examine what influences the perceiver and what inferences it draws."[23] By establishing how the sender views its signal, it can then be compared to the assessment of the signal by the target. To advance my theory and better understand the signaling process, I include both the sender and target. Through studying both actors the domestic political vulnerability theory offers a more complete understanding of why target policymakers believe some reassurance signals and not others.

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[21] DDEL, WHO Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-61 Special Assistant Series, Subject Subseries Box No. 4, "Stassen Memo on London Talks to Secretary of State, 25 April 1956."
[22] Quek, Kai, "Are Costly Signals More Credible? Evidence of Sender-Receiver Gaps," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (July 2016): 925–940.
[23] Jervis, Robert. "Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inference and Projecting Images." In K. R. Monroe, ed, *Political Psychology*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002): 308.

1.3   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Currently, CST requires careful historical, qualitative research to specify the conditions that drive the causal process and its various strategies. To date, CST has failed to adequately study the causal process. One example surrounds the debate over audience costs. In order to clearly and credibly signal intentions during crises, some scholars argue leaders will create audience costs, a tying hands strategy whereby leaders will be punished by domestic audience for failing to follow through on their public commitments.[24] Since democracies have a politically involved domestic audience and are more transparent, this scholarship argues, democracies are able to make credible threats than autocracies.[25] However, recent scholarship has not only questioned the democratic signaling advantage, but if audience costs even exist.[26] Despite the importance of using "historical case studies" to establish the presence of audience costs, Snyder and Borghard demonstrated that in reality there had been "little effort to examine crisis process in this way."[27] The debate over audience costs helps illustrate why using qualitative methods to study signaling is necessary.

CST's reliance on quantitative methods is in many ways understandable, as measurement issues and coding clear, testable conditions creates challenges for

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[24] Fearon, James, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994a): 577–92.

[25] Schultz, 2001. Other scholars argue democracies can also learn faster than non-democracies. See Cederman, Lars-Erik, "Back to Kant: Reassessing the Democratic Peace as a Macrohistorical Learning Process," *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001): 15-31.

[26] Rosato, Sebastian, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 585–602; Downes, Alexander B. "How Smart and Tough Are Democracies? Reassessing Theories of Democratic Victory in War," *International Security* 33, no. 4 (2009): 9–51; Downes, Alexander B. and Todd S. Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," *International Organization* 66, no. 03 (2012): 457–89.

[27] Schultz, Kenneth A. "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 1 (2001): 53; Snyder and Borghard, 2011: 437.

qualitative research.[28] However, the benefits of qualitative research, if carefully

conducted and aware of potential biases or limitations, outweigh concerns.[29] Process

tracing entails carefully examining the proposed theoretical relationship and causal

mechanisms leading to a particular outcome.[30] This makes process tracing well suited to

examine the causal chain for the hypothesized relationships.[31] Indeed, process tracing's

close attention to the causal mechanisms is particularly well suited to testing game

theoretic models' assumptions and scope conditions.[32] As Peter Lorentzen et al describe,

"Moreover, the focus of process tracing on evaluating the causal process differs from the

goal of typical statistical tests, which estimate the covariational relationship between a

parameter and an outcome. Consequently, process tracing can evaluate key components

of a model that conventional statistical tests cannot."[33] For example, there is increasing

attention by scholars towards greater empirical testing of the various strategies of costly

signaling.[34] Not only is qualitative and historical research crucial to test the claims of

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[28] Bas, Muhammet A. and Robert Schub "Theoretical and Empirical Approaches to Uncertainty and Conflict in International Relations" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[29] Lustick, Ian S. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 03 (1996): 605–18; Thies, Cameron G. "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 3, no. 4 (2002): 351–72; Darnton, Christopher "Archives and Inference: Documentary Evidence in Case Study Research and the Debate over U.S. Entry into World War II," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2018): 84–126.

[30] Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 106-109.

[31] Dion, Douglas, "Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study." *Comparative Politics* 30, no. 1 (1998): 127-45; George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 205-232; Levy, Jack S. "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (2008): 1-18; Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Mahoney, James, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation," *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 202, 215.

[32] Lorentzen, Peter, M. Taylor Fravel, and Jack Paine, "Qualitative Investigation of Theoretical Models: The Value of Process Tracing," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29, no. 3 (2017): 468, 472-473.

[33] Ibid: 470.

[34] Keren Yarhi-Milo, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Jonathan Renshon, "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 10 (2018): 2150-2179.

CST and specific strategies (sinking costs, tying hands, escalating risks), but also to advance our theoretical understanding of CST.

In order to closely trace the causal process, I use in depth archival research and process tracing to evaluate how U.S. policymakers believed, or did not believe, Soviet reassurance signals in each case. To conduct my research, I focus on signaling between the U.S. and USSR during the Cold War. Studying cases from the Cold War provides several advantages. First is the significant variation in U.S. policymaker belief in the sincerity of Soviet reassurance signals across cases and signaling strategy. This variation provides opportunities to understand how and why policymakers came to believe Soviet signals in some cases and not others. Second, selecting cases from the Cold War allows keeps the international system constant, controlling for systemic shifts in the balance of power. Third, the Cold War presents near ideal conditions for signaling described by CST. Over the course of the Cold War, costly signaling was a constant feature of superpower competition and cooperation.[35] The backdrop of nuclear war grounded each sides' interest in sending clear and credible signals. Finally, the United States and the Soviet Union interacted continually over the course of the Cold War, communicating from head of state down to the lower rungs of policy functionaries. This meant government officials on both sides should have had more open channels of communication, as well as a higher level of familiarity with their adversaries' styles of communication. The potentially disastrous consequences of incorrectly assessing each other, along with interaction at all levels of government, meant both powers had interests in correctly assessing signals.

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[35] Jervis, Robert, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no.1 (2001): 36-60.

Additionally, this dissertation focuses on reassurance signaling during peacetime. Arguably, less scholarship has focused on reassurance signaling, or those signals intended to demonstrate benign or defensive intentions.[36] Benign or defensive intentions refer to an actor which has no hostile or malign intentions. That is, the actor does not seek to gain power at the expense of another, or seeks to use force to advance or obtain its objectives. When an actor has benign or defensive intentions, that actor is content with the status quo and only seeks as much security as is necessary to ensure their own defense. By focusing on reassurance signals, this dissertation explores crucial questions regarding the reduction of uncertainty and understanding an adversary's intentions. In reassurance signaling, the target is often unclear if signals are intended to demonstrate the sender's intentions, or instead focused on negotiating a specific issue or situation.

1.3.1 Case Selection

To select my cases, I first collect all known Soviet reassurance signals during the Cold War (see Appendix 1). My collection strategy consisted of several steps. First, cases had to represent signals that met or exceeded the proposed standards of CST. To do so, I identify the reassurance signaling cases cited in previous CST scholarship. These signals are the specific types of actions CST argues leads to a reduction in tension and uncertainty. The goal is to select the cases most likely to work for CST, and therefore least likely to provide support for the theory of domestic political vulnerability. Second, I conduct an extensive survey of the general Cold War historiography to find any other

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[36] Although there has been an increase in recent scholarship focusing on the ability of states to send reassurance signals and demonstrate intentions. See citation six above.

15

situations that would correspond to the conditions set forth by CST.[37] Thus, to be

included, I require a sufficient understanding of Soviet intentions and U.S. assessment

[37] Andrew, Christopher and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the the Third World: Newly Revealed Secrets from the Mitrokhin Archive*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Barrass, Gordon, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Betts, Richard K. *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1987); Bialer, Seweryn, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Blechman, Barry M. and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1978); Hal Brands (ed). *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); Brands, Hal, "Progress Unseen: U.S. Arms Control Policy and the Origins of Détente, 1963–1968." *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (2006): 253–85; Evangelista, Matthew, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Freedman, Lawrence, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Fursenko, A.A. and Timothy J. Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006); Gaddis, John Lewis *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985); Gavin, Francis J. *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); George, Alexander L. *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*. Westview Press, 1983; George, Alexander L., and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); George, Alexander L. Philip J. Farley, and Alexander Dallin. (eds) *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Grynaviski, Eric, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Harrison, Hope M. *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Holloway, David, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Hopf, Ted, *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kaplan, Stephen S. *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981); Kuniholm, Bruce R. *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Larson, Deborah Welch, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Leffler, Melvyn P. and David S. Painter, *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Leffler, Melvyn P. *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Leng, Russell J. *Bargaining and Learning in Recurring Crises: The Soviet-American, Egyptian-Israeli, and Indo-Pakistani Rivalries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Mastny, Vojtech, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Miles, Simon, "Envisioning Détente: The Johnson Administration and the October 1964 Khrushchev Ouster." *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 4 (2016): 722–49; Morgan, Michael Cotey, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Joseph S. Nye (ed). *The Making of America's Soviet Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Offner, Arnold, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945–1953,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Oye, Kenneth A. Robert J. Lieber, and Donald S. Rothchild. (eds). *Eagle Defiant: United States Foreign Policy in the 1980s* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983); Sechser, Todd S. "Militarized Compellent Threats, 1918–2001." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28, no. 4 (2011): 377–401; Talbott, Strobe, *The Russians and Reagan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984); Taylor, Brian D. *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Trachtenberg, Marc, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Trachtenberg, Marc, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European*

outcome. Finally, I exclude cases when Stalin was in power. There is not sufficient

evidence to conclusively say what Stalin's intentions were in the immediate period

following WWII, and debates continue over the exact nature of Stalin's plans.[38] In large

part, the nature of Stalin's personalist dictatorship meant Stalin was the only view that

mattered, and scholars continue to debate and speculate as to Stalin's definitive

intentions.[39] Therefore, there are significantly more opportunities and historiography to

assess Soviet intentions post-Stalin.

I include cases of both assessment success and failure, and from across multiple

U.S. administrations. Without including success and failure, there would be no way to

examine for the presence or absence of mechanisms and their influence on assessment

outcome. By including both types of cases, I allow for controlled comparison over time

and examine for the particular mechanisms or conditions that contributed to, or were

absent from, the outcome. To account for variation in signaling strategy, I code cases into

one of the three signaling strategies identified by CST: hand tying, sinking costs, and

reducing risks (the inverse of crisis signaling strategy of escalating risks). For hand tying

Settlement, 1945-1963 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Westad, Odd Arne, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Wilson, James, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Wohlforth, William, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Wolfe, Thomas W. *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); Zubok, Vladislav M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[38] In addition to the sources above, see Ulam, Adam B. "A Few Unresolved Mysteries About Stalin and the Cold War in Europe: A Modest Agenda for Research," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1999): 110-116; Naimark, Norman, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Mastny, Vojtech, Vit Smetana, Vladimir Pechatnov, and Norman M. Naimark, "Stalin and the Fate of Europe After 1945: Contending Perspectives," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 23, no. 3 (2021): 208-231.

[39] Gorlizki, Yoram and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

strategies, I select cases of nuclear arms control negotiations; for sinking costs, unilateral troop reductions; and for de-escalation negotiations or agreements intended to reduce miscalculation.

After coding the cases according to one of the three signaling strategies, I select three cases for each strategy. I include success and failure, as well as cases from multiple administrations. Selecting cases across time is crucial to ensure there are no biases due to personalities, administrations, or idiosyncrasies in the relationship between the superpowers (such as periods of heightened tension). This case selection strategy allows for within case (across time) and cross case (signaling strategy) variation. For hand tying strategies, I select: Soviet May 10, 1955 nuclear arms control proposal, SALT I, and SALT II. The U.S. incorrectly assessed the May 10 proposal, but correctly assessed SALT I and SALT II. For sinking cost strategies, I select: Soviet 1956, 1960, and 1988 troop reductions. The U.S. incorrectly assessed the 1956 reduction, but correctly assessed the 1960 and 1988 reduction. Finally, for de-escalation strategies, I select: Austrian State Treaty, Basic Principles Agreement (BPA), and the Helsinki Accords. The U.S. correctly assessed the Helsinki Accords, but incorrectly assessed the Austrian State Treaty and the BPA.

1.3.2   Archival Research

I conducted my process tracing for each case in several stages. First, I collected information on the background and context leading up to the case. This includes previous negotiations, signals, and the overall relationship of the U.S. and USSR prior to the case. This helped provide a more complete picture of context in which signals are sent and

18

viewed by both parties. Second, I used primary and secondary material to assess Soviet

intentions and choice of signaling strategy. The combination of Soviet primary and

secondary material helped me protect against biases by relying on one particular source,

while diversifying my evidence collection to account for limitations in sources across

cases. This ensured I gained an accurate understanding of Soviet intentions and

policymaking in each period.[40]

I then established a baseline of key U.S. policymaker dispositional views of the

USSR heading into office. I am not concerned with how they came to those opinions,

merely that they hold those while assessing Soviet signals. This is crucial to test for the

alternative dispositional hypothesis. I focused on the three key foreign policymakers in

each administration: President, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and National

Security Advisor or Secretary of State. Because the influence of each position varies

across administrations and personalities, I focused on the advisors who have the most

influence in each case.[41] To determine which advisors are key, I surveyed the existing

research on U.S. foreign policy decisionmaking in each administration and pay close

attention to personnel change and any variation in influence over time. This allowed me

to focus my attention to the key policymakers who are deciding assessment outcome.

Without this focused attention, I risked losing my ability to trace the impact of my

variables of interest.

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[40] I describe my approach to evaluating Soviet intentions below.
[41] Betts, Richard, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises, (*Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977);
Zegart, Amy, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JSC, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University
Press, 1999);
Haney, Patrick Jude, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises: Presidents, Advisers, and the Management of
Decision Making*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

Finally, I carefully traced the causal process of assessment. I used both primary and secondary research to recreate and examine the debates among key U.S. policymakers on how to assess Soviet signals and ultimately conclude whether or not to believe the Soviet signals were sincere. I first conducted an extensive survey into the existing literature, and debates, surrounding each case. This survey was more focused due my previous research into the overall context and relationship between the superpowers. Through this survey I identified possible sources, areas of confusion or contestation, and gaps in understanding of the case. Second, I planned out a research approach to collecting and analyzing primary sources. I used three main types of archives to collect primary sources: online archives, the National Archives, and Presidential Libraries. First, I examined the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) archive collections published by the State Department and supplemented by records from the National Security Archive. This series provided an easily accessible and extensive look into some of the available primary source documentation. However, not all of the documents in the FRUS series are complete and often represent only a partial account of the document. After searching and cataloging the relevant FRUS documents, I collected documents from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. After conducting research at the National Archives, I made research trips to the Carter, Eisenhower, and Nixon Presidential Libraries. For the Ford and Reagan Presidential Libraries, I utilized the available online records and interacted with the Presidential Librarians to help identify and retrieve relevant documents.

1.3.3 Soviet Policymaking and Intentions

A central component to my research strategy was understanding and assessing Soviet intentions. I established Soviet intentions in each case to credibly demonstrate the Soviets were sending a genuine reassurance signal. To do so, I systematically examined Soviet policymaking processes, the nature of individual leaders, and variation over time.[42] Without such an approach, each case could be ascribed to the personalistic whims of an authoritarian leader. I investigated how and why Soviet policies were formulated, which includes taking into account the particular ruling strategies of each Soviet leader, to establish the USSR was in fact sending credible reassurance signals and a genuine reflection of intentions.

Except for Stalin, no other post-WWII Soviet leader approached a fully personalist dictatorship where the leader exerted full power and authority.[43] In fact, one of the earliest issues the leadership agreed upon post-Stalin was to ensure no subsequent Soviet leader could fully destroy competing sources of authority within the government and the Communist Party. After Stalin, terror was removed as a tool of political control amongst the elite. Instead, elites faced *political*, rather than actual, death through their removal and exile to remote and insignificant postings.[44] Part of the renunciation of terror was the elite's fear that another leader could gain the power and control that Stalin held.

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[42] Snyder, Jack, "Richness, Rigor, and Relevance in the Study of Soviet Foreign Policy." *International Security* 9, no. 3 (1984/85): 89-108.

[43] Bialer, 1982.

[44] Yanov, Alexander. *Détente After Brezhnev: The Domestic Roots of Soviet Foreign Policy*, Institute of International Studies, (Berkeley: University of California Press, March 1977): 8.

The leadership had to find other methods to justify and legitimate their rule since terror was removed as a tool of control.[45] Understanding how leaders did this requires scholars to examine the leader, as well as the strategies they employed to underpin their rule. Each leader has particular idiosyncrasies and ruling styles that lent them more or less likely to pursue particular policies.[46] This means that leadership personalities can influence the type, nature, and timing of particular strategies and efforts. For this dissertation, understanding each Soviet leader, and their attributes, is an important part to understand Soviet intentions.[47]

Nevertheless, all post-Stalin Soviet leaders had to build authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the various interest groups in the government, Communist Party, defense industry, security services, and military.[48] Some scholars argued that while there was bargaining and an effort to build authority on the part of the leadership, it was confined

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[45] Ross, Dennis, "Coalition Maintenance in the Soviet Union." *World Politics* 32, no. 2 (1980): 258-280.
[46] Roeder, Philip G. "Soviet Policies and Kremlin Politics." *International Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1984): 171-193; Goldgeier, James M. *Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy: Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
[47] For example, Khrushchev's policies of nuclear bluffing had not only failed to reap the benefits promised, but exposed the true weakness of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. His adventurism also demonstrated that U.S. nuclear superiority allowed them to translate military power into political utility, and the simple acquisition of nuclear weapons was not enough to translate into successful policy outcomes. In response, Khrushchev's successors came to agree that too much concentrated power in one person was destabilizing for their control over the country. No single person was to dominate policymaking, with Leonid Brezhnev's leadership becoming synonymous with what became known as the "collective leadership," which included Alexander Shelepin as first deputy prime minister, Nikolai Podgorny as head of state (replacing Anastas Mikoyan in 1965), Alexander Shelepin, Andrei Kirilenko, Mikhail Suslov as second secretary of the Communist Party and its chief ideologue, and Marshal Grechko becoming Defense Minister in 1967. Richter, James G. *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Evangelista, 1999: 436; Wolfe, 1972: 237-241; Simes, Dmitri K., "The Politics of Defense in the Soviet Union: Brezhnev's Era," in *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security*, eds. Jiri Valenta and William C. Potter (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984): 74-76; Anderson Jr., Richard D. *Public Politics in an Authoritarian State: Making Foreign Policy during the Brezhnev Years*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[48] Hough, Jerry F. *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Breslauer, George W. *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders (Routledge Revivals): Building Authority in Soviet Politics,* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).

within the Politburo and consisted of intra-elite competition.[49] After Stalin, however, power was not only decentralized away from personalist control, but dispersed amongst the various interest groups and wider nomenklatura, the massive body of officials in the Soviet bureaucracy, whose support was essential to the fulfillment of the leaderships plans and policies.[50] Post-Stalin leaders had to be evermore mindful of winning, and maintaining, the support of key power brokers and constituencies.

I relied on previous Soviet studies scholarship, from both the Cold War and more recent work which benefited from increased access to Soviet archives. Each Soviet leader had a distinct ruling style, and the leaders' control varied over time and between leaders. No one image can capture the Soviet policymaking, and a more nuanced approach is necessary to provide an adequate conceptual foundation to understand Soviet intentions in the cases. I evaluated how each leader and regime managed its relationship to the elite, including the military. In each case I examined the Soviet leadership, how it maintained domestic legitimacy and loyalty, its approach to relations with the United States, and specific intentions behind each signal.

Additionally, Soviet perceptions of the balance of power and the nature of deterrence shifted during the Cold War, but always had a distinct set of conceptual

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[49] Odom, William E. "A Dissenting View on the Group Approach to Soviet Politics." World Politics 28, no. 4 (1976): 542-567; Lenczowski, John, *Soviet Perceptions of U.S. Foreign Policy: A Study of Ideology, Power, and Consensus*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Gelman, Harry, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

[50] Skilling, H. Gordon and Franklyn W. Griffiths, eds., *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Jones, Ellen, "Committee Decision Making in the Soviet Union," *World Politics* 36, no. 02 (January 1984): 165–88; Anderson, Richard D., Margaret G. Hermann, and Charles F. Hermann, "Explaining Self-Defeating Foreign Policy Decisions: Assessing Soviet Arms for Egypt in 1973 Through Process or Domestic Bargaining Models?" *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 03 (1992): 759–66.

foundations.[51] Understanding this is crucial in evaluating why the Soviets believed

particular signals were necessary or would work at particular points in the Cold War.

These perceptions often differed from the U.S., and often contributed to a misperception

of aggressive Russian intentions.[52] For the Soviets, nuclear weapons could not be

separated from the political context, and strategic parity was essential to political parity.

Without parity, the Soviet Union believed it could be coerced by the U.S. strategic

advantage.

Moreover, the USSR did not go through the same strategic theory debates as the

West.[53] The Soviet leadership did not have a civilian advisory corps that provided

technological and strategic expertise on nuclear weapons.[54] With the Soviet military

dominating strategic debates, there was little exchange of ideas beyond a few select

military journals such as *Military Thought*. For the Soviets, deterrence as a finite state

and the possibility of winning nuclear war were not incompatible.[55] Therefore, the Soviet

military determined *how* nuclear weapons would be used in conflict.[56] In fact, being able

to win a nuclear war was a crucial component of the Soviet concept of deterrence.[57] The

compatibility of deterrence and war winning strategies in Soviet strategic thought was at

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[51] Snyder, Jack, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implication for Limited Nuclear Options,* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1977); Wohlforth, 1993; Evangelista, 1999.
[52] Garthoff, Raymond L. "Mutual Deterrence and Strategic Arms Limitation in Soviet Policy." *International Security* 3, no. 1, (1978): 115-125; Ermath, Fritz, "Contrasts in American and Soviet Strategic Thought," *International Security* 3, no. 2 (1978): 138-155; Freedman, Lawrence, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy,* (New York: Springer, 2003): 253-257.
[53] Snyder, 1977: 6, 30-33; Savel′ev, Aleksandr G, and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995).
[54] Dobrynin, Anatoly, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents*, (New York: Times Books, 1995): 193-194.
[55] Holloway, *1994:* 54.
[56] Although it was still the political leadership who decided when to use nuclear weapons. Understanding this nuance is crucial to Chapter Three's discussion of strategic arms control agreements.
[57] Nichols, Thomas, *The Sacred Cause: Civil-Military Conflict over Soviet National Security, 1917–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 156–60.

odds with the U.S. understanding of MAD and contributed to a perception of aggressive Soviet intentions.[58]

1.4   CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation's findings contribute not only to IR theory, but policymaking as well. For IR theory, this dissertation maps out the signaling process in a way that previously received limited attention. The study of the causal process allows scholars to better specify the conditions of signaling success and failure, and what the actual hurdles and limitations are to understanding an adversary's intentions. This has implications for IR theory and debates centered on whether or not states understand and update their assessment of an adversary's intentions. This dissertation finds that target policymakers believing the sender is sending genuine reassurance signals does not necessarily translate into an updating of an adversary's intentions. This does not mean signaling or conveying intentions is impossible, but the process may be more fraught than CST is willing to acknowledge.

Second, the domestic political vulnerability theory demonstrates scholars must appreciate both the sender and target when studying signaling. Focusing solely on the sender limits the understanding of the entire signaling process, and ignores potential

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[58] "…the American theory of deterrence is a theory of bargaining; the Soviet notion of deterrence is without a theory and substitutes instead the science of war." Legvold, Robert, "Strategic 'Doctrine' and SALT: Soviet and American Views," *Survival* 21, no. 1 (1979): 8–13; Green, Brendan R., and Austin Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance," *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 615-616; Green, Brendan R., *The Revolution That Failed: Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

variation in how the target views the signal and assesses cost. Without combining the two perspectives (target and sender), scholarship cannot explain why signals succeed in only some situations.

Third, this dissertation has policy implications. The case studies that follow demonstrate how important the political context and environment signals are sent in. As the domestic political vulnerability theory argues, policymakers are not solely convinced by a signal's cost, in fact, they are willing to dismiss those signals if they perceive the leadership as being immune or protected from those costs. Domestic politics has a large influence on signaling outcome, but instead of target domestic politics, it is the sender's domestic political situation which influences whether or not signals are correctly assessed. The potential downside is target policymakers can dismiss costs the sender attaches in good faith, which the sender created in the mistaken belief those are the costs the target will view and assess as credible.

1.5   PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

In the chapters that follow, I lay out the theory and empirical studies. Chapter Two lays out the theoretical approach and contributions of this dissertation, including the domestic political vulnerability theory, as well as the importance of understanding signaling and its causal process. I begin with a literature review of CST, including identifying strengths and shortcomings. I then explain the domestic political vulnerability hypothesis, describe the alternative hypotheses, and what I expect to find if each hypothesis is correct.

The chapters that follow are the dissertation's empirical studies. Using in-depth archival research and process tracing to closely examine the causal mechanisms of signaling, this qualitative approach enables me to intensively study multiple cases for the presence or absence of the proposed conditions highlighted in the theory chapter. All chapters include cases of correct and incorrect assessment to allow for comparison of the presence or absence of the variables under study.

Chapter Three examines hand tying signaling strategies by looking at three instances of strategic arms control. The cases selected are the incorrect assessment of the Soviet May 10, 1955 arms control proposal, and the correct assessment of the SALT I and SALT II negotiations. Tying hands strategies via strategic arms control negotiations were more likely to be believed by U.S. policymakers across signaling strategies (provided they met DPV conditions). Tying hands strategies also appeared to have a greater effect on U.S. policymaker assessment of Soviet intentions. For example, the SALT I agreements led to Nixon, Kissinger, and eventually Ford to continue negotiations and agree to the Vladivostok agreements in 1974. U.S. policymakers appeared to connect arms control negotiations to other issues, often seeking to leverage arms control negotiations for concession on other issues or negotiations, which complicated and at times threatened the success of negotiations.

Chapter Four examines sinking cost strategies through conventional troop reductions. The Soviets undertook several rounds of troop reductions, the largest and most significant coming in 1956, 1960, and 1988. Sinking cost strategies, while likely to be believed as genuine by U.S. policymakers (including the correct assessment during the 1960 and 1988 reductions), appeared to be less likely to lead to updating of intentions.

Across the three cases, U.S. policymakers often discounted conventional troop reductions due to the presence of nuclear weapons, including perceiving Soviet troop reductions as intended to increase military effectiveness on a nuclear battlefield, or that the reductions could be reversed.

Finally, Chapter Five examines de-escalation strategies by looking at the Austrian State Treaty, Basic Principles Agreement, and the Helsinki Accords. Reducing risk strategies appeared to be the most difficult and inefficient reassurance signaling strategy. U.S. policymakers across cases were largely uninterested in agreements centered on codes of acceptable conduct or mutual understanding, and generally ignored whether or not the Soviet leadership were genuine in attempting to reach agreements, except when negotiations advanced on U.S. terms. Even agreement, however, was unlikely to lead to a long-term reduction of tensions, as U.S. policymakers often viewed every breach (perceived or valid) as an indication of Soviet aggressive intent. Instead of focusing on larger codes of conduct or acceptable behaviors, the chapters initial conclusions support the position that negotiations should be focused on specific issues which have clear standards of violation. Without such standards, agreements are destined to fall victim to misunderstanding and misperception.

I conclude by summing up my findings, detail policy implications, and identify areas for future research. First, the empirical chapters support the domestic political vulnerability thesis. U.S. policymakers were more likely to believe Soviet reassurance signals were genuine when they perceived the Soviet leadership risked domestic political vulnerability to send the signal. However, if U.S. policymakers believed the Soviets were forced into sending a signal, due to international or domestic conditions, or the leadership

exposed themselves to too much vulnerability, U.S. policymakers did not believe Soviet signals were credible. In addition, the findings of the dissertation have policy implications such as not including peripheral issues or concerns in negotiations, as well as the importance of target policymakers being aware of the sender's political environment. I conclude with avenues for future research, including testing the domestic political vulnerability theory in crisis situations, investigating variation in signaling strategies (including identifying new methods of signaling), studying reassurance signaling between great and weaker powers, and exploring the effect of emerging technologies on signaling.

2.0   CHAPTER TWO: DOMESTIC POLITICAL VULNERABILITY THEORY

For international relations theorists and policymakers, the ability to send and understand signals between states is a central concern. However, the pressures of asymmetric information, incentives to misrepresent, along with overwhelming and competing information make any such communication fraught with danger and difficulty. Additionally, the competitive pressures of the international system push states toward competition and skepticism amongst each other. Indeed, the difficulty of signaling is unsurprising to many scholars.

States are even more skeptical when it comes to signals about an adversary's peaceful, benign intentions. If a target misunderstands an adversary's reassurance signals, the result can be catastrophic. Misunderstanding could expose the target to unacceptable vulnerability and threaten its existence. Nevertheless, states are able to send and receive reassurance signals. To cut through many of the difficulties noted above, states attach costs to their signals to help the target filter out which signals are sincere and genuine. Not all signals, however, are believed to be sincere. Often, similar signals are misunderstood, despite being costly and similar to previous signals. What explains this variation? More specifically, why do targets only sometimes believe the sender's signals?

In this dissertation, I present a theory of domestic political vulnerability and argue signaling success relies on target policymakers believing sender policymakers *risked* their own domestic political standing to send reassurance signals of benign, defensive intentions. Without risking such vulnerability, target policymakers believe any costs attached to a signal will be borne by the state or population if the signal is unsuccessful,

leaving the leadership immune or the policies easily reversed. However, by risking their own political future through reducing control over domestic political situations, sender policymakers demonstrate sincerity by attaching their fate to the target believing the sender's reassurance signals. Thus, DPV helps explain when and why target policymakers will believe some signals are costly, and therefore credible, and why others are not. When sender policymakers demonstrate domestic political vulnerability, target policymakers will believe the sender's reassurance signals are real and sincere.

The chapter expands on these points and proceeds as follows. The "argument in brief" section describes the key features of my theory of domestic political vulnerability. I then describe the problems with conveying intentions in international politics, and a brief description of the signaling process. I follow with a review of costly signaling theory (CST) literature, including critiques and weaknesses. I then detail the theory of domestic political vulnerability and its contributions to CST literature. I also describe the alternative hypotheses and how they will be measured in the empirical chapters. I end with a conclusions and implications section summarizing the chapter and identifying a few key theoretical implications of my argument.

2.1   ARGUMENT IN BRIEF

In order to better explain the variation in assessment of reassurance signals, I argue the target's perception of domestic political vulnerability determines whether or not reassurance signals are believed to be real and sincere. Success is defined as target

31

policymakers *believing* the sender's reassurance signals are genuine. I argue, signaling

success depends on the target state's policymakers believing the sending state's

policymakers are risking their own domestic position to demonstrate sincere intentions.

This theory acts as a bridge between sinking costs and audience costs. By paying the

costs upfront, similar to sinking cost strategies, and risking domestic political blowback,

like audience costs, sender policymakers demonstrate sincerity. In this sense DPV

imposes costs regardless if the signal is correctly assessed, such as with sinking costs, as

well as for failure, like audience costs. Additionally, by incorporating both the sender and

target into the theory, I argue the domestic political vulnerability theory builds on CST

insights to provide a more complete picture of the signaling process. Instead of focusing

on the state itself, in this dissertation the actors are target and sender policymakers.

Without focusing on the people actually assessing signals, scholars cannot gain an

accurate understanding of the signaling process or the sources of success and failure.

If the target believes the sender leadership risks its political standing domestically,

costs will be perceived as credible and the signal is likely to be believed. Since one of the

greatest challenges understanding intentions is the fear they will change, targets are

hesitant to believe the sender will not simply bear whatever costs imposed and alter its

actions in the future.[1] This is especially true if the sending state and population are seen

as bearing the costs, not the leadership. Domestic political standing is something all

political leaders are keenly interested in, authoritarian or democratic. This makes it

unlikely a politician would risk their political future on a signal if they were merely

trying to manipulate an opponent or jockeying for bargaining position. To risk domestic

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[1] Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security* 39, no. 3 (2014/15): 48-88.

political vulnerability, target policymakers must believe sender policymakers are enacting political or military strategies that go against entrenched domestic interests—such as hawkish members of the government, opposition figures, defense industry, or the military. Targets must believe the sender leadership directly risked something by sending reassurance signals, specifically a loss or weakening of control over domestic political processes. Target policymakers must believe sender policymakers are risking vulnerability, and not that pre-existing domestic (political, economic, or military) weakness *forced* the sending of reassurance signals. If target policymakers believe the sender leadership was forced into sending a reassurance signal, instead of deciding to send reassurance signals that risked their political position, the sender will appear to be acting aggressive and manipulative.

To advance CST, I argue more attention and study must be placed on the causal process of signaling. Without completely understanding the signaling process, scholars and practitioners overlook sources of success and failure which have a dramatic effect on signaling outcomes. This failure is even more pronounced when examining reassurance signaling. Reassurance signaling is when the sender seeks to convey that it has benign/defensive intentions, and not aggressive/revisionist intentions.[2] As Nicholas Wheeler notes, "However, what has been missing is a persuasive theory of the conditions under which sincere signals of peaceful intent will be assessed accurately."[3] To demonstrate benign intentions, senders have to overcome significant hurdles. While most research has focused on signaling resolve, less attention has been directed towards

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[2] Glaser, Charles L. "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997): 171-202; Kydd, Andrew H. "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (2000): 325-357.
[3] Wheeler, Nicholas J. *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 9.

signaling reassurance during peacetime. Understanding the variation in reassurance signaling outcomes during peacetime increases the literature's understanding of the signaling process and the conditions of demonstrating benign intentions.

2.1.1 Scope of Theory

Before moving forward, it is important to understand the scope of the theory. First, the dissertation focuses on reassurance signals of benign intent during peacetime. Focusing on reassurance signals allows me to investigate how difficult it is to credibly convey intentions, a key source of debate amongst CST and its skeptics. Second, the theory moves discussions of signaling away from states to policymakers. By opening the black box of the state, this dissertation moves the studying of signaling towards the practical. Without understanding who assesses signals and why they chose to believe, or not believe, signals, IR cannot fully account for variation in signaling outcomes. Finally, the dissertation takes a comprehensive look at the various signaling strategies used by states, and how they correspond to assessment. This gives policymakers and IR theory a better understanding of how specific strategies work, and the conditions that support or hinder their success.

Moreover, there is no guarantee that correct assessment will lead to an updating of intentions. In this dissertation, assessment is the process of recognizing, evaluating, and concluding whether or not to believe the reassurance signal is credible and sincere. A successful outcome is when the target *believes* the sender's signal is a genuine attempt at reassurance. Specifically, that the sender is sincerely attempting to demonstrate benign or defensive intentions. Therefore, correct assessment refers to target policymakers

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believing senders reassurance signals are genuine, while incorrect assessment refers to target policymakers mistakenly believing sender reassurance signals are attempts at manipulation. Target policymakers, however, may correctly assess the signal and the sender's sincerity, but still refuse to update their assessment of intentions. Until now, most scholarship focuses on whether or not a target can understand intentions instead of examining the conditions that may, or may not, lead to an updating of an adversary's intentions. Instead of being presented as a dichotomous outcome, there may in fact be shades of understanding intentions. Due to the dissertation's structure and use of process tracing, cases include research from before and after signal assessment, allowing me to study for evidence of U.S. policymakers updating their assessment of Soviet intentions. However, the variable of focus remains on the correct, or incorrect, assessment of Soviet signals.

In this dissertation, cases consist of examining assessments of Soviet signal by U.S. policymakers. Breadth is sacrificed for the sake of depth, allowing a greater study of the causal process of signaling.[4] The focus on understanding Soviet signals also allows for a greater understanding of how U.S. policymakers understand autocratic signals, but limits generalizability. As such, this dissertation makes no claims on the signaling ability of autocracies relative to democracies.

Even though cases are limited to U.S./Soviet interactions during the Cold War and only consist of reassurance signals, there are reasons to believe the implications extend beyond these conditions. First, this theory likely extends beyond the Cold War. The bipolar system that existed in the Cold War highlighted the incentive for both the U.S.

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[4] As noted above, successful signaling outcomes refers to target policymakers correctly believing sender reassurance signals are credible and genuine.

and USSR to correctly understand each other's signals. The change from a bipolar system to a unipolar or multipolar world does not remove the necessity of understanding an adversary's signals. The structure of the international system does not determine the presence or absence of assessing signals. Even if a country is more powerful than its adversary, it still cannot be sure of the adversary's intentions (even more so if it is a rising challenger) and must assess signals. Indeed, the only difference may be one of severity rather than necessity. For example, in a bipolar world, incorrect assessment could lead to a catastrophic conflict (or a worst-case scenario of nuclear Armageddon), where incorrect assessment in a multi-polar world could lead to unwanted conflict, albeit below the level of great power conflict.

2.2   PROBLEM OF CONVEYING INTENTIONS

Effective communication requires cutting through the massive, and often conflicting, amount of information that states face on a constant basis. In addition to the almost overwhelming challenge of filtering out what information is credible; states face the issue of understanding an adversary's intentions. A challenge that, if mistaken, can threaten the survival of the state. Therefore, one of the most persistent and dominating threats to a state is that of uncertainty. Uncertainty is pervasive to every issue facing a state, from an adversary's intentions to the meaning of signals. Additionally, for IR theory, it is a rare area of agreement. Which as Brian Rathbun succinctly notes, "…

central to every major research tradition in the study of international relations."[5] Whether it is uncertainty over resolve, intention, or capability, states and policymakers operate in a world that is defined by ambiguity and uncertainty.[6] The challenge of operating in this world is filtering and assessing the overwhelming amount of information available to quickly and accurately identify the information necessary to reduce that uncertainty.[7] The noise of the international system provides large, and often conflicting, amounts of information that must be processed and analyzed.[8]

While uncertainty can come in many forms, one of the most ubiquitous is the uncertainty of another state's intentions. Long a source of debate amongst IR theorists, states are continually forced with trying to assess and respond to another states perceived intentions.[9] Uncertainty and ambiguity drive competition and skepticism over an adversary's intentions.[10]

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[5] Rathbun, Brian, "Uncertain About Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2007): 533.

[6] Finnemore, Martha, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Powell, Robert, "Uncertainty, Shifting Power, and Appeasement." *American Political Science Review* 90 no. 4 (1996): 749-764; Copeland, Dale C. *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Koremenos, Barbara, "Contracting Around International Uncertainty." *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 4 (2005): 549-565; Mitzen, Jennifer, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341–70; Yarhi-Milo, Keren, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Debs, Alexandre and Nuno P. Monteiro, "Known Unknowns: Power Shifts, Uncertainty, and War." *International Organization* 68, no. 1 (2014): 1-31; Porter, Patrick, "Taking Uncertainty Seriously: Classical Realism and National Security," *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 02 (2016): 239–60.

[7] Crawford, Vincent P. and Joel Sobel, "Strategic Information Transmission," *Econometrica* 50, no. 6 (1982): 1431-1451.

[8] Wohlstetter, Roberta, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1962).

[9] Jervis, Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Snyder, Glenn and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977); Garthoff, Raymond L. "On Estimating and Imputing Intentions," *International Security* 2, no. 3 (1978): 22–32.

[10] Although as Mitzen and Schweller argue it is not uncertainty, but misplaced certainty that drives miscalculation and conflict. Mitzen, Jennifer and Randall L. Schweller, "Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War." *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (2011): 2-35.

Part of the debate over uncertainty is the result of differing definitions and a failure to agree on key terms. Some scholars conflate motives, intentions, and preferences. Glaser identifies intentions as the views on policies given the constraints and challenges of the international system. He argues that, "motives are primitive, that is, they are inherent in the features of states," whereas "intentions—what a states intends to do—result from the interaction of a state with its international environment."[11] This aligns with Rosato's definition, "intentions are about how states plan to realize their goals, whereas interests, motives, and preferences answer the question of what those goals are."[12] Motives are more permanent and describe the overarching motivations of states.[13] Motives closely align with preferences, which Moravcsik defines as "the fundamental social purposes underlying strategic calculations of government."[14] He argues preferences are "a set of fundamental interests."[15]

Intentions therefore refer to the designs that states pursue to achieve their fundamental interests.[16] It is a state's intentions that costly signaling seeks to convey, not the more fundamental motives or preferences. This does not mean, however, that

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[11] Glaser, 2010: 38; See also Jervis, 1976: 50; Morrow, 1989: 86.

[12] Rosato, 2014: 53; See Edelstein, David, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies* 12, no. 1 (2002): 3, 10; Keren Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 14-15.

[13] Glaser, 2010: 38.

[14] Moravcsik, Andrew, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*, vol. 51, no. 4 (1997): 513.

[15] Ibid, 519; Milner, Helen V. *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 14-17, also distinguishes between preferences and interests. She conceptualizes preferences in a similar way to that of intentions and argues that interests represent "fundamental goals" (15, note 4); See also Simmons, Beth A. *Who Adjusts: Domestic Sources of Foreign Economic Policy During the Interwar Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Legro, Jeffrey, "Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step." *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (1996): 118-137 takes a constructivist view by arguing that domestic beliefs and customs—organizational culture of national bureaucracies—influences the formation of preferences.

[16] Frieden, Jeffrey A. "Actors and Preferences in International Relations," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 39–47.

intentions are purely short term.[17] Rather, they are subject to the constraints and pressures

of particular situations and issue areas over time.[18] A state may also have multiple

intentions. While perhaps having aggressive intentions on some issues, a state at the same

time can have benign intentions on others. As such, intentions can be complex and

difficult to assess, making costly signaling both important to international politics and

more challenging to assess than scholars may acknowledge.

For rationalism, the primary cause of uncertainty over intentions is insufficient

information. Uncertainty is a variable, not a constant, and largely a function of the type

and level of information available to states.[19] The noise of the international system

provides large, often conflicting, amounts of information that must be processed and

analyzed.[20] The challenge of operating in this world is filtering and assessing the

overwhelming amount of information available.[21] The more information states have, the

lower the level of uncertainty about an adversary's intentions. As a result, low quality and

insufficient information is a primary driver of miscalculation. Information is the

determinate of each side's payoff structure, enabling each side to assess correctly the

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[17] Rather, as Yarhi-Milo (2014: 263) suggests, the difference between long and short-term intentions is crucial. Because intentions can change, a state can only reliable infer short-term intentions; Blum, Douglas W. "The Soviet Foreign Policy Belief System: Beliefs, Politics, and Foreign Policy Outcomes," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1993): 373-394; Edelstein 2002: 10.

[18] Tomz, Michael, "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach," *International Organization* 61, no. 04 (2007): 14.

[19] Glaser, Charles L. *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010): 46. Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, James D. Morrow, and Ethan R. Zorick, "Capabilities, Perception, and Escalation," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 01 (1997): 15–27.

[20] Wohlstetter, 1962: 3, 71-74, 228-231.

[21] Crawford, Vincent P. and Joel Sobel, "Strategic Information Transmission," *Econometrica* 50, no. 6 (1982): 1431-1451.

costs and benefits of contestation over an issue.[22] This is possible because rationalists view information as objective.

Not only does information determine the probability of cooperation or conflict, but the severity as well. Incomplete or inaccurate information drives the security dilemma, where states make inefficient moves to ensure their own security—and in the process reducing another state's security.[23] Incomplete information therefore leads to the inadvertent escalation of competitive policies.[24] If states knew they were dealing with defensive oriented security seekers, they would not fear the intentions of the other states and instead engage in cooperative strategies.[25] However, since states are uncertain over intentions, they often assume the worst, or at least hedge against a possible aggressive state, and enact competitive policies that increase the security dilemma.[26] Information is the variable that determines the extent and level of uncertainty, which in turn prompts the choice of competitive or cooperative strategies and the depth of the security dilemma.

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[22] Fey, Mark and Kristopher W. Ramsay, "Uncertainty and Incentives in Crisis Bargaining: Game-Free Analysis of International Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 1 (2011): 149–169; Spaniel, William and Peter Bils, "Slow to Learn: Bargaining, Uncertainty, and the Calculus of Conquest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 4 (2018): 774–96;

[23] Jervis, Robert, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167–214; Schweller, Randall L. "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): 90-121; Glaser, Charles L. "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997): 171-201; Tang, Shiping, "The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis." *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 587–623.

[24] Glaser, Charles L. "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models." *World Politics* 44, no. 4 (1992): 497–538; Glaser, 2010: 55-63.

[25] Kydd, Andrew, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other." *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 114–55.

[26] Often referred to as bargaining theory, where states escalate to conflict on the basis of incomplete information that drives adversaries to an inefficient conflict instead of a mutually beneficial settlement. Fearon, James D. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 379-414; Gartzke, Erik, "War Is in the Error Term," *International Organization* 53, no. 3 (1999): 567–87; Reiter, Dan, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," *Perspective on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003): 27–43; Slantchev, Branislav L. "The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiations," *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 621–32; Powell, Robert, "Bargaining and Learning While Fighting," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004): 344-361.

Nevertheless, some scholars believe states are able to communicate and demonstrate their true intentions, despite the incentives and amounts of information present in the international system. For some, uncertainty over intentions can be reduced by looking at regime type. Those states with similar regimes, or are transparent, such as democracies, can reduce uncertainty since other states are able to view their domestic debates and decisionmaking.[27] Others such as Mark Haas, John IV. Owen, and Jeffrey W. Legro theorize a state's ideology defines a state's intentions.[28]

2.3   COSTLY SIGNALING THEORY

Costly Signaling Theory (CST) fits squarely in the rationalist tradition.[29] A state's intentions are based off of the information it provides to its audience. This means not

[27] Maoz, Zeev and Bruce Russett, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624–38; Owen IV, John M. "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace." *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994): 87-125; Schultz, Kenneth A. "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998): 829–44; Schultz, Kenneth A. "Do Democratic Institutions Constrain or Inform? Contrasting Two Institutional Perspectives on Democracy and War." *International Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999): 233-266.
[28] Haas, Mark L. *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Legro, Jeffrey W. "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 03 (2007): 515-534; Glaser, Charles L., Andrew H. Kydd, Mark L. Haas, John M. Owen, and Sebastian Rosato, "Correspondence: Can Great Powers Discern Intentions?" *International Security* 40, no. 3 (2016): 197–215; Owen IV, John M. *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[29] Osgood, Charles, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966/2008); Spence, Michael, "Job Market Signaling." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 87, no. 3 (1973): 355-374; Powell, Robert, "Crisis Bargaining, Escalation, and MAD." *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 3 (1987): 717-736; Fearon, James D. "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 2 (1994): 236-269; Smith, Alistair, "International Crises and Domestic Politics." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 3 (1998): 623-638; Schultz, Kenneth A. "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4 (1998): 829–44; Morrow, James D. "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in

only the quantity of information, but the quality as well. States can never be sure that the sender is not manipulating information to deceive them in the hopes of gaining advantage.[30] Because there is so much—and conflicting—information available, there has to be a way to filter credible from false and misleading information. To do so, states send costly signals, which are signals with costs attached, making the signals not only visible but credible since no state would bear those costs if they were not sincere. These "costs" allow the sender to cut through the noise of the international system and credibly convey their intentions to targets in both times of crisis and reassurance.

To send signals, states have a variety of methods to convey intentions.[31] States can attach costs by raising risks, sinking costs, or tying their hands which no bluffing state would.[32] Raising risk strategies escalate the level of risk to a point where a situation can spiral out of control and start a conflict, thus demonstrating resolve by risking uncontrolled conflict. Sinking cost strategies pay upfront costs, such as mobilizing troops and committing resources. Tying hands strategies are similar to down payments by limiting future actions. The most famous tying hand strategy are audience costs. Audience costs are when a regime, or leader, risk potential future domestic blowback should they fail to follow through on their promises or policies.[33] However, much of the emphasis is on the publicly visible aspect of signals, arguing that because they are public

International Politics," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds. *Strategic Choice and International Relations (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 77- 114.

[30] Slantchev, Branislav L. "Feigning Weakness," *International Organization* 64, no. 3 (2010): 357–88; Wolford, Scott, Dan Reiter, and Clifford J. Carrubba, "Information, Commitment, and War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 4 2011): 556–79; Ramsay, Kristopher W. "Information, Uncertainty, and War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, no. 1 (2017): 505–27.

[31] Lektzian, David J. and Christopher M. Sprecher, "Sanctions, Signals, and Militarized Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2007): 415–31.

[32] Schelling, 1966; Fearon, James D. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands Versus Sinking Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 68-90.

[33] For citations on particular strategies, see cites 28 and 29 above.

and visible, they are much harder to back down from.[34] The conventional view is signals

sent in secrecy, by contrast, are low-cost because they have no publicity—thus no

responsibility.[35] These actions become costless because there are no repercussions should

the sender simply be bluffing. Additionally, if they aren't public, they are much less

likely to be seen by the target.[36] Due to this focus on visibility, democracies were largely

believed to have an advantage in signaling due to the transparent nature of their politics.[37]

[34] Baum, Matthew A. "Going Private: Public Opinion, Presidential Rhetoric, and the Domestic Politics of Audience Costs in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (2004): 603–31; Ramsay, Kristopher W. "Politics at the Water's Edge: Crisis Bargaining and Electoral Competition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 4 (2004): 459–486; Lai, Brian, "The Effects of Different Types of Military Mobilization on the Outcome of International Crises." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 2 (2004): 211–29; Tarar, Ahmer and Bahar Leventoğlu, "Public Commitment in Crisis Bargaining: *Public Commitment in Crisis Bargaining*," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2009): 817–39; Slantchev, Branislav L. *Military Threats: The Costs of Coercion and the Price of Peace*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Tingley, Dustin H. and Barbara F. Walter, "Can Cheap Talk Deter? An Experimental Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 6 (2011): 996–1020.

[35] Sagan, Scott D. and Jeremi Suri, "The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 150–83; Lai, 2004; Stacie Goddard also focuses on the public nature of rhetoric to influence and coerce adversaries. However, in contrast to rationalist costly signaling, the legitimizing power of rhetoric comes from its resonance Goddard, Stacie E. "When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power," *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2008/09): 123-124. See also Krebs, Ronald R. and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 46-47.

[36] Recent scholarship has challenged the importance of publicity to signaling in recent years. See Stasavage, David, "Open-Door or Closed-Door? Transparency in Domestic and International Bargaining," *International Organization* 58, no. 04 (2004): 667-703; Kurizaki, Shuhei, "Efficient Secrecy: Public versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 03 (2007): 543–58; Leventoğlu, Bahar and Ahmer Tarar, "Does Private Information Lead to Delay or War in Crisis Bargaining?," *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2008): 533–53; Trager, Robert F. "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters." *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 2 (2010): 347–68; Yarhi-Milo, Keren, "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance," *Security Studies* 22, no. 3 (2013): 405–35; Carson, Austin and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017): 124–56; McManus, Roseanne W. and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Logic of 'Offstage' Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations," *International Organization* 71, no. 04 (2017): 701–33; Carnegie, Allison and Austin Carson, "The Spotlight's Harsh Glare: Rethinking Publicity and International Order," *International Organization* 72, no. 03 (2018): 627–57.

[37] Eyerman, Joe and Robert A. Hart Jr. "An Empirical Test of the Audience Cost Proposition: Democracy Speaks Louder than Words." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 4 (1996): 597-616; Partell, Peter J. and Glenn Palmer, "Audience Costs and Interstate Crises: An Empirical Assessment of Fearon's Model of Dispute Outcomes," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1999): 389–405; Schultz, Kenneth A. *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Guisinger, Alexandra and Alastair Smith. "Honest Threats: The Interaction of Reputation and Political Institutions in International Crises." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 2 (2002): 175–200; Reiter, Dan and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

The key for sending credible signals is the situation the signal is sent in (crisis or reassurance) and the attributes of the signal, along with assuming both the target and sender understand the signal objectively.

For CST, the situation affects the nature of the signaling process. In crises, states demonstrate resolve and their true bargaining position. Indeed, a majority of the literature has focused on signaling in crisis situations and how actors seek to demonstrate resolve and force a settlement short of conflict. Scholars also have studied how a state deescalates crises by signaling it is willing to reduce tensions and compromise.[38] In contrast, reassurance signaling focuses on the ability to convey benign intentions and to differentiate "type" as a defensive, security seeking state during peacetime. Reassurance signaling is in some aspects more challenging because it deals with intentions that go beyond a particular issue and refer to a longer timeline.[39] Since reassurance signaling demonstrates a state's type, the hurdles to convince the target are that much greater. Instead of demonstrating the sender's position on one issue, the sender is trying to demonstrate their overall disposition. The scale of what is being signaled complicates accurate assessment. Perhaps most challenging is the fact that intentions can change. Due to this, skeptics argue states can never be sure of an adversary's intentions and as a result no state can convincingly signal intentions.[40] These reasons make the target even more skeptical whether or not a sender is sincere. If the target misunderstands the sender, the potential implications are huge. Rather than misreading an adversary's position on an

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[38] Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, *A Study of Crisis*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Kai Quek and Alastair Johnson, "Can China Back Down? Crisis De-escalation in the Shadow of Popular Opposition," *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2017/18): 7-36.

[39] Edelstein, David M. *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Cornell University Press, 2017).

[40] Rosato, 2014/15.

issue and leading to an unwanted conflict (although with nuclear weapons the stakes are heightened), misreading an adversary's reassurance signals, by mistaking an aggressive for a benign state, can open the target up to surprise attack and potentially catastrophic threats to its survival.

2.3.1 Costly Signaling Critiques

Despite the extensive scholarship, CST remains undertheorized in a number of areas. In order to fully capture the signaling process, CST's causal logic has to be specified and re-examined. What exactly is the target assessing when they assess signals, and why would they believe some and not others? Do costs have to be paid up front like sinking cost strategies, or do policymakers accept the threat of potential future costs for failing to follow through as wish audience cost strategies?

Despite its practical and theoretical importance, there is surprisingly little evidence of the actual operation of CST's causal process. As Quek notes, "little is known on how costly signaling actually works. Causal evidence is elusive because the effect of a costly signal is almost always confounded with the effects of other previous or simultaneous information."[41] As a result, scholars have overlooked potential sources of signaling failure and success due to insufficient attention paid to the signaling process.

Recent scholarship has challenged many of the conventional wisdoms about signaling, such as cost and an objective understanding by both the target and sender. Even recent CST scholarship has found that, "the frequency of cooperation is

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[41] Quek, Kai, "Are Costly Signals More Credible? Evidence of Sender-Receiver Gaps," *The Journal of Politics* 78, no. 3 (July 2016): 925–940.

significantly lower than the model predicts, and the feasibility of reassurance is highly sensitive to the degree of prior trust."[42] CST has failed to fully specify "costs" and the threshold—other than publicly visible—that separates costly from costless signals.[43] Charles Glaser briefly attempts specifying cost by arguing, "Cost here is measured in terms of the impact on the state's ability to achieve its goals."[44] However, there is a tension between the signal being large enough and exposing the state to unacceptable levels of vulnerability, limiting the ability of states to send reassuring signals. CST then fails to address the next logical question: do costlier signals provide more information? Is there a range of costs that can affect the information sent in signals?[45] Evan Braden Montgomery notes this tension, "Small gestures that do not affect a state's capabilities are thus likely to be discounted, and gestures sufficient to convey information are likely to be dangerous if others are in fact greedy."[46] But there is a tension between accurately conveying a message and exposing the state to unacceptable levels of vulnerability.

However, like costliness, CST fails to provide a satisfactory answer as to why states and policymakers will learn the right lessons, or that it will consist of Bayesian Learning, whereby learning occurs through the gradual addition of new information.[47] Indeed, Andrew Kydd recognizes but circumvents the issue by briefly noting, "…although the learning process is noisy and prone to errors of all kinds, beliefs over

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[42] Yoder, Brandon K. and Kyle Hanes, "Signaling Under the Security Dilemma: An Experimental Analysis*." Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 4 (2021): 672-700.
[43] Rathbun, 2007: 537.
[44] Glaser, 2010: 65.
[45] Kertzer, Joshua D. "Resolve, Time, and Risk," *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (2017): 116.
[46] Montgomery, Evan Braden, "Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 158; Slantchev 2011; Biddle goes further to argue that it is impossible to signal benign intentions via military policies. See Biddle, Stephen, "Rebuilding the Foundations of Offense-Defense Theory," *The Journal of Politics* 63, no. 3 (2001): 769.
[47] Holt, Charles A. and Lisa R. Anderson, "Classroom Games: Understanding Bayes' Rule," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (1996): 179–87;

time and on average are more likely to converge towards reality than to diverge from it."[48] As James Lebovic demonstrated in his study of U.S. intelligence estimates of Soviet nuclear threat, "estimates of the Soviet threat were not uniformly biased: over multi-year periods, the United States sometimes overstates and sometimes understated the threat."[49] Therefore, as states continue to interact, there should be evidence of increased correct assessment and more cooperation.[50] Initially, states would get assessments of signals and intentions incorrect, gradually increasing their success rate over time as they gain more information on their opponent. While not specifically studied in this dissertation, there is circumstantial evidence that policymakers did not in fact learn over time by accumulating more information as Bayesian learning argues.

Since the world is objective to CST, any information sent or received is assumed to be understood in the same way. Once a signal is viewed it is then correctly assessed by the target, assuming the signal is costly. If signals are costly then it should be correctly understood, if not, it wasn't costly "enough." But the source of the cost is primarily focused on the sender, since it is the sender who decides what costs to attach and how much. This is problematic because signaling then becomes unfalsifiable. Stacie Goddard argues,

[48] Kydd, Andrew H. *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 19.

[49] Lebovic, James H. "Perception and Politics in Intelligence Assessment: U.S. Estimates of the Soviet and "Rogue-State" Nuclear Threats." *International Studies Perspectives* 10, no. 4 (2009): 395.

[50] Sartori, Anne E. "The Might of the Pen: A Reputational Theory of Communication in International Disputes." *International Organization* 56, no. 1 (2002): 121-149; Weisiger, Alex and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics." *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (2015): 473–95.

"First, neither approach explains how a signal acquires meaning: how and why its signals are interpreted as information. This would be fine if signals were truly objective and meaning was inherent, stable, and uncontested. But, in reality, action's meaning "are not self-evident, but contingent and open to interpretation."[51]

Greater attention has to be paid to how target's process what makes a signal costly or not.[52] CST leaves little room for variation in assessment on the part of the target, since the world is assumed to be viewed objectively. In reality, a "sender-receiver" gap exists, where there is a possible breakdown between what the sender believes is costly and what the target believes.[53] This is crucial because as Robert Jervis notes, leaders often assume their signals are clear and that there is only one-way to interpret them.[54] In reality, Robert Jervis argues, "often it is not clear exactly what is being revealed, what is intended to be revealed, and what others will think is being revealed."[55] Therefore, CST has to take into account both the target and sender when examining the causal process. Additionally, CST argues all information revealed through signaling is additive. That is, any new information is simply added to the previously revealed information and contributes to gradually reducing uncertainty. Thus, CST can only explain failure through some shortcoming via the sender.

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[51] Goddard, Stacie E. *When Right Makes Right: Rising Power and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018): 10-12.

[52] Keren Yarhi-Milo, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Jonathan Renshon, "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 10 (2018): 2150-2179.

[53] Quek, 2016: 925–40.

[54] Jervis, 1976: 187. Indeed, Eric Grynavinski argues the U.S. and Soviet Union were only successful in reaching agreements due to misinterpretation of the meaning of agreements and treaties. Grynaviski, Eric, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[55] Jervis, Robert. "Signaling and Perception: Drawing Inference and Projecting Images." In K. R. Monroe, ed, *Political Psychology*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002): 298.

2.3.2 Signaling Stages

The central question of this dissertation is why U.S. policymakers correctly assessed Soviet signals in some situations and not others. In this dissertation, assessment is the process by which policymakers recognize, evaluate, and ultimately come to a conclusion on whether or not to believe Soviet reassurance signals. Correct assessment refers to U.S. policymakers believing Soviet reassurance signals were genuine, and incorrect assessment refers to U.S. policymakers not believing Soviet reassurance signals were sincere. While there are some implications of the study for effectiveness of the signal and subsequent responses based on the signal, the central question and focus of the dissertation is on how and why U.S. policymakers correctly assessed Soviet signals.

To answer this question the stages of signaling must be clearly identified. There are several stages to signaling, each with distinct mechanisms. The signaling process can be described as follows:

Signal => ID => Interpretation => Assessment => Response

After the signal is sent, the first task for the target is to identify the signal. That is, the target separates the signal from other competing information. The second stage is interpretation. At this stage, the target tries to understand the specific message of the signal. The third stage, and the focus of this dissertation, is on assessment. At this stage, and described above, the target evaluates whether or not to believe the intended message of the signal. The final stage is response, where the target formulates a response to the new information provided by the signal, such as updating intentions or sending reciprocal signals. At the response stage, scholars analyze the effectiveness of the signal by studying how and why the target state responds. For example, a benign actor may update its

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assessment of an adversary's intentions and send reciprocal reassurance signals. A malign

actor, however, may correctly assess the signal but not care or decide to not act on the

new information. As such, this is a distinct and separate step from assessment, where the

target is analyzing whether or not to believe the signal is credible and sincere.

2.4   DOMESTIC POLITICAL VULNERABILITY THEORY

To address these various issues, and advance CST, I propose focusing on the

target's perception of the sender's domestic political situation. This theory contributes to

CST by bridging the sender-receiver gap through studying both the sender and receiver.

As a result, the domestic political vulnerability theory can more accurately define the

causal process and provide a better understanding of the sources of signaling success and

failure.

As I have argued, CST scholarship has overlooked a crucial aspect of cost. Even

if a sender attaches costs to its signal, target policymakers could still believe the sender

assessed the costs of sending a reassurance signal could divert those costs onto the state

or population. In such cases, target policymakers would not believe a signal is a genuine

attempt at communication. Instead, I propose whether or not the target believes the

sender leadership has risked its own political standing to send a signal is crucial to

explaining reassurance signaling outcome. If the target believes the sender risked

domestic political vulnerability by sending a signal, the target will correctly assess the

signal and sender's message. DPV argues target policymakers not only assess whether

not the signal was costly, but who bears those costs as well. As such, DPV helps fill a gap

in CST's explanations for cost and its inability to explain signaling failure other than signals not being costly enough, as described in the critique section above.

Previous literature has explored how domestic political vulnerability can often be a cause of war. The diversionary theory of war argues that in response to domestic unrest, states launch wars to distract attention of the domestic population towards external threats, thereby reducing the pressure to reform domestically or because other strategies proved ineffective.[56] Indeed, much of this literature focuses on the differences between democracies and authoritarian regimes to launch diversionary wars, especially in response to negative economic conditions.[57] Other scholars argue there is insufficient or unconvincing evidence that domestic unrest directly contributes to dispute escalation.[58]

Less focus, however, has been paid to whether or not political leaders actively foster domestic unrest to signal credibility. One exception is Jessica Chen Weiss who argues the threat of unhappy domestic constituencies allows authoritarian regimes to signal resolve in a crisis by allowing anti-foreign protests.[59] She argues that autocratic states can signal resolve by visibly cultivating and increasing domestic vulnerability by

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[56] Lebow, Richard Ned, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic: The Origins of the Falklands War," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, eds., Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985): 89-124; Gelpi, Christopher, "Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 2 (1997): 255-282; Chiozza, Giacomo and Hein Goemans, "Peace through Insecurity: Tenure and International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47 (2003): 445–46; Oakes, Amy, "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 431-463. Although supported by anecdotal evidence and select case studies, there is a lack of quantitative evidence to support the direct link between domestic unrest and external escalation. See Levy, Jack S. "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 259–288.
[57] For an extensive treatment of the literature see Fravel, M. Taylor, "The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict," *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 309.
[58] Leeds, Brett Ashley and David Davis, "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes*," Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (1997): 814–34.
[59] Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protests in China's Foreign Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

allowing "nationalist, antiforeign protests." Allowing protests signals a sender's resolve because protests are risky and can quickly spiral out of control of the government, potentially turning into antigovernment protests.[60] These protests signal to the target the sender is risking overthrow to demonstrate resolve. Jessica Chen Weiss writes, "Because nationalist protests are costly to repress and can spiral out of control…nationalist protests both convey and exacerbate an authoritarian government's vulnerability to domestic pressure."[61] Despite focusing on demonstrating resolve in a crisis, Jessica Chen Weiss' research demonstrates autocratic regimes can demonstrate credibility through the domestic political situation. This opens up avenues to explore how and why leaders could demonstrate reassurance in peacetime through the domestic political situation.

Instead of demonstrating resolve, sender policymakers send reassurance signals in peacetime by opening themselves up to domestic political vulnerability. This hypothesis argues target policymakers examine the domestic political context in which reassurance signals are sent, and assess whether or not the signal puts the sender in a domestically vulnerable position. Therefore, when a sender stakes its political interest on the successful outcome of the signal, and opens itself to domestic opposition and potentially weakens its political control, the target is more likely to assess the signal as costly. In other words, the sender needs to expend domestic political capital for the target to understand the sender's reassurance signals.

Previous CST scholarship argued that domestic cohesion leads to more credible signaling. For example, Kenneth Schultz argued that in political systems with competition and transparency, an adversary can see whether or not the governing and

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[60] Ibid, 16-19.
[61] Ibid, 4.

opposition party are aligned on a threat. Thus, when both the opposition and governing party are aligned on a signal, the target believes the sender has added credibility because both parties believe there are political benefits to carrying through with the threat.[62] In contrast, DPV is a departure from the conventional scholarship and argues less domestic cohesion leads to more credible reassurance signals. In other words, both approaches lie on a U-shaped curve where successful assessment is relative to the level of domestic cohesion: high domestic cohesion in crises and low cohesion in reassurance signaling.

Figure 2.1 U-Shaped Curve

High Cohesion   Low Cohesion

Y=Success

X=Elite Cohesion
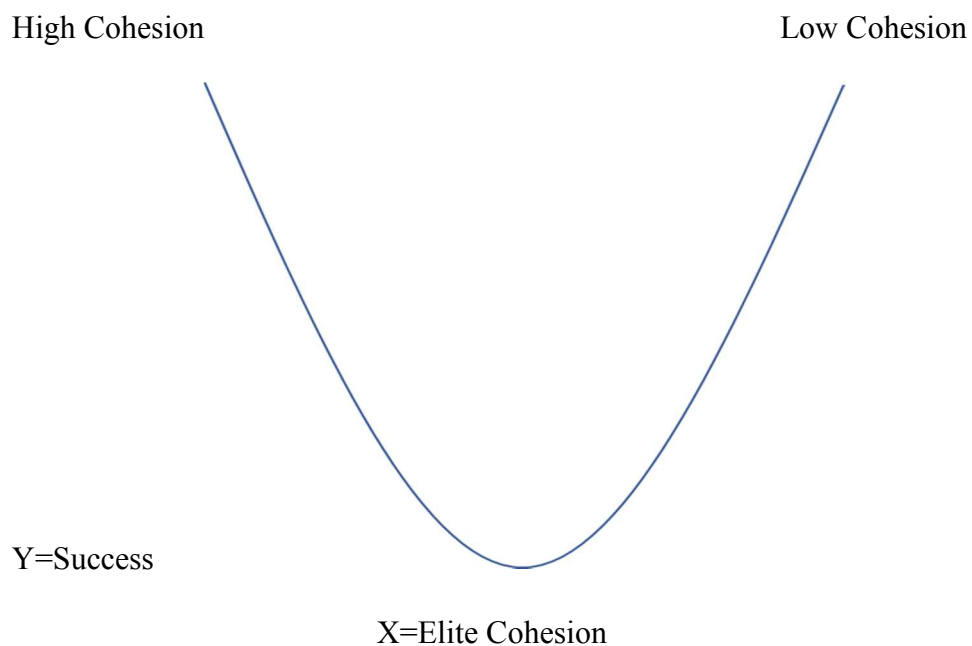
The difficulty is making sure the target can differentiate between normal political competition and competition arising from debates over the signal. One avenue to do so is to make the signal large and public. This aligns with most conventional theories of CST which argue publicity and size are important to the successful outcome of the signal. When signals are sufficiently large, the target not only has an easier time recognizing and

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[62] Schultz, (1998): 830.

identify it as a signal, but has more difficulty in dismissing the signal outright.

Additionally, when the sender commits to a large or significant signal, it forces the target to pay greater attention, including looking for debates and dissent within the sender leadership. The larger and more public the signal, the greater the likelihood that there is debate and discussion within the sender's leadership, including factions opposed to such a signal. This debate is then likely, to some degree, to be viewed by the target either through intelligence collection, negotiations with the leadership, or even through simple rumor and conjecture. Thus, with large and public signals, the target is able to clearly identify the signal and there is a greater possibility of viewing domestic infighting and dissent.

DPV acts as a bridge between sinking cost and audience cost signaling strategies by combining aspects of each. Like sinking costs, this theory forces the sender to put a down payment on its costs by exposing the sender to domestic political vulnerability before or during the signal itself. Therefore, the target is guaranteed that the sender will bear some cost for sending the signal. Like audience costs, the sender exposes themselves to domestic political blowback. This demonstrates the sender leadership cannot shift or deflect costs onto the state or population and must directly bear the costs. A leader may be willing to accept costs if most of the effects are borne by someone else, but not if they themselves are directly liable. The domestic political vulnerability theory creates expectations that the sender leadership is directly committed to ensuring the target understands the reassurance signal. And because of this commitment, unlikely to be a deceitful strategy intended to manipulate the target. Unlike audience cost strategies, however, the cost is imposed regardless and not just a potential punishment for failure to

follow through. These features—paying costs upfront and risking domestic political

repercussions—allow the sender to send credible reassurance signals.

2.4.1 Political Vulnerability

Before moving forward, I define political vulnerability and how target

policymakers evaluate it. Political vulnerability is when a leader has weakened their

control and support by angering important domestic constituencies or empowering

opposition in order to send a reassurance signal. Very few policymakers would be willing

to risk their political position unduly, especially in authoritarian regimes where leader

ouster is often violent and bloody.[63] Insights from comparative politics literature are

crucial because scholars have demonstrated the elite are often the main threat to

autocratic leaders, making maintaining elite support often an autocrat's primary

consideration. Since concessions are unpopular, they have the potential of undermining

the leaderships political position and increasing domestic opposition to their rule.

In order for the target to perceive vulnerability, the sender leadership has to

demonstrate the risks it is taking by sending reassurance signals. To do so, the target has

to appreciate the domestic political context of the sender. Some scholarship studying

diversionary war theory have proposed incorporating strategic behavior into the

argument. That is, states will assess an adversary's domestic situation and adjust their

own policies in order to not become a target for the diversionary use of force. Since

foreign leaders realize they may be scapegoats for an adversary's unpopular leadership,

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[63] Debs, Alexandre and H.E. Goemans, "Regime Type, the Fate of Leaders, and War," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010): 430-445.

they will restrain their policy decisions to avoid any justification for the use of force.[64] However, the inverse is possible. Just as observing domestic instability to avoid becoming a target, states can see domestic vulnerability as an opportunity to exploit an adversary's weakness.[65] This research demonstrates that states do in fact pay close attention to the domestic political and economic situation of their adversary, and make strategic choices based off that assessment.[66]

Yet, much of the diversionary war and IR literature focusing on domestic conditions use broad metrics such as economic growth rates, protests, terrorist attacks, or rebellions to name a few.[67] These metrics ignore the nuance and importance of political competition, elite infighting, and the support of key constituencies when defining political vulnerability. These are crucial in all regimes, but even more so in autocratic regimes, which as Milan Svolik notes, "an overwhelming majority of dictators lose power to those inside the gates of the presidential palace rather than to the masses outside."[68] But figuring out exactly who is inside those gates is often challenging. According to selectorate theory, the leaders' supporters (winning coalition) are compared to the proportion of the population nominally able to select the leader (selectorate).[69] In

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[64] Smith, Alastair, ''Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems.'' *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1996): 133–54; Fordham, Benjamin O., ''Strategic Conflict Avoidance and the Diversionary Use of Force.'' *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 1 (2005): 132–53.

[65] Foster, Dennis M. "An 'Invitation to Struggle?' The Use of Force Against 'Legislatively Vulnerable' American Presidents." *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2006): 421-444.

[66] Clark, David H., Benjamin O. Fordham, and Timothy Nordstrom, "Preying on the Misfortune of Others: When Do States Exploit Their Opponents' Domestic Troubles?" *Journal of Politics* 73, no. 1 (2011): 248-264.

[67] For example, see Miller, Ross A. "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, no. 3 (1999): 388-402; Powell, Jonathan M, "Regime vulnerability and the Diversionary Threat of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 1 (2014): 169-196.

[68] Svolik, Milan W. *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 4-5.

[69] Bueno De Mesquita, Bruce, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow. *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003).

autocratic regimes, the winning coalition relative to the selectorate, is smaller than in a democracy, meaning the leader has to maintain the support of a much smaller portion of the population. But since the winning coalition is small, autocratic leaders are much more responsive to changes in the coalition's support. If the winning coalition believes the leader is not responsive to their demands, ignores commitments, or potentially threatens their position and security, the coalition will move to oust the leader, often in very violent manners such as assassinations or coups.[70] This makes autocratic leaders very attentive to maintaining the support of the winning coalition, the elite, through a variety of methods.[71] Some scholars, such as Henry Hale, identify the need to study exactly how the regime and elite interact and change over time. Rather than seeing a regime and its support as static, scholars and practitioners need to be aware of "regime dynamics" and how "informal politics" influences whether elites fall into line or challenge the leadership.[72]

Since autocratic leaders must placate their winning coalition, they are careful to enact policies which will not anger their winning coalition or risk losing support.[73] As a

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[70] Goemans, H.E., "Which Way Out? The Manner and Consequence of Losing Office." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (2008): 771-794; Roessler, Philip, "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (2011): 300-346.

[71] Some dictators distribute economic rents Wintrobe, Ronald, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, "Cooperation, Cooptation, and Rebellion Under Dictatorships," *Economics and Politics* 18, no. 1 (2006): 1-26; conduct repression Frantz, Erica and Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "A Dictator's Toolkit: Understanding how Co-optation Affects Repression in Autocracies," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 1 (2014): 332–46; Sudduth, Jun Koga, "Strategic Logic of Elite Purges in Dictatorships," *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 13 (2017): 1768-1801; or create power sharing agreements by creating legislatures or other institutions Gandhi, Jennifer. *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Magaloni, Beatriz, "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4/5 (2008): 715-741.

[72] Hale, Henry E. *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 7-10.

[73] An issue is how generalizable the theory is across types of authoritarian regimes. There is a large literature on the variety of autocratic regimes, including how stable they are and the extent to which they allow for managed competition. Since my cases come from multiple periods during the Cold War, the Soviet Union exhibited a variety of different autocratic regime attributes. At some times the leadership was more personalistic, such as during Khrushchev, and others more committee based, such as during Brezhnev. As such, I believe this theory applies to all autocratic regimes except consolidated personalistic

result, when leaders do enact policies which could undermine their support or control, it is seen as a strong sign of support by the leader for that policy. Domestic political vulnerability is a situation where the leader is in a weakened political position. The leader has weakened their control over domestic politics, either from losing support of key constituencies or emboldening political opposition, and is more susceptible to challenges or pressure from the elite. The leader has accepted increased domestic instability and a loss of control in exchange for demonstrating their support and commitment to the policy. As Jessica Chen Weiss argued, "It is because nationalist protests are difficult to control and can easily turn against the government that nationalist protests constrain the government's diplomatic options."[74] Therefore, domestic political vulnerability is when a leader weakens its control over the domestic political process. Control in this context refers to the level of political challenge in a country. If leaders have high levels of control, then they face limited opposition and are in little danger of being challenged or overthrown. If the leader has poor control, then there are multiple competing sources of power who threaten the leader's position. This does not mean the leader loses all control, simply that their control is weaker than prior to enacting a policy. Elites, interest groups, and aspiring challengers are all able to operate with more freedom and less fear of repercussions since the leader has weakened their control. This does not mean actors turn to outright opposition, but they are given more agency to operate independently from the leader. Weakened political support from key interest groups is one example of a leader's

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regimes. Consolidated personalistic regimes are personified by an individual leader who wields total and uncontested control over domestic political, economic, and social life. In such regimes, all potential competing sources of power or winning coalitions have been eradicated. In such a situation there are no institutions to constrain the leader, and thus no ability to weaken domestic control. See Colgan, Jeff D. and Jessica L.P. Weeks, "Revolution, Personalist Dictatorships, and International Conflict," *International Organization* 69, no. 1 (2015): 163-194.

[74] Chen Weiss, 2014: 4.

weakened control. This is why it is important to study relations between a leader and the elite as a dynamic, iterative process as Henry Hale described. Politics, control, and political support are not static metrics and must be carefully assessed to understand how domestic processes can affect signaling outcomes.

However, a winning coalition or elite is inevitably not one coherent body, but often a series of competing power centers, factional interests, and personalities. This means in any situation, potential cleavages exist not just between the leadership and winning coalition, but the leadership and multiple factions within the winning coalition. For example, the leadership may enact a policy which the military supports. In this scenario, the leadership would not have increased their domestic political vulnerability because the military also agreed with the policy. But the military is not the only actor. The leadership has to contend with other members of the leadership, business elites, religious or ideological competitors, and members of the security and/or intelligence services. In such a chaotic political environment, it is unlikely that all actors will agree with the leadership's policies. Inevitably, to enact a radical policy similar to a reassurance signal, the leadership will reduce their control over domestic politics by angering some constituency.

2.4.2   Demonstrating Political Vulnerability

In contrast to previous studies of signaling domestic vulnerability, the key mechanism is the target policymaker's *perception* of domestic vulnerability. Therefore, the exposure of the sender to domestic political vulnerability has to be large and visible enough for the target to identify. The target has to believe that there is a plausible chance

that the sender's control over the domestic political situation was weakened as a result of the signal. This means the sender has to demonstrate the sender is risking the domestic status quo to send reassurance signals of benign intent. For example, the sender cancels numerous military programs or reduces the size of the defense budget by such an amount that any observer could believe that the military's bureaucratic interests are threatened as a result. Another example is if the sender agreed to negotiations or settlements which were previously rejected or identified as contra to the ruling ideology or state dogma. Perhaps even more credible is for the sender to cede to specific target demands, often unilaterally. This action potentially opens the leader up to criticism for being too weak on the adversary or a poor negotiator. Regardless of strategy, the target has to identify that the sender's choice to send the reassurance signal directly challenges key domestic interests or has significant opposition from crucial constituencies in the regime.

Therefore, senders have to demonstrate they are reducing their control over the competing pressures, interest groups, and centers of powers vying for leadership. This is similar to the "bold gesture" described by Shahin Berenji where leaders, "initiate conciliation through a single, dramatic act" despite the "severity of the risks."[75] It is the severity of the risks that distinguishes the signal. However, instead of simply accepting a higher degree of risk, the domestic political vulnerability theory argues policymakers accept a different kind of risk. In some cases, the sender does not intentionally create domestic vulnerability, but understands the risks and decides to send the signal regardless. In others, leaders have more agency and seek to leverage their domestic exposure to the target—such as during negotiations. To expose themselves to domestic

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[75] Berenji, Shahin, "Sadat and the Road to Jerusalem: Bold Gesture and Risk Acceptance in the Search for Peace," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020), pp. 127-163.

political vulnerability, sender policymakers give room for those groups and pressures to undermine and even threaten their political leadership. The sender does this by sending a signal which threatens the interests of key constituencies, such as the military, or can be used by political opponents to attack the leader. A central component is the sender demonstrating it has exposed itself to domestic vulnerability in order to send the signal. Additionally, it demonstrates that the leader is directly taking on the cost of the signal, and not pushing it onto the state or the population.

However, this is distinctly separate from the perception that domestic weakness *forced* the sender into sending signals. Target policymakers have to believe the sender is risking domestic political vulnerability to send the signal, not acting as a result of previously existing vulnerability. If the sender has nothing to risk and is already in a compromised situation, then the target has no reason to believe the sender is doing anything other than acting out of necessity. The target is then more likely to believe the signal is a bargaining maneuver in response to negative domestic or international conditions instead of a reflection of sender intent. For example, the target could believe the reassurance signal is intended to buy time or allow the sender to redirect funds to more advantageous sectors, regions, or issues. This means the signal really does not reflect the sender's true intent and could use using these redirected funds to become more aggressive and dangerous in the future.

The sender must also be careful not to accept too much vulnerability. If the sender overexposes themselves to domestic vulnerability, the target may believe that the sender is likely to be overthrown, meaning any signal would likely be temporary and reversed with a new leadership. Even if the target believes the signal is genuine, the target may

ignore the signal because of concerns the sender leadership may be overthrown or unable to follow through on the signal due to their weakened political position. This is similar to Evan Braden Montgomery's point noted above, where the sender must balance costs between demonstrating credibility and exposing the state to unacceptable risk.[76] The trick is accepting enough vulnerability to demonstrate sincerity to the target, but not so much that the target perceives the sender may be overthrown and ignore the reassurance signal, even if the target believes it is genuine.

It is theoretically possible that the sender manipulates the target into overestimating the level of domestic political vulnerability. In this situation, the target may misjudge how sincere the sender is, allowing the sender to gain an advantage. Essentially, the sender increases the image of domestic vulnerability relative to the actual level. However, that is a risky strategy for any leader to play. As Jessica Chen Weiss argues, the credibility of signals comes from the risk of domestic forces spiraling out of control.[77] As a result, manipulating domestic vulnerability is an unattractive and potentially uncontrollable option for a leader. Moreover, domestic vulnerability is not a precise equation that can be increased or decreased depending on the situation. Once a leader relaxes control, it can set in motion events or conditions whose effects will be felt long after the situation has passed. All these aspects make manipulating domestic political vulnerability for bargaining advantage highly unlikely.

Complicating the issue is how the target perceives and evaluates domestic political vulnerability. Even if the sender is risking domestic vulnerability, it may not match with the target's perception of what makes a leader vulnerable. Due to its

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[76] Montgomery, 2006.
[77] Chen Weiss, 2014: 16-19.

inherently subjective nature, assessments of vulnerability can and do change over time and across situations. Therefore, it is important that the target recognize the political situation in which the sender operates, especially if it is different from the target. Nevertheless, all political leaders recognize certain attributes. For the target, the most important condition to recognize is the sender's weakening control over domestic political processes. This can manifest in a range of situations (but not so great as to threaten the overthrow of the leader and thereby undermine the signal) but generally fall into the two conditions described above: angering important constituencies the leadership relies on for support (winning coalition) or emboldening opposition (by allowing greater freedom of action, a reduced fear of repercussions, or a combination of both).

_Hypothesis 1__: U.S. policymakers will believe Soviet signals when U.S. policymakers perceive Soviet leaders faced domestic political vulnerability for sending costly signals. Policymakers will not believe Soviet signals if they do not perceive Soviet leaders faced domestic political vulnerability._

To test this hypothesis, I specifically look for evidence that U.S. policymakers sought, paid attention to, and evaluated Soviet domestic political conditions when assessing whether or not to believe Soviet reassurance signals. U.S. policymakers should pay attention to whether or not they believe the signal is costly to the Soviet leadership. If this hypothesis is correct, there should be evidence U.S. policymakers actively look for indicators of Soviet domestic political conditions, specifically the standing of the Soviet leadership and any other competing sources of political influence. Specifically, that U.S. policymakers assess the Soviet leadership's control over domestic politics and if Soviet signals possibly resulted in a weakened political situation for the leadership. This means there should be evidence that U.S. policymakers understand the Soviet Union is not a

totalitarian dictatorship, and that the Soviet leaders must manage domestic politics. Examples include assessing whether or not signals go against entrenched domestic interests, such as the military, or represent a shift in Soviet policy and potentially expose the Soviet leader to accusations of undermining Soviet legitimacy or caving to U.S. pressure. Additionally, attention should be paid to how the signal affects the Soviet leadership, and not just the power or relative standing of the Soviet Union to the United States. Further evidence would include U.S. policymakers examining whether or not the Soviet leadership did in fact receive domestic pushback after sending the reassurance signal. If there is evidence the Soviet leadership dealt with increasing dissent and dissatisfaction with at least some set of elites, then this is evidence that the leadership was in fact genuine, and should be reflected in U.S. policymaker assessments.

2.5   ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

2.5.1   Dispositional Theory

One compelling alternative explanation is a policymaker's assessment of the sender's disposition. Dispositional views are the target's images of what "type" of actor its opponent is. That means emphasizing the individual traits which define their opponent's interests and likely actions. Dispositional perceptions create expectations in the minds of policymakers, resulting in their resistance to actions that are contra to those expectations. These traits exist outside of the situation, and are indicators of the probabilities of specific actions. Dispositional views are also sticky, and unlikely to be

altered by signals that challenge perception of what actions are likely given their opponent's type, thus "people perceive what they expect to be present."[78]

CST's focus on the situational dynamics overlooks a potentially crucial aspect of signaling, the target's image of the sender.[79] From this perspective, the target's dispositional views of the sender affect its assessment of the signal's credibility.[80] Instead of the signals themselves, the target focuses on who they believe the sender is and whether or not the signal corresponds with their image of the sender.[81] Dispositional perceptions create expectations in the minds of policymakers, resulting in their resistance to actions, and therefore signals, that are contra to those expectations. Thus, instead of updating beliefs as they acquire more information as costly signaling suggests, this hypothesis argues that policymakers will only incorporate information that conforms to their pre-existing views.

Hypothesis 2*: U.S. policymakers do not believe Soviet signals when a signal does not correspond with their pre-existing dispositional views of the USSR. U.S. policymakers will believe Soviet signals when those signals correspond with their pre-existing dispositional views of the USSR.*

To test this hypothesis, I establish the dispositional views of key U.S. policymakers towards the USSR prior to signaling. In order to establish these baseline views, I ask a series of questions to act as indicators, including: whether the Soviet Union

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[78] Jervis, 1976: 68.
[79] Mercer, 1996.
[80] Herrmann, Richard, "The Power of Perceptions in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: Do Views of the Soviet Union Determine the Policy Choices of American Leaders?," *American Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 4 (1986): 841-875; Herrmann, Richard and Michael P. Fischerkeller, "Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model: Cognitive-Strategic Research after the Cold War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 415–50; Murray, Shoon Kathleen and Jonathan A. Cowden, "The Role of 'Enemy Images' and Ideology of Elite Belief Systems," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1999): 455–81; Brutger, Ryan and Joshua D. Kertzer, "A Dispositional Theory of Reputation Costs," *International Organization* 72, no. 03 (2018): 693–724.
[81] Holsti, Ole R. "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy," *Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 1, (1967): 16–39; Jervis 2002: 307

driven by a rigid adherence to communist ideology; whether the Soviets viewed the use of force as their first and primary means of statecraft; and whether the Soviets reacted better to stronger displays of US force or were more amendable to diplomatic responses? I use this information to code whether or not officials believe the Soviets are either (1) revisionist ideologues who cannot be trusted, or (2) pragmatic rationalists who can be negotiates with. The officials selected will depend on the case, but include the President, Secretary of State, National Security Advisor (or key foreign policy advisor), and Secretary of Defense. In accordance with the literature on leaders' beliefs, I rely on individual policymakers' personal testimonies, articles, and publications written prior to office, as well as the secondary literature, to provide an assessment of their pre-existing views about the Soviet Union. I am not concerned with how they came to those views, merely that they hold them at the beginning of the cases.

If the sender sends signals that coincide with the target's view of its adversary, the probabilities of a successful outcome increase. If the signal challenges the belief framework of the receiver towards the sender, it is unlikely that the signal will be able to alter the perception and lead to signaling success. Instead of updating beliefs as they acquire more information as costly signaling suggests, this hypothesis argues policymakers will only incorporate information that conforms to pre-existing views. Accordingly, costly signals that convey intentions that *confirm* policymakers' dispositional views will be correctly assessed, while those conveying intentions that run *counter* to those views will be incorrectly assessed.

2.5.2 Face-to-Face Theory

Recent neurological and psychological studies emphasize the importance of direct leader to leader contact on the outcome of negotiations and demonstrating intentions.[82] This scholarship argues each leader draws inferences from the personal connections they make, or fail to make, with an adversary's leader, which subsequently affects signaling outcome.[83] Scholars such as Keren Yarhi-Milo and Marcus Holms argue the personal connection between leaders is an important factor in overcoming many of the psychological barriers which impede communication.[84] For Holmes, face to face contact allows each leader to empathize with the other, and this empathy acts as a signaling mechanism that stimulates neurological activity in the brain.[85] Others such as Nicholas Wheeler, argue direct communication is crucial for the building of trust.[86] To these authors, trust is often the crucial component to credible signaling and communication. Nevertheless, CST dismisses such personal impressions as "cheap talk" and do not affect signaling outcome. Since such face-to-face negotiations do not necessarily entail any costs, there is no penalty for deceiving, bluffing, or failing to follow through on commitments.

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[82] Hall, Todd H., and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Personal Touch: Leaders' Impressions, Costly Signaling, and Assessments of Sincerity in International Affairs," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2012): 560-573.

[83] Yarhi-Milo, 2014; Wong, Seanon S. "Emotions and the Communication of Intentions in Face-to-Face Diplomacy," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2016): 144-167.

[84] Holmes, Marcus and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Psychological Logic of Peace Summits: How Empathy Shapes Outcomes of Diplomatic Negotiations," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2017): 107-122.

[85] Holmes, Marcus, "The Force of Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Mirror Neurons and the Problem of Intentions," *International Organization* 67, no. 4 (2003): 829-861.

[86] Wheeler, 2018.

For this theory, direct personal communication is a crucial component of successful signaling. It is important not only what policymakers say, but how they say it. With leaders connecting on a personal level, they are able to build a personal bond with their adversary, and whether through the building of trust or emotions, able to correctly gauge their intentions. This is not to say personal impressions are the sole factor in determining sincerity, but that direct communications between leaders can act as another, and often powerful, source of information on the sender's sincerity. These impressions, however, have the potential of reinforcing negative views and inhibiting successful assessment. For example, Todd Hall and Keren Yarhi-Milo find that Kennedy's and Khrushchev's 1961 Vienna Summit contributed to negative views between the leaders.[87]

Hypothesis 3: *U.S. policymakers will believe Soviet signals when there is face-to-face interaction between the leaders. U.S. policymakers will not believe Soviet signals when there is no face-to-face interaction.*

Establishing the presence and impact of personal impressions is difficult, however, due to the lack of quantifiable indicators or metrics to assess across large numbers of cases. Therefore, to establish the presence and importance of face-to-face impressions I use careful qualitative research, including using in-depth archival research of primary source documents. This approach allows me to identify if leaders cited personal impressions when assessing signals and credibility. Additionally, it can help evaluate the level to which leaders relied on these personal interactions relative to other sources of evidence. To evaluate the role of face-to-face interactions, I included cases with and without direct face-to-face interactions between U.S. Presidents and Soviet General Secretaries. By focusing only on direct, high-level talks, I exclude lower-level

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[87] Hall and Yarhi-Milo, 2012: 571.

interactions between policymakers (such as Secretaries of State and Foreign Ministers) which were a common and routine feature of diplomacy. This allows me to isolate the impact of direct personal relations between the leaders, and not routine negotiating and diplomatic contact.

2.5.3   Observable Implications

In summary, if DPV is correct, there should be evidence U.S. policymakers paid attention to internal Soviet political dynamics and evaluated whether sending the reassurance signal exposed the leadership to increased levels of political vulnerability. Supporting evidence includes concerns that domestic conditions forced the Soviets into sending signals, or that the signals were too large and exposed the Soviet leadership to potentially fatal levels of vulnerability. For the dispositional theory, there should be evidence of policymakers relying on pre-existing dispositional views of the Soviet Union, and that those views influenced their willingness or accept or discard information. Policymakers should primarily focus on the type of actor they believe the Soviet Union to be and ignore the attributes of signals. For the face-to-face theory, successful assessment of Soviet signals should be largely determined on the basis of whether or not there was contact between leaders. Signaling outcome should be easily observable on whether or not the leaders had direct contact and were able to convey their messages.

2.6   CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I laid out my theory of domestic political vulnerability and why it provides a more complete picture of the signaling process. I also described why focusing on reassurance signaling is crucial to advancing our understanding of signaling success and failure. CST has failed to fully capture the signaling process by focusing primarily on the sender as the source of signaling success or failure. In response, careful qualitative research is required to study the causal process, evaluate the causal mechanisms, and evaluate competing explanations. Moreover, by studying reassurance signaling, this dissertation tests crucial assumptions of CST.

The implications of this theory are fourfold. First, this theory describes why studies of signaling should increasingly incorporate both the sender and target into studies. Focusing on only the sender or target ignores half of the process and can overlook crucial conditions that contribute to signaling outcome. To understand variation in signaling outcome, scholars have to look inside both the sender and target state to study how and why policymakers assess signals in certain ways. Second, this project expands how scholars and practitioners understand and assess costs. Instead of purely being an attribute of the signal, this dissertation argues policymakers take into account exactly who is bearing that cost. Regardless of how "costly" a signal is, often a more important question is who is bearing that cost and can those costs be displaced onto the state or population. Third, the focus on reassurance signaling during peacetime brings much needed attention to a signaling condition that has gotten less attention until recently. Studying reassurance signaling during peacetime is crucial because it helps scholars investigate key sources of debate on whether or not states can convey intentions.

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Finally, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of qualitative methodology to validate many of the insights from quantitative or game theoretical approaches. Without qualitative methodology's ability to carefully investigate and explore the causal process, studies of signaling would not be able to fully explain variation in signaling present in the historical record.

In the following chapters I test this theory against nine case studies in three empirical chapters. Each empirical chapter covers a different signaling strategy, and includes cases of both signaling success and failure. For each case, I provide background on the overall relationship between the United States and Soviet Union, establish Soviet intentions, and provide descriptions of U.S. policymaker dispositional views of the USSR. In each case I evaluate the evidence against the alternative hypotheses, and generally find support for the argument that target policymaker perception of sender domestic political vulnerability influenced signaling outcome. The empirical chapters proceed as follows. Chapter Three examines strategic arms control negotiations during the Cold War. Chapter Four evaluates Soviet Union troop reductions. Chapter Five analyzes agreements intended to reduce the risk of escalation and to standardize the bilateral relationship. Chapter Six concludes by reviewing this dissertation's arguments, findings, academic and policy contributions, as well as avenues for further research.

3.0   CHAPTER THREE: STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL REASSURANCE

SIGNALING

During a 1967 speech, Robert McNamara spoke about the role of technology and the arms race. But it was not just technology and the destructive power of nuclear weapons that drove such an unstable, competitive relationship with the Soviets, he argued, it was the lack of information regarding intentions. "If we had more accurate information about planned Soviet strategic forces, we simply would not have needed to build as large of a nuclear force as we have today."[1] CST would agree with McNamara that a lack of information is the primary driver of miscalculation and conflict.

To send signals, one strategy to attach costs is through tying hands. Tying hands is a strategy where the costs are imposed should the sender fail to follow through on commitments; such as resuming arms races, or gaining a reputation as a greedy state. Therefore, due to the inherent risks of negotiating over nuclear weapons, states will only engage in negotiations if they are sincere and committed to arms control. A revisionist/greedy state could be interested in arms control, but only so far as to minimize future expected disadvantages. In contrast, agreeing to a wide ranging and comprehensive agreement—or an agreement that would deal with areas of advantage for the sender— demonstrates defensive orientations and a willingness to sacrifice potential advantage.

In this chapter, I examine the success and failure of the U.S. to assess Soviet tying hands signals over nuclear arms control. According to CST, one strategy of

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[1] McNamara, Robert S. *The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968): 58.

demonstrating benign intentions is by engaging in arms control. Through limiting the ability to conduct offensive operations, senders can demonstrate benign and status quo intentions. As Charles Glaser notes, "arms control agreements that limit both countries' current or future abilities to perform offensive missions communicate a lack of greed, since a greedy state sees greater value in offensive missions."[2] As a result, nuclear arms control can reduce the intensity of arms races and the risk of inadvertent escalation. Therefore, states engage in nuclear arms control negotiations to demonstrate their defensive and benign intentions. Yet, the costs of incorrect assessment can be potentially catastrophic.[3] States are therefore unwilling to give up capabilities that are essential to its survival.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union tried numerous times to signal its interest in arms control by sending tying hands signals. In this chapter, I examine one case of failed U.S. signal assessment—Soviet May 10,1955 Proposal—and two cases of successful U.S. assessment—SALT I and SALT II. Since all three cases meet or exceed CST's expectations of costly arms control proposals, the fact there is variation in signaling outcome suggests there is some other variable affecting whether or not U.S. policymakers believe Soviet signals. As the theory chapter described, the domestic vulnerability thesis predicts that policymakers will believe Soviet signals when they perceive Soviet leaders were risking their own domestic political standing to negotiate with the United States. In those cases, U.S. policymakers will believe the Soviets are genuine and sending sincere reassurance signals.

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[2] Glaser, Charles L. "The Security Dilemma Revisited." *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997): 181.
[3] Andrew J. Coe and Jane Vaynman, "Why Arms Control is So Rare," *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020): 342-355.

3.1   MAY 10, 1955 SIGNAL: INCORRECT ASSESSMENT

The Soviet May 10, 1955 disarmament proposal is a most likely case for CST. In November 1953, the UN created a subcommittee of the U.S., Soviet Union, U.K., France and Canada to negotiate a comprehensive disarmament agreement. The most advanced proposal came in 1954 with a joint Anglo-French proposal calling for the establishment of an international monitoring body to oversee the gradual disarmament of conventional forces and nuclear weapons.[4] On September 30, 1954, Soviet Ambassador to the U.N., Andrei Vyshinsky, announced that the USSR was willing to negotiate on the basis of the Anglo-French memorandum of June 11, 1954. However, this statement was retracted in February, only to be expanded and stated clearly in the May 10, 1955 disarmament proposals.[5] The Soviet proposal was nearly identical to the Anglo-French proposal a year earlier the Soviets had rejected.[6] Nevertheless, the Eisenhower administration incorrectly assessed the Soviet signal as a bargaining maneuver and did not believe the Soviets were sending real reassurance signals.

There is some limited support for the domestic political vulnerability theory. If DPV was correct, U.S. policymakers should have devoted more attention to why the Soviets were willing to make such a significant offer after turning down previous Western efforts only a few years before? One would expect U.S. policymakers to actively seek out information regarding the nature of the new Kremlin leadership and for signs of potential infighting and domestic vulnerability. However, in this case, a perception

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[4] Department of State, *Documents on Disarmament, 1945-1959*, (Volume I, Washington D.C., 1960): 423-424.
[5] Department of State, 1960: 456-467.
[6] Blechman, Barry M., and Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament, 1954-1964*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1966): 22-23.

weakness forced the Soviets into sending signals negatively affected assessment. Since U.S. policymakers believed the USSR was in a weak domestic and international position, any reassurance signal was not a sign of benign intent but rather a manipulative ploy.

This case finds support for the alternative dispositional hypothesis, demonstrating how difficult it was for the Soviet leadership to overcome skeptical dispositional assessments held by U.S. policymakers. The Eisenhower administration assessed the Soviet May 10 signal as a tactical bargaining maneuver and propaganda ploy and did not believe it represented a sincere demonstration of Soviet benign intentions. Fears over the trajectory of Soviet technological change reinforced negative dispositional assessments, and focused the Eisenhower administration on verification and inspection against potential Soviet cheating. Moreover, it demonstrates the effect of advisors on the President, as Eisenhower initially correctly assessed the Soviet signal, but was convinced by Radford and Dulles' dispositional arguments to alter his assessment. In large part, this was bolstered by a perception that Soviet leaders were not risking anything, and could make offers because any costs could be easily displaced onto the state and population without affecting the stability of the Soviet leadership.

The case study begins with a brief background section to give context to previous Soviet proposals, as well as U.S. debates over disarmament, nuclear, and Soviet policy. Understanding the debates within the Eisenhower administration in the period leading up to the May 10 proposal is crucial to appreciate the context of the assessment. It continues with a section describing Soviet intentions, demonstrating that the May 10 signal was sincere and costly reassurance signal. The next section briefly describes the key policymakers' (President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Arthur Radford) dispositional views of the Soviets.

The final section uses process tracing to understand the incorrect assessment the Soviet

May 10 proposal, and subsequent negotiations at the Geneva heads of state conference.

Table 3.1 May 10th Case Outcomes

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Limited
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	Yes
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there has been direct contact between the leadership	None

3.1.1   Context and Background

Eisenhower came into office with arguably the most foreign policy experience of

any president.[7] With this experience came a contempt for the Truman administration's

handling of foreign policy, specifically towards the Soviet Union. In response, he set

about creating a structured, ordered, and coordinated system for debating and

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[7] Ambrose, Stephen E. *Eisenhower: The President, 1952–1969,* 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984); Divine, Robert A., *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Hitchcock, 2018; Smith-Norris, Martha, "The Eisenhower Administration and the Nuclear Test Ban Talks, 1958-1960: Another Challenge to Revisionism," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 4 (2003): 504-506.

implementing foreign policy.[8] During Eisenhower's first term Soviet-American relations

also underwent dramatic transformations. On March 5, 1953 Stalin died, making the

leadership and direction of the Soviet Union an open question.[9] All of this was occurring

as the Eisenhower administration was conducting an extensive evaluation of its nuclear

and Soviet policies. Stalin's death injected a further level of uncertainty into these

debates as the Eisenhower administration tried to assess the new Soviet leadership.

While the Soviet leadership moved quickly to appoint Deputy Chairman of the

Council of Ministers Georgy Malenkov to replace Stalin, it was unclear what

policymaking would look like in his absence.[10] Due to leadership infighting, most

intelligence assessments predicted that the Soviets would continue the current foreign

policy line and not undertake dramatic changes, "the new Soviet leadership will almost

certainly pursue the foreign and domestic policies established during recent years. In

particular it will probably continue to emphasize unremitting hostility to the West." [11] Yet

it was soon clear that Stalin's heirs were not committed to Stalin's policies and

recognized a need for change in foreign policy.[12] Shortly after his death, the Soviet Union

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[8] Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL), White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-61, NSC Series, Administrative Subseries A67-50 & A67-64, Box No. 6, National Security Council-Organization and Functions [March 1953] (6), "Robert Cutler, Memorandum for the President: Recommendations Regarding National Security Council, 7 March 1953."; Greenstein, Fred I. and Richard Immerman, "Effective National Security Advising: Recovering the Eisenhower Legacy," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (2000): 335-345. Nelson, Anna Kasten, "The 'Top of Policy Hill': President Eisenhower and the National Security Council." *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 4 (1983): 307–26.
[9] Knight, Amy, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 176-180; Montefiore, Simon Sebag, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003): 555-577; Taubman, William, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004): 236-240.
[10] Richter, 1994: 30-46; Bialer, Seweryn, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[11] SE 39, *Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and of the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR* 3-8, CIA (12 March 1953).
[12] Mackintosh, John Malcolm, *Strategy and Tactics of Soviet Foreign Policy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963): 72-76; Larson, Deborah Welch, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2000): 44-46; Zubok, 2009: 98-101.

attempted to demonstrate goodwill and called for negotiations with the U.S. in what became known as Malenkov's "Peace Offensive."[13]

Stalin's death and Malenkov's "peace offensive" complicated the Eisenhower administration's attempts to structure its deterrent posture and reduce the size of the military and defense spending. Uncertain over the direction the new Soviet leaders would take, Eisenhower was shocked to find that the U.S. had little to no estimate of what could happen once Stalin died.[14] Both the State Department and the intelligence community expected a continuation of Stalin era foreign policies and the new leadership to avoid any radical changes in policy. Allen Dulles noted in an April 8, 1953 NSC meeting, "there were quite shattering departures…from the policies of the Stalin regime. The Soviet peace offensive had come much earlier and was being pursued much more systematically than the CIA had expected."[15] The prevailing view in the U.S. government was that Malenkov's speech and the "peace offensive" were meant as a propaganda ploy to paint the U.S. as an aggressor if it rejected Soviet offers.[16] At best the Soviets were merely correcting misguided policy rather than genuine signals.[17] Additionally, Foster Dulles' main priority was creating the European Defense Community (EDC), and feared negotiations with the Soviets would undercut his efforts by reducing the Soviet threat.[18]

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[13] Although some like Vojtech Mastny question the seriousness of these proposals because of the nature of the Soviet system. See Mastny, Vojtech, "The Elusive Détente: Stalin's Successors and the West," In Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* Rowman & Littlefield, 2006: 3-26.

[14] Bowie, Robert R., and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 109.

[15] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, 139th Meeting of NSC, April 8 1953.

[16] Raymond L. Garthoff, *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991): 9-10.

[17] Larson, 2000: 47, 59.

[18] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, 139th Meeting of NSC, April 8 1953; Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 115; Osgood, Kenneth, "The Perils of Coexistence: Peace and

Yet, Eisenhower wanted to see if Soviet leaders "were really changing their outlook, and accordingly whether some kind of modus vivendi might not at long last prove possible."[19] To do so the Soviets needed to take actions—such as costly signals.[20] On April 16, President Eisenhower delivered his "Chance for Peace" Speech in front of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He argued peace required actions, and listed a serious of steps the Soviets could take to credibly demonstrate its intentions:[21]

> Look, I am tired—and I think everyone is tired—of just plain indictments of the Soviet regime. I think it would be wrong—in fact, asinine—for me to get up before the world now to make another one of those indictments. Instead, just one thing matters: what have we got to offer the world? What are we ready to do, to improve the chances of peace? If we cannot say these things—A, B, C, D, E, F, G, just like that—then we really have nothing to give, except just another speech. For what? Malenkov isn't going to be frightened with speeches. What are we trying to achieve?[22]

It was clear that while the administration was not willing to take the Soviets at its word, Eisenhower was open the possibility of the Soviets sending costly signals to demonstrate its sincere intentions.

U.S. disarmament policy at the time of Eisenhower's election was spelled out in NSC 112, approved by the Truman administration on July 19, 1952. NSC 112 described U.S. policy as reducing arms so that preemptive war would be ineffective, although it failed to specify what threshold would achieve this goal, and that international control over nuclear weapons and inspection was essential.[23] More importantly, in January 1953, Eisenhower received the findings of an eight-month long study commissioned by

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Propaganda in Eisenhower's Foreign Policy." In Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 32.
[19] Leffler, 2007: 105.
[20] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, Memorandum of Meeting of NSC, 136th Meeting of NSC, March 11, 1953.
[21] Leffler, 2007: 106-109; Dulles gave a speech to the same audience two days later in a far stronger tone arguing the U.S. would not let its guard down against the Soviets.
[22] Rostow, Walt Whitman. *Europe after Stalin: Eisenhower's Three Decisions of March 11, 1953*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982: 54-55; Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 120-121.
[23] Evangelista, Matthew. "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s." *World Politics* 42, no. 04 (1990): 515.

Secretary of State Acheson of previous negotiations and likely options for future

disarmament negotiations.[24] The Oppenheimer Panel, as it came to be known, argued the

Soviets had not seriously engaged in arms control negotiations since 1946, and that the

UN Disarmament Commission was largely a forum for propaganda. Even with the

negative findings, the Commission recognized that the danger of nuclear weapons meant

that the U.S. had to continue trying to find a way to minimize the spiraling arms race, in

addition to avoid being painted by the Soviets as obstructionist without offering any

specific proposals.[25]

3.1.2   Soviet Intentions

In the wake of Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet leadership moved quickly to

ensure a stable transfer of power. Georgy Malenkov assumed the role of Chairman, but

his control was never solidified as members jockeyed for power.[26] While most of the

leadership agreed that a dramatic change in Stalinist foreign and domestic policies were

required, advancing changes too quickly exposed them to criticism and accusations of

treason.[27] The new leadership realized that an increase in the standard of living and

increasing industrial capacity was imperative. To do so, the Soviets needed to relax

tensions with the West to allow the importation of technology and to divert resources into

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[24] "Report by the Panel of Consultants of the Department of State to the Secretary of State, January 1953."
FRUS, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Vol. II, Part 2, Disarmament files, lot 58 D 133,
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p2/d67; Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 223;
Bundy, 1988: 288.
[25] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 223-224.
[26] Haslam, Jonathan, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 2011): 136-141; Rubenstein, Joshua. *The Last Days of Stalin.* (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 2016): 22-30.
[27] Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War.*
(NY: Hill and Wang, 2007): 85-95.

domestic consumption. This became the primary driver behind new Premier Georgy Malenkov's "peace offensive."[28]

Due to nuclear weapons, Malenkov believed that war was unthinkable, and that there were realists within the western camp which were capable of negotiation. He believed Soviet overtures could prompt those realistic forces to compromise with the Soviet Union. During Stalin's funeral on March 9, 1953 Malenkov laid out a new Soviet "policy of struggle against the preparation of a new war, a policy of co-operation and the development of business-like relations between all countries…" Which was followed a few days later with a speech to the Supreme Soviet on March 15, 1953 (and reprinted the next day in *Pravda*) calling on the U.S. to enter into negotiations and establish new relations with the Soviet Union—specifically over the status of Germany and nuclear weapons.[29] However, this challenged many of the orthodox understandings of the struggle between the socialist and capitalist forces driving world politics.[30]

Already by April 1954 Malenkov was under constant criticism from the elite, prodded by Nikita Khrushchev, and his power waned and was forced to resign in February 1955. By the time of Malenkov's resignation, Khrushchev was articulating his own foreign policy views now that he had increased his leadership position. As James

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[28] Richter, James G, *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 37-41.

[29] Dallin, David J, *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin*. (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1961): 125-127, 138; Kramer, Mark, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 3)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, No. 3 (1999): 3-66; Geoffrey, Roberts, "A Chance for Peace? The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953-1955." *CWIHP Working Paper* No. 57 (2008): 4.

[30] Zubok, Vladislav M., and Hope M. Harrison, "Nuclear Education of Nikita Khrushchev," in *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945*, ed. John Lewis Gaddis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 144-145; "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Morning," January 31, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 2, op. 1, d. 127. Obtained for CWIHP and translated by Vladislav Zubok. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111995

Richter described, "…he framed his strategy in a way that would take advantage of Malenkov's decline not only by appealing to Malenkov's now-orphaned supporters but by defining the tasks and strengths of Soviet foreign policy in ways that accentuated his own areas of strength in the defense establishment and the Party apparatus."[31]

Indeed, Khrushchev largely agreed with most of Malenkov's earlier positions, although for slightly different reasons and framed them in different ways.[32] Khrushchev agreed that nuclear weapons had changed the nature of the threats facing the Soviet Union.[33] However, instead of heralding the end of the use of force, by acquiring nuclear weapons the Soviets could now no longer be coerced and threatened by the West.[34] For Khrushchev, the "correlation of forces"— rough and often ill-defined term often encompassing military, economic and political power—meant that the USSR was increasingly on equal footing with the West.[35] For Khrushchev, "peaceful coexistence" with the West was now possible not because of a change in Western intentions or Malenkov's reduced importance of class struggle, but because the balance of power meant that the West could no longer bully the Soviets.[36] With the USSR protected by nuclear weapons, the global class struggle continued but would now be a conflict of ideologies, which Khrushchev saw tilting in the favor of Socialism. This did not mean he foresaw military force as useless, quite the opposite, as it was precisely military strength

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[31] Richter, 1994: 55.

[32] Zubok and Harrison, 1999: 145-146.

[33] Craig, Campbell and Sergey Radchenko, "MAD, Not Marx: Khrushchev and the Nuclear Revolution," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1–2 (2018): 213-214; Richter, 1994: 56-57.

[34] Zaloga, Steven J, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces 1945-2000*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002): 22-59.

[35] Holloway, David, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 66-68, 84; Richter, 1994: 56-59.

[36] Zubok, Vladislav M, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 129-132.

that allowed the Soviet Union to withstand the forces of Capitalism and to propel Soviet diplomacy.[37] A changed correlation of forces had created a new status quo that enabled the Soviets to change from a competitive to cooperative approach.

Khrushchev undercut the previous Stalinist approach of confrontation and competition as only justifying Western hostility without increasing Soviet security. At the July 1955 Plenum Khrushchev laid out his new approach to arms control and criticized previous efforts,

> For a long time we took an incorrect position, proposing to cut the armed forces of all countries by one third…By making that sort of proposal we give the imperialists trump cards to decline our proposal; we will look like opponents of disarmament. The rulers of bourgeois states under the pressure of their people also raise the issue of disarmament. In order to knock all of the trumps out of the hands of the imperialists, we decided to introduce a proposal that, on the issues of arms control, we start from the conditions of each state, taking into account the size of the territory of the country, the quality of its population, and other conditions. Based on these conditions, we must obtain arms cuts to an appropriate level. Is this decision correct? Undoubtedly, it is correct.[38]

With nuclear weapons, military competition was a thing of the past and a mutual coexistence could be established with each side respecting the security interests of the other. In this sense Khrushchev sought a recognition from the U.S. of the status quo as he saw it, one that recognized Soviet power.

Disarmament negotiations took on an added importance with the acquisition—and potential proliferation—of nuclear weapons amongst the great powers. Not only would an agreement on nuclear weapons enshrine the relative balance of power between the Soviets and the West, but also reduce conventional forces, which Khrushchev believed

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[37] Wohlforth, William Curtis, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 156, 164.
[38] "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Concluding Word by Com. N. S. Khrushchev," July 12, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD f.2, op.1, d.176, ll.282-95. Translated by Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110452

were unnecessary and allow the diversion of resources into the domestic economy.[39] Additionally, a disarmament agreement would support Khrushchev's argument that correlation of forces between the Soviets and the West was narrowing and help him advance his own proposals domestically. Moreover, Khrushchev blamed longtime Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov for continuing the Stalin era policies of competition that had continued to fail to achieve results with the West, created an opening for Khrushchev's more cooperative approach.[40]

While not resolving all issues, the Soviet May 10 proposal was nothing short of groundbreaking. It was a clear attempt to reduce tensions with the West, and explicitly signal the Soviets did not have militarily revisionist intentions. The Soviets also believed the Anglo-French proposal of 1954 represented the U.S. position due to the Soviet perception of the capitalist West. Therefore, the Soviet leadership believed their proposal explicitly accepted almost all Western preconditions for disarmament. The Soviets accepted calls for an international control organ to monitor disarmament, freedom of inspection to verify, complete nuclear disarmament, and accepted Western conventional force reduction levels. Moreover, the Soviets proposed a nuclear test ban to coincide with the May 10 proposal.[41]

Additionally, since the Soviets had large conventional superiority and only a developing nuclear capability, a nuclear arms agreement would not necessarily be costly for the Soviets since it would retain a conventional force advantage. By combining

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[39] Wolfe, Thomas W. *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970): 78-79.

[40] Zubok, Vladislav. "Soviet Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955" in Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (LSU Press, 2000): 56; Richter, 1994: 68-70.

[41] Clemens, Walter C. and Franklyn Griffiths, *The Soviet Position on Arms Control and Disarmament: Negotiations and Propaganda, 1954-1964*, (Cambridge: Center for International Studies at MIT, 1965): 2-7.

provisions to limit the size of conventional forces as well, the Soviets demonstrated they were willing to sacrifice its conventional advantage and potential future nuclear capabilities for an agreement.

3.1.3   American Policymaker Views

To understand the U.S. assessment of the Soviet May 10 proposal, I examine the dispositional views of Eisenhower and the two primary advisors in this case: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Arthur W. Radford. Dulles was a central figure throughout the Eisenhower administration, and had enormous influence on Eisenhower and U.S. policies in general.[42] Additionally, Arthur Radford became a crucial component in formulating U.S. foreign policy.[43] Not simply content to be a neutral disseminator of the military's views and assessments, he was an active political participant lobbying for and against policies.

For Eisenhower, the Soviets were not simply a band of ideologically blinded despots. He was willing to believe Stalin was sincere in easing tensions but "the Politburo had insisted on heightening the tempo of the cold war and Stalin had been obliged to make concessions to this view."[44] Instead he viewed the Soviet leadership as security

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[42] Immerman, Richard H. "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?" *Political Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1979): 22.

[43] Much more so than Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson. "[Wilson] proved no match for the service chiefs in the Pentagon, who ran circles around him." Hitchcock, William I., *The Age of Eisenhower: American and the World in the 1950s*, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2018): 88.

[44] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, Memorandum of Meeting of NSC, Minutes of 135th Meeting of NSC, March 4, 1953.

seeking, intent on ensuring their own hold on power.[45] He viewed the Soviets as capable

of negotiation, and while not willing to assess purely benign intentions, neither did he

exclude them from negotiations and a serious pursuit of peace and détente.[46]

While Eisenhower had foreign policy and military experience, John Foster Dulles

came with notable establishment credentials.[47] A longtime lawyer and GOP insider, he

was staunchly critical of the Truman administration's handling of the Soviets, especially

containment, and argued for rolling back and challenging communism.[48] For Dulles,

Soviet intentions were clearly defined by Marxist ideology.[49] Dulles extensively studied

communist literature and theory, making him believe he had a better insight into the

motivations and intentions of the Soviets.[50] This led him to believe the Soviets were

aggressive and had no interest in peace other than temporary ceasefires. Crucially, he

believed that the internal contradictions inherent in Communism would lead to its

downfall and that the best way to speed up that process was by pressuring the Soviets.[51]

From his perspective, most of the conflict was a propaganda battle, with each side trying

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[45] Erdmann, 1999: 93; "Memorandum of Discussion at the 204th Meeting of the National Security Council, June 24, 1954," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Vol II, Part 1, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, Whitman File https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d120

[46] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, 163rd Meeting of NSC, September 24, 1953; Leffler, 2007: 113.

[47] Pruessen, Ronald W., *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power* (NY: Free Press, 1982); Guhin, Michael, *John Foster Dulles: A Statesman and His Times*, (NY: Columbia University Press, 1972); Leffler, 2007: 98-100.

[48] Dulles, John Foster, "A Policy of Boldness," *Life* (May 19, 1952): 146-60.

[49] Gardner, Lloyd, "Poisoned Apples: John Foster Dulles and the "Peace Offensive." In In Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 78-79.

[50] Pruessen, Ronald W., "John Foster Dulles and the Predicaments of Power," in Richard H. Immerman ed, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 23; Although as John Lewis Gaddis points out, his understanding of Communism was more nuanced and complex. Gaddis, John Lewis, "The Unexpected John Foster Dulles: Nuclear Weapons, Communism, and the Russians." in Richard H. Immerman ed, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 58-67

[51] Gaddis, 2005: 135, 181.

to paint the other as the aggressor. In many instances, he supported U.S. negotiations not

to test Soviet intentions, but simply to avoid being painted as obstructionist.[52]

Similar to Dulles, Admiral Radford held hawkish views towards the Soviet Union

and paid keen attention to the perceived balance of power between the two

superpowers.[53] Radford was politically active and involved in lobbying policymakers and

Congress.[54] Highly skeptical of assessing benign intentions, Radford assessed intentions

on the basis of the relative power between states.[55] He also agreed with Dulles that the

U.S. had to take a more aggressive stand towards the Soviet Union.[56] However, he

differed from both on massive retaliation.[57] Instead he advocated for greater leeway and

use of nuclear weapons to coerce opponents, even to force the Soviets out of Europe.[58]

This was to allow greater flexibility for the U.S. to military challenge communist

advances. He was adamant that any negotiation could only be allowed so long as the U.S.

gained more than the Soviets.[59]

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[52] Rosendorf, Neal, "John Foster Dulles' Nuclear Schizophrenia." In John Lewis Gaddis et al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 63, 68-89.

[53] Radford, Arthur W., *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford,* Stephen Jurika ed. (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, 1980).

[54] Betts, Richard K., *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991): 57, 84-88.

[55] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 172-174, 185, 227-228.

[56] Trachtenberg, Marc, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 142-143.

[57] Craig, Campbell, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 59.

[58] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 185.

[59] Evangelista, 1990: 520.

3.1.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

Despite dramatic changes in Soviet policy after Stalin's death, and a costly signal of Soviet willingness to engage in arms control, the Eisenhower administration failed to believe Soviet signals were sincere. Dulles and Radford's negative dispositional views biased their assessment of Soviet signals, and ultimately influenced Eisenhower's own assessment. Perhaps most importantly, U.S. policymakers did not believe Soviet leaders were risking their own position, which contributed to incorrect assessment. In fact, U.S. policymakers believed the Soviet leadership's proposal was intended to strengthen their political position, rather than reduce their control and risk vulnerability.

In the wake of Malenkov's peace offensive, Eisenhower appointed the Special Committee (Secretary of State, Defense, and AEC Chairman [Atomic Energy Commission]) to review and propose a new disarmament policy. Yet, by 1954 no report had been made, and there was seemingly little progress on formulating both U.S. disarmament and Soviet policy.[60] To expedite the process, a working group was formed between Defense, State, and the AEC. However, rather than bridging each agency's viewpoint, continued squabbles prevented the creation of a single policy. Radford was adamantly opposed to any disarmament negotiations due to his negative dispositional view of the Soviets. There had to be a clear demonstration of a sincere change in Soviet intentions.[61] Indeed, Radford saw no evidence of a change despite Stalin's death, "There is no acceptable evidence of abandonment or major modification of the Communist

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[60] DDEL, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-1961, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries, Box No. 18, "Report on U.S. Policy for the Exploitation of Soviet Vulnerabilities, Presented to Mr. Robert Cutler from the OCB, June 8, 1954."
[61] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 228, 238-239

objective of achieving ultimate world domination, using armed force, if necessary." He

continued that "a state of tension is conducive to advancing Communist objective' hence,

achieving agreements merely for the purpose of relieving world tension would, from the

Soviet standpoint, be self-defeating."[62] Without such assurances of changes in Soviet

disposition, the least risky option to Radford was a continued arms race since it did not

immediately threaten American strategic security.[63]

In contrast, Dulles and the State Department advocated a step-by-step

disarmament plan, with each successive step building trust backed by stringent

monitoring and verification.[64] Dulles' dispositional assessment of the Soviets hardened in

the wake of post-Stalin reassurance signals because he believed the U.S. was losing the

battle of world opinion. For Dulles, the issue of disarmament was a crucial component of

the propaganda battle. After Malenkov's peace offensive, any failure of the U.S. to at

least appear open to negotiations would benefit the Soviets, while at the same time

undermining U.S. allied support which was crucial for Dulles' attempts to create the

European Defence Community.[65] He also agreed with Radford's concerns regarding

Soviet cheating and the need for verification, adding that it would be difficult to "work

out any disarmament agreement plan with a powerful nation which we did not trust and

believed had the most ambitious goals."[66] But like Eisenhower, Dulles recognized that

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[62] Memo from Wilson summarizing JCS comments on the U.S. Basic National Security Policy, "Memorandum by the Secretary of Defense (Wilson) to the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Lay), November 22, 1954," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Vol II, Part 1, S/P–NSC files, lot 61 D 167, "Review of Basic Natl Sec Policy, Sept–Nov, 1954 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d135
[63] Garthoff, 1991: 21.
[64] Bowie and Immerman, 1998 237-238.
[65] Rosendorf, 1999: 77.
[66] "Memo of Conversation: Review of United States Policy on Control of Armaments, Department of State, January 4, 1955," *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Regulation of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d1

despite the low likelihood of an agreement, nuclear weapons meant that efforts had to be made, arguing, "we must accept the working hypothesis that a solution to this terrible problem *can* be found."[67]

However, it became clear that Dulles and Radford—despite their agreement on Soviet disposition—could not agree on a strategy.[68] Even Eisenhower was torn, both recognizing the imperative for negotiations and the inherent danger of betrayal, using an analogy from antiquity which seemed to reinforce the complexity of the issue, "every time recently that the subject of disarmament had come up in a conversation, he was reminded of the fate of Carthage. The Roman invaders had by false promises induced the citizens of Carthage to surrender their arms."[69] Eisenhower was concerned over the prospect of Soviet cheating, "if he could be shown a really foolproof system which would ensure the effective abolition of atomic and nuclear weapons, he would be perfectly willing to agree to their abolition, even though there were no simultaneous reduction or abolition of conventional weapons."[70] But he was more willing to accept the Soviets shared his rational concern. The concern regarding cheating only increased with a report from the Technological Capabilities Panel (also known as the Killian Committee) in February. The report argued that that U.S. was vulnerable to a surprise attack and that the

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[67] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No 6, 236th Meeting of NSC February 10, 1955.
[68] "Memorandum by the Chairman of the NSC Planning Board (Cutler) to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense (Wilson), and the Chairman of the United States Atomic Energy Commission (Strauss), December 10, 1954" *FRUS*, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Vol. II, Part 2, S/S–NSC files, lot 66 D 95, NSC 112 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p2/d290
[69] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 265th Meeting of NSC November 10, 1955.
[70] DDEL Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No 6, 236th Meeting of NSC February 10, 1955.

U.S. must increase its intelligence collection and estimation efforts.[71] Fears over increasing Soviet technological advancements heightened the implications of incorrectly assessing Soviet intentions. With no disarmament policy in place, Eisenhower appointed Harold Stassen on March 10 as Special Representative for Disarmament, a cabinet level appointment.[72] However, before Stassen could finish his report, the Soviet leadership put forward the May 10 proposal.

The combined Soviet actions of the May 10 proposal, and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty on May 15, was a diplomatic broadside that stunned the administration. The Soviets also called for a heads of state summit to discuss disarmament and the status of Germany. Yet, despite May 10 being nearly identical to the last Western proposal, and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty being one of the primary signals Eisenhower said the Soviets could send in his "Chance for Peace" speech, most of the administration initially viewed them as tactical moves and not an indication of intentions. Indeed, rather than being a source of further credible information to update previous assessments, policymakers dismissed the challenging information and remained wedded to their pre-existing views of the Soviets. For example, Dulles believed that the Soviets were forced to make the May 10 proposal because of domestic economic hardships, and rejected a change in his dispositional assessment, he stated "… [the Soviets] had not changed their ideology, but that the Russians were in some respects overextended and overcommitted. What they were seeking was some limitation on the

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[71] "Report by the Technological Capabilities Panel of the Science Advisory Committee, February 14, 1955," *FRUS*, 1955-1957-, National Security Policy, Vol XIX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d9; Damms, Richard V., "James Killian, the Technological Capabilities Panel, and the Emergence of President Eisenhower's 'Scientific-Technological Elite,'" *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 1 (2000): 57–78.

[72] Kaplan, Lawrence S., *Harold Stassen: Eisenhower, the Cold War, and the Pursuit of Nuclear Disarmament* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018).

arms race, some easing of the armaments burden." Indeed, he continued at an off the record speech on May 23 that the Soviets were correcting erroneous policies and to reduce the "economic drain of large armaments…We cannot, however, at this stage foresee to what degree Soviet activities are addressed toward serious negotiation about those major problems which require for solution a considerable change in Soviet policy."[73] The perception of the sender being forced into sending a signal can be viewed as a sign of aggressive, not defensive, intentions and can lead to incorrect assessment. It also was used to reinforce negative dispositional assessments and rebuff any information that ran counter to expectations.

Moreover, Dulles argued that while the Soviet leadership "imagined" their proposal was a demonstration of good will, "the Soviets had gone a long way to meet the British and French position on disarmament, without realizing there was a very wide gap between the United States and the British and French on the issue of disarmament." However, even Eisenhower didn't understand what the differences were and Governor Stassen had to briefly explain. Governor Stassen also joined Dulles by noting he, "had very real doubts as to the genuineness of the apparent Soviet change of heart regarding a disarmament program."[74]

For Radford, there was nothing to assess regarding the Soviet May 10 proposal. It was merely a tactical change designed to maneuver the Soviets into a better bargaining position.[75] Radford argued in a memo to Secretary of Defense Wilson, "The tactics of the

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[73] "Outline for a Speech by the Secretary of State, May 19, 1955," *FRUS*, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d23
[74] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 249th Meeting of NSC, May 19, 1955.
[75] Evangelista, 1990: 507.

Soviets appear temporarily to have undergone change. However, the Joint Chiefs of staff consider there has been no evidence that their objectives have changed or that they are genuinely seeking an equitable and effective disarmament arrangement in the interests of easing international tensions."[76]

Of primary concern for Radford was the trajectory of technological change and the balance of power.[77] Radford had long painted a dire picture of rising Soviet capabilities, noting during an NSC meeting on June 3, 1954, "…commented on the possibility that by 1958 a Soviet intercontinental guided missile, equipped with a thermonuclear warhead, would pose the major danger to the United States."[78] Radford continued at a subsequent NSC meeting on November 24, 1954, that "upon the attainment of nuclear balance by the USSR…that the relative power position of the U.S. would have so changed that the U.S. could no longer count on the Russians being afraid of starting general war," and was joined by Dulles who agreed the U.S. was facing a deteriorating atomic advantage.[79] Increasing the concern over the size of the Soviet strategic force were SNIE 11-8-54 and the May 1955 NIE 11-3-55, both of which painted a dangerous Soviet bomber force capable of hitting the U.S. by the late 1950's. NIE 11-3-

[76] "Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, June 16, 1955" *FRUS*, 1955-1957, 1955-1957, Regulation of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d38; Additionally, a briefing book prepared for the Geneva conference labeled the May 10 proposal as "nothing more than a clever tactic to confuse and obstruct any real settlement." DDEL, WHO National Security Council Staff: Papers, 1948-61, Executive Secretary's Subject File Series, Box No. 10, Four Power Conference (1), The Summit Four Power Conference.
[77] Walt Rostow argued that the Soviet goals were to induce complacency in the West and reduce Western arms expenditures at the same time the Soviets were expanding. Rostow, Walt Whitman, *Open Skies: Eisenhower's Proposal of July 21, 1955*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982): 20.
[78] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No 5, 200th Meeting of NSC June 3, 1954.
[79] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 225th Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, November 24, 1954," *FRUS*, 1952–1954, National Security Affairs, Vol II, Part 1, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower Papers, Whitman File https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d136

55 estimated that the Soviets had 1,100 of the outdated TU-4 Bull, and that by 1959 the Soviets would have some 700 heavy bombers capable of hitting the U.S.[80] The conclusion was that if U.S. agreed to negotiations, it would eventually lead to a position of "military inferiority" with the Soviet Union.[81]

Supported by dire military assessments, Radford believed the May 10th signal was a ploy to buy time for the Soviets to increase their strategic capabilities. To ensure the U.S. strategic advantage, efforts needed to be continued to develop new technologies and devote resources to ensure the Soviets could not catch up. However, Eisenhower was skeptical of the technological leaps and number of conventional bombers the Soviets would be able to make by 1958 as Radford predicted.[82] He remained confident in the U.S. strategic position and soon the Soviet bomber estimates were discovered to be wildly inflated and revised downward.

Undeterred, Dulles' argument a poor economic position forced the Soviets into sending the May 10th signal convinced Eisenhower, which partly supports assertions from DPV. It appears negative dispositional views were dominant in this stage, but used the belief that the Soviets were forced into sending reassurance signal to bolster that dispositional view. While DPV asserts that creating domestic weakness can signal reassurance, absent a large and clear indication of such, U.S. policymakers relied on dispositional beliefs and assessments the signal was sent to reduce, not increase, vulnerability to support their preferred understanding.

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[80] NIE 11-3-55 "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses of Action Through 1960," 17 May 1955; Additionally, SNIE 11-8-54 estimated that the Soviets could launch 850 bombers to attack the U.S., and by 1957 over 1,000.

[81] "Memo to Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Soviet Ground Forces Mobilization Potential, 15 February 1955." NA, RG 218 Records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Geographic File 1954-56, 092 Spain (4-19-46) Sec. 18 350.09 USSR (12-19-49) Sec 7. Box No. 33.

[82] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 223-224.

Eisenhower and Dulles believed the revisionist dispositional nature of the Soviets had not changed, and the May 10th signal was not a credible demonstration of benign intentions. Nevertheless, both policymakers reaffirmed their belief the U.S. had to make some sort of proposal or risked losing the support of allies and the propaganda battle. As Eisenhower stated,

> This much should be clearly understood by everyone present: The Russians were not deserting their Marxian ideology nor their ultimate objectives of world revolution and Communist domination. However, they had found that an arms race was much too expensive a means of achieving these objectives, and they wished to achieve these objectives without recourse to war. If the United States rejects this attitude and seems to prefer a military solution, it would lose the support of the world. Thus our real problem is how we can achieve a stalemate vis-à-vis the Russians in the area of the non-military struggle as we have already achieved such a stalemate in the military field.[83]

As a result, the U.S. had to accept Soviet calls for a heads of state meeting and agreed on a summit in Geneva.

Radford continued to be against engaging the Soviets, and questioned the "seriousness of the Soviet desire to reach any settlement," arguing that the U.S. should "hold its [Soviets] feet to the fire." Dulles was also concerned about the Geneva Summit, especially that Eisenhower would be tricked by the Kremlin into committing to an agreement. This fear was driven in large part by Woodrow Wilson's experience at Paris in 1919.[84] Eisenhower bristled at the accusations that he didn't fully realize the possibility of Soviet cheating, "were not so naïve as to think that the Soviets have suddenly changed from devils to angels" and that while the U.S. should be open to negotiations, it had to be careful "unless concrete Soviet deeds at Geneva indicated a contrary state of mind." Even failing to correctly assess the May 10th signal, Eisenhower was still open to the possibility

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[83] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 253rd Meeting of the National Security Council, June 30, 1955," *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Regulation of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d45
[84] "C.D. Jackson Log Entry, July 11, 1955." *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955 Vol V. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d155

of further information that demonstrated a change in Soviet intentions. Indeed, they were going to Geneva to "penetrate the veil of Soviet intentions." In contrast, Dulles questioned whether it was "profitable to speculate on Soviet intentions," in large part because this would mean the possibility of challenging the negative dispositional views of the Soviets.[85] To him, Western pressure was working and should be continued. The main consideration was the economic strain pressuring the Soviets into an agreement to stabilize their internal position, all while trying to turn world opinion against the U.S.[86] More important for Dulles was avoiding the negative image of refusing peaceful Soviet overtures, "we did not actually desire to enter into either negotiation, but felt compelled to do so in order to get our allies consent on the rearmament of Germany. World opinion demanded that the United States participate in these negotiations with the Communists."[87]

Eisenhower decided that the U.S. would make a proposal which would, at the least, serve as the basis for further discussions and probe Soviet intentions.[88] Eisenhower presented his Open Skies proposal at Geneva on July 21, 1955. Instead of calling for

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[85] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No 7, 254th Meeting of NSC July 7, 1955.

[86] DDEL Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memo Series Box No 3, White House Correspondence General 1955 (2), "John Foster Dulles Memo to the President, June 18, 1955"; However, U.S. Ambassador Charles Bohlen wrote that economic considerations were not so great that they were forced into concessions and could not enter into an arms race, "they have the capability, without serious threat to the regime, to take the necessary steps in that direction." "Memorandum from the Ambassador to the Soviet Union (Bohlen) to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1955" *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955 Vol V
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d151

[87] Quoted in Garthoff, 1991: 25.

[88] Bury, Helen, *Eisenhower and the Cold War Arms Race: "Open Skies" and the Military- Industrial Complex*. (NY: IB Taurus, 2014): 78; Eisenhower was also influenced by advisors such as Rockefeller, "A basic U.S. aim at Geneva must be to capture the political and psychological imagination of the world." "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rockefeller) to the President., July 11, 1955," *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955 Vol V. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d154

disarmament, Open Skies called for increased transparency by allowing surveillance overflights and an exchange of information on military facilities. For the U.S., this addressed its central concern over the possibility of surprise attack and cheating, while for the Soviets—who said they would study the proposal—it was viewed as a way to legitimize intelligence collection.[89] Indeed, the administration gained Admiral Radford's support by arguing it was in fact a way to collect intelligence on the Soviet Union.[90] And while Dulles was initially skeptical of the plan, he was encouraged by the public reaction and apparent propaganda win—and a recognition that it would most likely be rejected by the Soviets.[91]

To most in the administration, the failure of the Soviets to accept Open Skies was further justification for assessing the May 10 proposal as a tactical move.[92] The administration incorrectly assessed previous Soviet signals, and mistook their rejection of Open Skies as a signal of aggressive intentions. For Radford, the focus remained on the balance of power as an indication of intentions, and believed previous Western military weakness invited Soviet aggression. Using the analogy of Korean War and the gradual demobilization following WWII he argued, "When our military forces were at their lowest level the communists commenced hostilities in Korea."[93] Intelligence assessments continued to stress that Western nuclear capabilities were the only factor preventing a

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[89] Prados, John. "Open Skies and Open Minds: American Disarmament Policy at the Geneva Summit." In Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill ed, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

[90] Rostow, 1982: 53-54; Knopf, 1998: 98.

[91] Tal, 2008: 70-72; Kaplan, 2018: 112-113, 126-127.

[92] "They have shown no inclination to depart from the totalitarian character of the Soviet state or to abandon their aim of expanding the Communist sphere of power." NIE 11-4-56 "Soviet Capabilities and Courses of Action Through 1961" 2 August 1956.

[93] DDEL, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-61, Special Assistant Series, Subject Subseries, Box No. 4. "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense: Proposed Policy of the United States on the Question of Disarmament, 25 January 1956."

Soviet offensive, and that the "production of weapons, reorganization and re-equipment of armed forces" was "clear evidence that Soviet aims have not changed."[94] Radford's assessment of aggressive Soviet intentions remained unchanged.

After Geneva, Eisenhower came around to Dulles' assessment of Soviet intentions. Dulles never believed the Soviet May 10 signal was sincere, and while Eisenhower was initially open to the signal, the Geneva conference and a perception of Soviet intransigence over further negotiations contributed to his ultimate belief the Soviet leadership was not sincere. Eisenhower concurred with Dulles stating that "he believed that the Soviets were engaged in actions of complete duplicity."[95] By August, Dulles and Eisenhower summarized the administration's view regarding Soviet intentions. They argued that the Soviet leadership had assessed their "tough" policies were producing "diminishing or counter-productive results." Therefore, in order to "obtain a 'relaxing of tension with the Western world came about, we believe, not because of any change in their basic purpose but because of their own need, external and internal, for new policies." To do so, they enacted a series of steps—including May 10 proposal—that "had been prepared well in advance for possible use in this contingency." Indeed, Dulles and Eisenhower summarized that "These moves were designed to meet, and did measurably meet, the Western demand for "deeds" as a prerequisite to a meeting at the 'summit'."[96] These statements explicitly show that U.S. policymakers believed Soviet

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[94] "Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Implications of Soviet Armaments Programs and Increasing Military Capabilities, 13 February 1956." NA, RG 218 Records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Geographic File, 1954-56, 350.09 USSR (12-19-49) Sec. 8-381 USSR (3-2-46) Sec 71, Box No. 34, CCS 350.09 USSR.

[95] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 265th Meeting of NSC November 10, 1955.

[96] NA, "Memo from Dulles to Radford: United States Post-Geneva Policy, August 15, 1955." RG 218, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman's File: Admiral Radford, 1953-1957, 091 Russia (1953-55) to 091 Russia (1956), Box No. 16 HM 1994.

signals were costly and designed to demonstrate sincere intent as CST predicts, thus demonstrating cost alone is often insufficient to convey credibility.

Ultimately, the Eisenhower administration incorrectly assessed the Soviet's May 10 proposal because policymakers did not believe the Soviet leadership was risking domestic vulnerability and was in fact *forced* into meeting Western demand for "deeds." This partially supports the domestic political vulnerability argument that signals perceived to be forced on an adversary will be incorrectly assessed. Instead of viewing it as a sincere effort to begin constructive negotiations on disarmament, the U.S. viewed the May 10 proposal as a tactical measure by the Soviet leadership to improve their domestic position and pivot away from ineffective strategies of confrontation. Interestingly, U.S. policymakers framed perceptions of Soviet domestic conditions to support existing dispositional views. Specifically, that the USSR's poor economic conditions forced it into sending signals, and the intent was to buy time to solidify the Soviet position, not risk vulnerability.

Despite Eisenhower's view of the Soviets as essentially status quo and initially correctly assessing the message of the Soviet signal, he subsequently assessed that his confidence in that assessment was misplaced and the Soviets indeed had aggressive intentions. Even coming face-to-face with the Soviet leadership did little to influence Eisenhower at Geneva. For Dulles and Radford, dispositional assessments of the Soviets guided their assessment, although coming to different conclusions on how to respond. For Dulles, the Soviet signal was an artful ploy to not only reduce military expenditures, but box the U.S. into an unenviable position of looking like the aggressor if the U.S. rejected the proposal. While for Radford there was never any doubt Soviet intentions remained

aggressive and unwavering. More important for Radford was the trajectory of technological innovation and the ability of the Soviets to improve its strategic arsenal. He viewed the May 10 proposal as nothing more than a smokescreen to buy time for the Soviets to build up the military until it could challenge the U.S. Ultimately, Radford and Dulles' strong views convinced Eisenhower that the Soviet May10 proposal was insincere.

3.2   SALT I NEGOTIATIONS: CORRECT ASSESSMENT

In contrast to the May 10 signal, the U.S. correctly assessed Soviet signals during SALT I. America and the Soviet Union signed a wide-ranging agreement that included limitations on both defensive and offensive weaponry (the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement), and an agreement intended to reduce the risk of conflict (Basic Principles Agreement).[97] This was all accomplished against the backdrop of quantitative nuclear parity between the superpowers. This case supports the domestic political vulnerability thesis, demonstrating that Kissinger and Nixon believed the USSR was sincere because the Soviet leadership was risking its political standing. Since so much of the negotiations were conducted face to face, there is some support for the face-to-face theory. In contrast, dispositional views played a minimal role in assessment.

The first section gives a brief overview on the changing strategic relationship, as the Soviets rapidly increased its strategic capabilities throughout the 1960's.

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[97] The Basic Principles Agreement is dealt with in Chapter Five. This case focuses on the strategic arms control negotiations, including both offensive and defensive capabilities.

Understanding the changing relationship is important to understand Soviet intentions and the new nuclear reality that faced the Nixon administration. The next section describes Soviet decisionmaking in the wake of Khrushchev's ouster in 1964 and the drive for nuclear parity. It is followed with a description of the key policymakers' dispositional views towards the Soviets (President Nixon, National Security Advisor/Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird). The final section carefully examines the U.S. assessment of Soviet signals. Despite domestic opposition, Kissinger and Nixon correctly assessed Soviet signals during the negotiations and signed the SALT I agreements on May 26, 1972 in Moscow.

Table 3.2 SALT I Outcomes

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Yes
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	None
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	Yes

3.2.1 Context and Background

In the years leading up to SALT, both sides were concerned over the balance of nuclear capabilities. For the superpowers, ensuring the other never gained strategic superiority was a primary goal. That meant gaining the necessary nuclear capabilities to match the U.S. for the Soviets, or ensuring the Soviets never gained strategic superiority for the U.S. The Soviets also were scarred by the recklessness of Khrushchev's nuclear brinkmanship. His bluffing attempts had exposed Soviet weakness and revealed the necessity of increasing the nuclear arsenal.[98] For the new leadership, catching up and achieving parity was the central political goal—even at the expense of domestic economic priorities.[99] While for the U.S. it was maintaining nuclear superiority, and once it became clear that was no longer feasible, arresting future Soviet nuclear growth. For both sides, ensuring nuclear parity was the driving goal of the SALT negotiations.

The Soviet's strategic position in the early 1960's was not nearly as strong as the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy would lead one to believe.[100] Indeed, the absence of reliable intelligence led to overestimates of the Soviet strategic arsenal. In reality, the Soviets only had Six SS-6 ICBM's deployed in 1961. Not only were there too few of them, they still relied on the time and labor-intensive process of liquid fueling.[101] Additionally, the Soviet strategic bomber force and a sea-based deterrent stagnated as a result of

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[98] Wolfe, 1970: 87-89.

[99] Kolkowicz, Roman. "Strategic Parity and Beyond: Soviet Perspectives," *World Politics* 23, no. 3 (1971): 436-440.

[100] Preble, Christopher A., "'Who Ever Believed in the "Missile Gap"?': John F. Kennedy and the Politics of National Security," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2003): 801–26; Berman, Robert P., and John C. Baker, *Soviet Strategic Forces: Requirements and Responses*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982): 51-52.

[101] Zaloga, 2002: 103-104.

Khrushchev's emphasis on land-based missiles.[102] To close the strategic gap, the Soviets

launched a two-fold project to develop a lighter solid fuel ICBM (SS-11)—to counter the

Minuteman—and a heavier ICBM (SS-9) to counter the Titan II.[103] "Between 1966 and

1969 the Soviet ICBM force grew by about 300 new launchers a year, and in 1969

surpassed the number of ICBM launchers in the American force."[104] Most concerning for

the U.S. was the sheer size and throw weight of the SS-9. Due to its size, the U.S.

believed that the SS-9 was intended as a counterforce weapon and represented an

existential threat to the U.S. land-based deterrent. However, in the late 1960's and early

70's, the warheads were MRV (Multiple Reentry Vehicles), not MIRV's (Multiple

Independently Targeted Re-entry Vehicles), making them less of a threat than initially

believed.[105]

In contrast to the Soviet experience of inferiority during the Cuban Missile Crisis,

the U.S. became concerned over inadvertent escalation. Despite the criticism of the

Eisenhower administration's nuclear policy, Kennedy and his Secretary of Defense

Robert McNamara also worried over the immense expense of a nuclear arms race and the

potential for uncontrolled escalation in a nuclear crisis.[106] Initially, they advocated a

policy of flexible response, "Nuclear superiority, rationally procured through cost

effectiveness calculations, and deployed in crises through graduated escalation, was the

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[102] Zaloga, 2002: 117-118.
[103] Holloway, 1983: 58-62; Dupont, Vincent, *The Development of the Soviet ICBM Force, 1955-1967* (Ph. D Dissertation, Columbia University, 1991); Norris, Robert S., and Hans M. Kristensen, "Nuclear U.S. and Soviet/Russian Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, 1959-2008," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 65, no. 1 (2009): 67.
[104] Holloway, 1983: 43.
[105] Ultimately, 100 of the 288 SS-9's was deployed with this MRV warhead. Zaloga, 2002: 132.
[106] Lanoszka, Alexander, *Atomic Assurance: The Alliance Politics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018): 37-42.

basic element of the Kenney administration's image of rational superiority."[107] But the potential for miscalculation demonstrated by the Berlin and Cuban crises affected the administration's views on the utility of nuclear weapons.[108] However, the U.S. was confident in its nuclear superiority going into the Johnson administration.[109] At the same time, U.S. estimates of the growth of the Soviet nuclear force were reduced. Partly as a result from the overestimates of the late 1950's, but also due to the overthrow of Khrushchev and the belief that the Soviets could not sustain the cost of a large arms buildup.[110] But by 1966 estimates had changed. NIE 11-8-66 concluded, "We estimate that the USSR will have some 670-765 operational launchers in mid-1968. This is considerably more than we anticipated in our last estimate and reflects our belief that construction of launchers has been started at a higher rate than ever before."[111] These new intelligence estimates heralded the beginning of the end of American quantitative nuclear superiority.

3.2.2   Soviet Intentions

In 1964, Khrushchev was removed from power. Most accounts and the public rationale for the removal were Khrushchev's contentious domestic policies.[112] However,

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[107] Cameron, 2018: 19.
[108] Gavin, Francis J., *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012): 30-31, 34-37, 53-56.
[109] NIE 11-8-63, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," 18 October 1963.
[110] CIA, "Soviet Economic Problems Multiply," 9 January 1964
https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000500555.pdf
[111] NIE 11-8-66, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," 20 October 1966: 2.
[112] Yanov, Alexander, "In the Grip of the Adversarial Paradigm: The Case of Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev in Retrospect," in *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.*, ed. Robert O. Crummey (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 156-181; Tompson, William J, "The Fall of Nikita Khrushchev," *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1110.

his reckless foreign policies also contributed to his ouster.[113] Instead of forcing the West

to recognize the Soviet's nuclear capabilities and the impossibility of nuclear war, he

brought both sides to the brink of destruction and was forced to back down in light of

American nuclear superiority. Dmitry Polyansky, a member of the Presidium, prepared a

report on Khrushchev's foreign policy "adventurism" and its failings. Unsurprisingly, the

Cuban Missile Crisis received the most attention, with Polyansky bursting the image of a

Soviet victory:

> The adventurism (recklessness) of the policy toward Cuba is particularly obvious in light
> of all this. In one of his speeches, Khrushchev stated that if the US touched Cuba, then
> we would deliver a strike against them. He insisted that our missiles be sent to Cuba. That
> [action] led to the deepest of crises, and brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war; it
> also scared the organizer of that idea himself greatly. Having no other way out, we were
> forced to accept all the demands and conditions dictated by the US, including humiliating
> inspections of our ships by the Americans.[114]

By the end of the 1960's, two gradual but large shifts happened that opened the

Soviets to negotiations: Brezhnev's increasing political power and Soviet quantitative

strategic parity. Unlike previous eras, political competition now primarily revolved

around creating a consensus and advocating for approaches or policies. After

Khrushchev's ouster, no single person dominated policymaking, with Alexei Kosygin

and Leonid Brezhnev waging a low-level competition for influence.[115] By 1968 however,

Brezhnev was gaining in stature, becoming *primus inter pares* in the collective leadership

and solidified at the 24th Party Congress in 1971.[116] At the 24th Party Congress, with

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[113] Quenoy, Paul Du "The Role of Foreign Affairs in the Fall of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964," *The International History Review* 25, no. 2 (June 2003): 334-356.

[114] "The Polyansky Report on Khrushchev's Mistakes in Foreign Policy, October 1964," History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitriĭ Antonovich Volkogonov papers, 1887-1995, mm97083838, Reel 18. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya, The National Security Archive. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115108

[115] Wolfe, 1970: 237-241.

[116] Garthoff, 1978: 139; Dobrynin, 1995: 216-220; Wohlforth, 1993: 187-188; Simes, Dmitri K., "The Politics of Defense in the Soviet Union: Brezhnev's Era," in *Soviet Decisionmaking for National Security*, eds. Jiri Valenta and William C. Potter (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984): 74-76.

strategic parity accomplished, Brezhnev laid out an approach that closely connected

domestic and foreign policy, so called "Peace Program," arguing that successes in the

foreign realm could be used to alleviate some of the failings domestically.[117]

At the same time Brezhnev was increasing in authority, the Soviets approached

quantitative parity with the U.S.[118] The Soviets believed that part of the tension between

the superpowers was from a misunderstanding of each other's legitimate interests and

security concerns. U.S. strategic superiority had bred hubris, and the only way to regulate

relations was to eliminate the American advantage in nuclear weapons. Khrushchev

miscalculated by believing the presence of nuclear weapons would force the U.S. to

recognize Soviet security interests. Brezhnev and the new leadership believed the only

course was to force U.S. recognition by obtaining strategic parity. As William Wohlforth

noted, "Once again, the Soviets believed that their military power had great political

utility precisely because it deprived America's military power of its political utility."[119]

Parity allowed Brezhnev to justify opening negotiations without being attacked for

undercutting security.[120] There was no longer a need to compete with the U.S. militarily,

since the Soviets reached parity, eliminating the ability of one side to coerce the other.[121]

But most importantly, with parity the U.S. was forced to recognize Soviet interests and

security, and to treat the Soviets as equals.

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[117] Anderson, Richard Davis, *Public Politics in an Authoritarian State: Making Foreign Policy During the Brezhnev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1993): 196, 210-216.
[118] Wolfe, 1970: 437-441; Garthoff, Raymond L., "Mutual Deterrence and Strategic Arms Limitation in Soviet Policy." *International Security* 3, no. 1, (1978): 126; Wohlforth, 2002: 188-189.
[119] Wohlforth, 1993: 189-190, 198.
[120] Garthoff., Raymond L. "SALT I: An Evaluation" *World Politics* 31, no. 1 (1978): 2-3.
[121] Savel′ev, Aleksandr G, and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995): 4-5; Evangelista, 2002: 178-179.

To reach parity, the Soviets engaged in large scale strategic build up in the 1960's. The construction of SS-9 and SS-11 silos reduced the strategic disparity between the two sides, and while the Soviet SLBM capability was still far behind the U.S., it increased over the previous ten years.[122] However, U.S. qualitative advantages presented a threat to the recently acquired parity. Especially concerning was a potential ABM system that could negate the primary Soviet strategic asset, its heavy ICBM force of SS-9's. Unlike the U.S., the Soviets relied almost exclusively on land-based ICBMs. Therefore, preventing the deployment of a U.S. ABM system was crucial to preserve the strategic parity the Soviets had just achieved.[123]

However, Brezhnev still was responsible to the Politburo and the military.[124] Hawkish members of the government and the military were ardently opposed to negotiations. Minister of Defense Marshal Grechko was a vehement opponent to negotiations, and Brezhnev had to be cautious in how he approached negotiations to ensure he was not viewed as sacrificing Soviet strategic interests.[125] Brezhnev's consolidation was in part due to his ability to portray the positive outcomes of his détente policy, including the Four Power Agreement on Berlin and the progress of the SALT negotiations.[126] This enabled him to gradually undercut the more hesitant members of the leadership and justify continuing détente.

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[122] Zaloga, 2002: 116-119,

[123] Evangelista, 2002: 212-214.

[124] Gelman, Harry, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Detente* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984): 73, 76-78; Hodnett, Gary, "The Pattern of Leadership Politics," in *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy*, ed Seweryn Bialer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981): 87-118.

[125] As noted above, one way he gained the military's support was reversing Khrushchev's troop reductions and increasing the size of the conventional military. Herspring, Dale, *The Soviet High Command, 1967-1989: Personalities and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 75-78; Gelman, 1984: 79-80, 92-95; Evangelista, 2002: 227; Savel′ev and Detinov, 1993: 15-30.

[126] Dobrynin, Anatoly; *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995): 207, 216-220.

Throughout negotiations there was little strategic incentive for the Soviets to agree to anything other than ABM's. However, Brezhnev and the Soviets were interested in stabilizing, normalizing, and gaining recognition of strategic parity. As the former advisor to Foreign Minister Gromyko stated, "There was, however, serious interest in getting an agreement on SALT. The Soviet leadership craved parity with the United States. Additionally, the Politburo's anxiety about the uncertain outcome of a spiraling competition for strategic advantage was paralleled by increasing concern about the costs entailed in its military program."[127] The importance of gaining this recognition and establishing parity was important enough for the Soviets to agree to multiple American conditions. First, the Soviets continued to negotiate and eventually agreed to offensive limitations despite the U.S. an ideal agreement on ABM without any contingent offensive limitations during the opening negotiating rounds.[128] Second, while not dropping concerns over Forward Based Systems (FBS) and still believing them to be strategic weapons, the Soviets agreed to deal with the FBS issue during subsequent negotiations.[129]

The extent to which the Soviets were willing to go to negotiate a deal, especially regarding its two primary strategic concerns, demonstrated the sincerity in signaling benign intentions. Further support for this conclusion is the extent to which Brezhnev had to personally force the agreements over the objections of other Politburo members and the military.[130] This is in line with the domestic vulnerability thesis and demonstrates how important sender leaders risking their own position is to correct assessment. Soviet

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[127] Shevchenko, Arkady N., *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1985): 201
[128] Cameron, James, *The Double Game: The Demise of America's First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 127-128.
[129] Millett, Stephen M. "Forward-Based Nuclear Weapons and SALT I," *Political Science Quarterly* 98, no. 1 (1983): 79-97.
[130] Zubok, 2007: 220-221.

intentions were to codify the relationship between the two powers, and demonstrate they were security seekers.[131]

3.2.3 American Policymaker Views

In contrast to Eisenhower's desire to standardize and streamline the policy process, Nixon was determined to dominate it.[132] To ensure tight control over policies, Nixon and Kissinger put in place an NSC system that changed from a largely advisory and analytical function, to one centered around policy advocacy led by Kissinger.[133] Nevertheless, they needed to gain DoD support to quell domestic opposition. Most important was gaining Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird's buy in, who held hawkish views towards negotiations and was concerned over the balance of capabilities. Together the triumvirate of Nixon, Kissinger, and Laird were the key figures in the U.S. assessment of Soviet intentions.

Just as Eisenhower came into office with unimpeachable foreign policy experience, Nixon came with well-earned anti-communist credentials.[134] Not only was he

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[131] Blacker, Coit D., "The Kremlin and Détente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations." In *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, ed. Alexander George (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979): 120-122.

[132] Litwak, Robert S., *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 64-73; Hanhimaki, Jussi M., *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 23-24; Glad, Betty, and Michael W. Link. "President Nixon's Inner Circle of Advisers." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1, (1996): 15.

[133] Kissinger, Henry. *White House Years*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979): 38-48; Smith, Gerard C., *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980): 65, 108-120, 222-225; Newhouse, John, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); Rovner, Joshua, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011): 29-92.

[134] Larson, Deborah Welch "Learning in US-Soviet Relations: The Nixon-Kissinger Structure of Peace." In *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy,* eds. George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991): 356-357; Indeed, the Soviets were concerned about his anti-communist views, Dobrynin, 1995: 196.

a member of the House Commission on Un-American Activities, but as Eisenhower's Vice President advocated hardline policies towards the Soviets.[135] However, Nixon's views of the Soviets were not as dogmatically ideological as his anti-communist public persona would lead people to believe.[136] He was a pragmatist, but keenly aware of the power of rhetoric. Ultimately, he subscribed to the belief—shared by Kissinger—the Soviet leadership was concerned with maintaining their hold on power and would attempt to gain advantage over the U.S. when and where possible.[137] In a letter to Melvin Laird shortly after taking office, "I believe that the tone of our public and private discourse about and with the Soviet Union should be calm, courteous and non-polemical," continuing, "I believe that the basis for a viable settlement is a mutual recognition of our vital interests. We must recognize that the Soviet Union has interests; in the present circumstances we cannot but take account of them in defining our own."[138] But he was terrified of the buildup of Soviet strategic weapons, arguing that if the Soviets were to become more aggressive in a crisis it was because the Soviets "knows we aren't confident."[139] His strident rhetoric of anti-Communism was used to help defend against critics of SALT, and believed that arms control could be used to gain concessions, such as help to end the war in Vietnam.[140]

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[135] Litwak, 1984: 51-56.
[136] Hanhimaki, 2004: 18-20.
[137] Garthoff, Raymond. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1985): 26.
[138] "Letter from President Nixon to Secretary of Defense Laird, February 4, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol. I, Foundation of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v01/d10
[139] "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting: Briefing by Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff, February 12, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIV, National Security Policy, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v34/d5
[140] Knopf, 1998: 163-167; Cameron, 2018: 108; Maurer, John D., "Divided Counsels: Competing Approaches to SALT, 1969–1970," *Diplomatic History* 43, no. 2 (2019): 3653.

Kissinger believed that the realpolitik of international politics had demonstrated to the Soviet leadership their reliance on ideology and aggression was failing, and that military competition with the U.S. was a losing strategy.[141] Indeed he was largely skeptical of dispositional assessments over intentions, and believed that a "obsession with Soviet intentions causes the West to be smug during periods of détente and panicky during crises….The West is thus never ready for a change of course; it had been equally unprepared for détente and intransigence."[142] Indeed, by America adopting more pragmatic foreign policy, and with the Soviets tempering the ideological fervor, space had opened for a manageable relationship driven by the bipolar structure of the international system.[143] In part his belief was guided, like Nixon, by the perception of Soviet challenges (economic and political) compelled an interest in an agreement.[144] The ultimate motive for Kissinger was regulating and minimizing the chance of a catastrophic nuclear war, by gaining Soviet buy in to the legitimacy of a bipolar order, and recognized the political implications of an arms control agreement to achieve that end.[145]

In contrast, Melvin Laird was concerned with the quantitative and qualitative balance of capabilities rather than the management of the bipolar system.[146] He was an active participant in the SALT debates, and strove to understand and advocate for the policies of DoD and JCS. In this way he did not emphasize aggressive Soviet intentions, but that as an adversary the U.S. could not become vulnerable simply for the sake of

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[141] Del Pero, Mario, *The Eccentric Realist: Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010): 81-83; Larson 1991: 353-356: Kissinger, 1979: 119-124.
[142] Kissinger, 1979: 124.
[143] Garthoff, 1978: 82; Ferguson, Niall, *Kissinger: 1923-1968: The Idealist* (New York: Penguin, 2016).
[144] Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982): 235-246; Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 99-103.
[145] Del Pero, 2010: 82-85; Garthoff, 1985: 25-31; Kissinger, 1979: 1253-1254.
[146] Van Atta, Dale, *With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008): 189-190, 196; Maurer, 2019: 368-369.

reaching an agreement.[147] His support was crucial to push back against the domestic

critics that would eventually argue that the SALT agreement was in the Soviet's favor

since they were allowed higher quantitative thresholds.[148] Indeed, he testified his support

for SALT was contingent on Congress approving new strategic weapon systems.[149]

Kissinger even admitted the numbers he used with the Soviets were given directly to him

by Laird. Ultimately, Laird believed "anything that could slow down the Soviet pace

[arms buildup] was a good thing" and appointed Soviet hawk Paul Nitze to become his

representative on the negotiating team.[150]

3.2.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

During SALT I, the Nixon administration correctly assessed Soviet signals, and

led to the signing of numerous arms control agreements. However, the administration

came into office with a skeptical view of the Soviets, and a belief the U.S held a stronger

negotiating position which meant there was little urgency in reaching agreements. It soon

became clear, however, that the USSR had reached parity, and further growth threatened

the U.S. in the absence of an agreement. This recognition, as well as the belief Soviet

leaders were risking their own domestic political position, eventually forced Nixon and

Kissinger to correctly assess Soviet signals. Specifically, that Brezhnev was conceding to

U.S. positions which directly went against the Soviet military's interests and views. The

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[147] Cameron, 2018: 159.
[148] Van Atta, 2008: 193; Tal, David, *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiation and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-1979* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 16.
[149] Garthoff, 1985: 313-314.
[150] Van Atta, 2008: 193-194; Thompson, Nicholas, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009): 323-233.

size and scope of Soviet concessions convinced the Nixon administration the credibility of Soviet reassurance signals.

Kissinger and Nixon's initial approach to SALT was cautious, believing the Soviets were more interested in negotiations and could be leveraged to gain concessions on a "range of major issues"—namely Vietnam, in a policy that came to be known as "linkage."[151] Kissinger noted in his memoirs, "SALT also gave us the opportunity to determine whether détente was a tactic of a new turn in Soviet policy."[152] At a Review Group Meeting to discuss SALT proposals chaired by Kissinger, he noted on whether the Soviets would negotiate, "that he had seen strong arguments on both sides, i.e., that the Soviets were more conciliatory when scared or more conciliatory when they were not scared."[153] Even though Nixon believed "rational men" were in charge in DC and Moscow, he still believed the Kremlin would use every opportunity to expand its power.[154]

Soon after, the Nixon administration realized it had lost strategic superiority and developed what became known as strategic sufficiency, or as Kissinger called it, strategic equality.[155] Viewing an arms race as too costly, Nixon opted for a policy of negotiation to

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[151] On the first day of the Nixon Presidency the Soviet Foreign Ministry released a statement calling for the opening of strategic arms talks. "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, February 15, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XII, Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d13; Garthoff, 1985: 69-73; Gavin, 2012: 108-109; Kissinger, 1979: 129-130; Litwak, 1984: 110-111; Smith, 1980: 25; Tal, 2017: 6-8.
[152] Quoted in Garthoff, 1985: 192.
[153] Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the NSC also said that historical analogies provided "examples for each view. For example, many major Soviet weapons decisions were taken during 1955 and 1958-9, periods of relative détente." "Minutes of Review Group Meeting, May 29, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIV, National Security Policy, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v34/d32
[154] "Memorandum of Conversation," 25 February 1969, NA, Record Group (RG) 59, Records of the Department of State, Executive Secretariat Conference Files, 1949–72, Box 489, Vol. 1.
[155] Terriff, 1995: 19-21, 27-28; Garthoff, 1985: 127-128, 184-185; Gavin, 2012: 112.

ensure the U.S. maintained its qualitative superiority over the Soviets.[156] But rather than

launching straight into talks, Nixon and Kissinger wanted to evaluate their defense

priorities and what thresholds would be required to constitute strategic sufficiency. Nixon

argued in 1969, "We remember our massive retaliation, gave us freedom to act. This has

changed…Nuclear umbrella no longer there. Our bargaining position has shifted. We

must face facts." He went on to use an analogy contrasting the Kennedy administration's

balance of nuclear forces to 1969 and arguing that "We can't do this today. Our concern

is with their confidence, what do they think we have. We may have reached a balance of

terror."[157] The large quantitative increase in the Soviet strategic arsenal threatened U.S.

nuclear superiority—especially the land-based Minuteman force—and diminished the

hubris that marked Nixon's election.[158]

Kissinger was keenly aware of the trajectory of the Soviet strategic buildup, "The

Soviets' present buildup of strategic forces, together with what we know about their

development and test forces, raises serious questions about where they are heading and

the potential threats we and our allies face."[159] Initially, both Nixon and Kissinger held

onto the belief that the Soviets till needed an agreement more than the U.S., and argued

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[156] Terriff, 1995: 29, 31; Although other scholars argue Nixon never stopped striving for superiority. See
Petrelli, Niccolò and Giordana Pulcini, "Nuclear Superiority in the Age of Parity: US Planning, Intelligence
Analysis, Weapons Innovation and the Search for a Qualitative Edge 1969–1976," *The International
History Review* 40, no. 5 (2018): 1191–1209; Burr, Williams, "The Nixon Administration, the Horror
Strategy, and the Search for Limited Nuclear Options, 1969-1972: Prelude to the Schlesinger Doctrine."
Journal of Cold War Studies 7, no. 3 (2005): 34-35; Maurer, 2019: 364.
[157] "Notes of National Security Meeting, February 14, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIV, National
Security Policy, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v34/d7; Nixon,
Richard, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978): 617-618; Del Pero,
2010: 84; Terriff, Terry, *The Nixon Administration and the Making of US Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell
University Press, 1995): 23-26.
[158] Terriff, 1995: 19; Freedman, 1986: 153-168.
[159] Nixon Library (hereafter NL), "NSC Meeting 6/13/69 Review of US Strategic Posture NSSM 3," NSC
Institutional H Files, Meeting Files 1969-1974, NSC Meetings NSC Meeting 4/16/69 North Korea
Downing of US Aircraft to NSC Meeting 6/18/69 SALT (NSSM 28 [2 of 2] Box H-022.

an agreement for an agreement's sake was a dangerous option, "The prospect of reaching an agreement which would "legitimize" significant increases in their capabilities may explain why the Soviets are so interested in proceeding with arms control talks. It confirms the requirement that our own preparations be measured, orderly and thorough."[160] However, in what would later be somewhat ironic, Secretary Laird and the JCS argued negotiations had to begin soon otherwise, due to the quantitative growth of the Soviet strategic arsenal, both sides would be forced to continue increasing their capabilities. "If we delay initiating talks, the Soviets could cross certain thresholds (land mobile missiles, MIRV's) in their strategic programs which might foreclose certain options for limitation and create complications for verification."[161] Yet Kissinger was convinced that the Soviets needed negotiations and was "determined to initiate these talks at a moment I judge to be optimal for their success."[162]

At this early stage the primary focus was on the balance of capabilities, not Soviet intentions. Kissinger even noted at a Review Group Meeting set up to organize and standardize U.S. proposals that, "our analysis of the implications of arms control packages was more important than possible Soviet motives." Key Kissinger advisor Helmut Sonnenfeldt at the same meeting continued he "did not believe that it was fruitful to speculate on Soviet motives. If the U.S. and USSR agreed on a package and our analysis demonstrated that it was acceptable to us, we would not need to care about the

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[160] NL, "Memo for President from Henry A. Kissinger, "Analysis of Strategic Arms Limitation Proposals." May 23, 1969," NSC Files, SALT, SALT January-May Vol I to SALT June-July Vol II, Box 873.
[161] NL, "Memo for Dr. Kissinger, From Secretary of Defense, DOD Paper— "Military Consequences of a Delay in Opening Strategic Talks." 13 Feb 1969" NSC Files, SALT, January May Vol I to June-July Volume II, Box 873.
[162] NL, "Memo for Sec of State, Defense, US information agency and Executive branch, 4/23/69," Nixon Library, NSC Files, SALT, January May Vol I to June-July Volume II, Box 873.

Soviet motives."[163] Arms agreements were merely means to ends, allowing the U.S. to halt a continued Soviet buildup, stabilize the bipolar system, and ensure the continued global power of the U.S.[164] Laird directly challenged CST's concept of learning by arguing the notion the U.S. could assess Soviet intentions through iteration was a dangerous proposition, "The belief that one knows the behavior pattern of another, and further that the other is bound to this defined behavior pattern, is very risky and demands a cautious, prudent approach."[165] Nixon summed up his concerns in a note to Kissinger, "1) [The Soviets] have closed the gap [in strategic weapons]—2) they continue to increase—3) they want to talk—4) We must see that the gap is not widened on the other side."[166] The primary goal was halting further Soviet offensive strategic growth, not discerning Soviet intentions.[167]

Debates within the administration led to at least seven proposals. However, Laird was adamant that most proposals were unacceptable because of the evolution of technology and verification.[168] Nixon and Kissinger realized that the Soviets primarily wanted an ABM agreement, and could be used as a bargaining chip to gain concessions

[163] "Minutes of Review Group Meeting: NSSM 28- Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, June 12, 1969" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d17

[164] Gavin, Francis, "Nuclear Nixon: Ironies, Puzzles, and the Triumph of Realpolitik," in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* eds. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 132.

[165] NL, "Memorandum for: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, from Secretary of Defense, 3 July 1969," National Security Council (NSC) Files, SALT January-May Vol I to SALT June-July Vol II. Box 873.

[166] Cameron, 2018: 111.

[167] Tal, 2017: 4-5.

[168] NL, "Memo to Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs from Melvin Laird on SWWA, 26 June 1969," Nixon, National Security Council Institutional (H) Files Meeting Files (1969-1974), National Security Council Meetings, NSC Meeting 6/25/69 SALT NSSM 28 to NSC Meeting 9/10/69 NSSM 3 Box H-023.

on offensive limitations.[169] Yet, in a turnaround from being previously unconcerned with Soviet intentions, Nixon now cited understanding Soviet intentions as crucial in a letter to chief negotiator Gerry Smith:

> If the Soviet leaders operate on similar premises (which we do not know and which their current military programs give some reason to doubt), there could be, I believe, a prospect of reaching an understanding with them…It will be your task to obtain evidence that will assist me in making a determination whether such a prospect is real and what the elements of such an understanding could be.[170]

Indeed, Kissinger became skeptical of the chances of SALT before negotiations even began, and cited a negative dispositional view of the Soviets as justification, "They [Soviets] remain a highly suspicious, unimaginative and extremely conservative collective. There is no reason to expect a dramatic change in our relations…"[171] In part this was because Kissinger continued to misread the Soviets refusal to link any issues with arms control negotiations, which was initially a key goal for the administration.[172] As a result, and much like CST would predict, initial negotiations largely focused on gaining information on Soviet intentions.[173] The opening round in Helsinki (November to December 1969) soon demonstrated the importance the Soviets placed on ABM and Forward Based Systems.[174] Indeed, the reports from Gerry Smith and the negotiating

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[169] NL, "NSC Review Group Meeting, July 17 1969," National Security Council (NSC) Files, SALT January-May Vol I to SALT June-July Vol II. Box 873; Nixon, 1978: 416-418; Kissinger, 1979: 145, 161; Cameron, 2018: 110-124.

[170] NL, "Letter from Richard Nixon to Gerry Smith on beginning Negotiations with Soviets and proposals. July 21, 1969," National Security Council Institutional (H) Files Meeting Files 1969-74, National Security Council Meetings. NSC Meeting Box H-022 NSC Meeting 4/16/69 to NSC Meeting 6/18/69 SALT NSSM 28.

[171] NL, "Memorandum for the President, from HAK, September 22, 1969," National Security Council (NSC) Files, SALT, SALT August-September Vol III to SALT October-Nov 16 1969 Vol IV, Box 874.

[172] Which Dobrynin flatly renounced at their first meeting with Nixon. Garthoff, 1985: 48-49; Tal, 2017: 9-11.

[173] NL, "Preliminary SALT Negotiations Decision from White House NSDM 33, November 12, 1969," NSC Files, SALT, Salt 17 Nov 69-30 Nov 69 Vol I (May-Nov 69) to SALT 1 Dec 1969-31 Dec 69 VI [2 of 2] Box 875; "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, November 10, 1969," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d39; Tal, 2017: 25.

[174] Smith, 1980: 81-99.

team were quite impressed with the "seriousness" of the Soviet team.[175] Yet even the

optimistic reports of the Soviet "seriousness" didn't mean they wouldn't try to "obtain

maximum gains from an agreement."[176]

Uncertainty remained high in the run up to the first substantive negotiating

meeting in Vienna. Additionally, bureaucratic infighting continued as State and ACDA

argued the U.S. should present more comprehensive options, while Laird and the JCS

were adamantly against anything that would limit the U.S. strategic arsenal.[177] Nixon was

especially active in this period, and seemed to be genuinely uncertain over Soviet

intentions.[178] However, he was keenly aware of the potential for Soviet cheating, even

noting their penchant for secrecy was affirmed by his reading of Tolstoy.[179] He also cited

a more general analogy of the U.S. experience in the 1960's that the U.S. always

underestimated what the Soviets would do, and a dispositional belief that there were "no

constraints on cheating for them" due to the nature of the political system and

ideology.[180] Kissinger joined in the debates and had seemingly changed his views on the

importance of Soviet intentions and was annoyed by the "little reference to specific

[175] NL, "Gerry Smith's Official Report of the U.S. Delegation to the Preliminary Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, December 29 1969," National Security Council Files, SALT, SALT 17 Nov 1969-30 Nov 69 Vol V (May-Nov 69) to SALT 1 Dec 1969-31 Dec 69 VI [2 of 2] Box 875.

[176] NL, "Memo for the President from Henry A. Kissinger, Report of SALT Delegation, January 6, 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT 1/70 Vol VII to SALT 1/70 Vol VII.

[177] For State position see "Secretary of State Memo for President, Negotiating Position at Vienna SALT Talks April 6, 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT 1/70 Vol VII to SALT 1/70 Vol VII; for Laird position see, "Secretary of Defense Memo for President, 9 April 1970." NSC Files, SALT, SALT 1/70 Vol VII to SALT 1/70 Vol VII.

[178] "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, March 25, 1970," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d59

[179] NL, "Memo of Conversation, Meeting Between SALT Delegation and the President, April 11, 1970." NSC Files, Presidential/HAK Memcons, Memcon-Kissinger/Emile van Lennep March 25 1970 to Memcon-The President, PM Heath, Sir Burke Trend and Henry Kissinger, December 18, 1970 Box 1024.

[180] "Memorandum of Conversation, April 8, 1970" *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d65

evidence supporting assertions about Soviet views or interests" in the National

Intelligence Estimates.[181]

Nixon overruled DoD and JCS objections to propose a more comprehensive

option, one that included ABM limitations to national capitals. This was an almost

perfect deal that the Soviets agreed to almost immediately, reducing the U.S. ABM while

avoiding any offensive limitations.[182] And while there is still debate whether this "first

class blunder," as Kissinger admitted, was due to misperception over Soviet interests or

because of bureaucratic infighting, it resulted in Kissinger activating a backchannel

through Soviet ambassador Dobrynin, the first instance of face-to-face contact.[183] Laird

also spoke out about the seriousness of the Soviet threat, in part to justify continued

congressional support for Safeguard. "We are concerned about the future because of the

momentum in this Soviet buildup. The rapid Soviet buildup in the past five years has

reached the point where we wonder what the Soviet goal is."[184]

Ultimately, the bungled ABM proposal eliminated any doubt that it was now the

U.S. that needed an agreement more than the Soviets.[185] The backchannel resulted in a

lack of attention to official U.S. proposals and Soviet counteroffers throughout the rest of

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[181] NL, "Memo for the President, from Henry Kissinger, SNIE on Soviet Attitudes Towards SALT, March 25, 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT 1/70 Vol VII to SALT 1/70 Vol VII Box 876; is SNIE 11-16-70 Soviet Attitudes Towards SALT, 19 February 1970.

[182] NL, "Memo from HAK to Nixon, Soviets Say They Accept Moscow/Washington ABM in SALT, April 28, 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks Vienna Vol III April 9-May 10 1970, Box 877.

[183] Kissinger, 1979: 138-141; Garthoff, 1985: 162-163; Grynaviski, Eric, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014): 93-97; Cameron, 2018: 127-129. Kissinger and Cameron cite domestic and bureaucratic difficulties as the cause of the ABM proposal while Garthoff and Grynaviski argue it was ignorance of a change of Soviet position on ABM's and the fact they were more concerned about technological abilities.

[184] NL, "Secretary Laird testimony, Senate Armed Services Committee, 9 May 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks Vienna Vol III April 9-May 10 1970, Box 877.

[185] In a memo from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, he noted, "that (1) the Soviets are leading from very considerable strength in SALT." NL, "Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger from Helmut Sonnenfeldt: SALT and the US-Soviet Adversary Relationship, April 29, 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol III 4/9/70-5/10/70 to SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol IX 5/10/90-6/12/70 Box 877.

1970.[186] The Soviets continued to refuse to link offensive and defensive systems, and pressure increased on Kissinger and Nixon as Vietnam dragged on and elections were coming up.[187] Complicating the administration's assessment of Soviet intentions was the revelation by a Pentagon spokesperson that the Soviets had halted the construction of new SS-9 silos, in addition to stopping previous work on its ABM system (Galosh). Yet it was not clear to the administration if this was a signal—and indeed still unclear if this was an intentional signal by the Soviets—and there was the possibility that the slowdown was a ploy to allow the Soviets to deploy more MRV warheads, or at the least gain leverage on the FBS issue.[188] Regardless, the Soviets soon resumed SS-9 silo construction. Laird was especially concerned since the heavy throw weight of the SS-9's compensated for their lack of accuracy, making them extremely threatening to the Minuteman fields. To offset this threat, Laird insisted continuing to deploy Polaris and Poseidon SLBM's.[189] Additionally, Laird argued that "Success depends on the kind of agreement we get, not just that we get an agreement."[190]

Discussions between Kissinger and Dobrynin continued through the beginning of February, with Dobrynin noting that things did not move as fast in the Politburo as they did in the U.S., the first indication that there was significant debate within the Soviet

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[186] Tal, 2017: 52-53.
[187] Tal, 2017: 44.
[188] Smith, 1980: 202, 206-207; Garthoff, 1985: 183; Sonnenfeldt cited many "facts seem inconsistent" and contributed to the confusion. NL, "Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger from Helmut Sonnenfeldt: Political and Negotiating Implications of the Soviet ICBM Slowdown, December 17 1970," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70-Sept 70 to SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct. 70-Dec. 70 [3 of 3] Box 879.
[189] NL, "Memorandum to the President from Secretary of Defense Laird: Implication of New Intelligence for SALT, 9 March 1971," SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71- April 71 [1 of 3] to SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71-April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880.
[190] "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, March 8, 1971" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d137

leadership. This demonstrated how precarious Brezhnev's position was and that there was opposition to an agreement. Nevertheless, by February 10th, the outlines of what would later become the May 20th agreement were largely in place, which set the groundwork for the interim agreement.[191] Kissinger's discussions with Dobrynin buoyed Nixon, who believed that the Soviets "right now they want to do something."[192] He and Kissinger were beginning to believe the Soviet leadership was genuine and willing to risk their political standing for an agreement as the domestic political vulnerability theory predicts. Even though negotiations continued throughout March and April, Kissinger and Nixon remained impressed with Soviet concessions. Kissinger noted, "To sum it up, Mr. President, they've, to all practical purposes, given in on this SALT thing…because on this one they have yielded 98 percent. They've practically accepted our position on the SALT."[193] This quote demonstrates the importance of the size and scope of concessions. The fact the Soviets would agree to U.S. demands after achieving its primary objective with few concessions demonstrated the seriousness of Soviet attempts to demonstrate benign intentions.

However, the Soviet leadership (either intentionally or as Dobrynin argues unintentionally) overplayed their hand when on May 4th Semenov, chief SALT negotiator, responded to Kissinger in the official negotiations, revealing the presence of

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[191] NL, "Memorandum of Discussion Between Henry A. Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin, 10 February 1971," NSC Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Country Files-Europe-USSR, Box 78; Kissinger, 1979: 810-823.
[192] "Conversation Between Secretary of State Rogers and President Nixon, 26 February 1971" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d135
[193] "Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), 23 April 1971" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d150

the back channel.[194] Kissinger blamed the Soviets for intentionally trying to embarrass him, and the Soviets soon realized that they had to come to some sort of agreement.[195] They soon signed the May 20th agreement that committed both sides to signing an ABM agreement and "certain measures" on offensive forces. By gaining Soviet acceptance of tying offensive and defensive weapons together, the U.S. had achieved its chief goal. And while the statement was a political boost to Nixon, Kissinger's negotiations failed to specify several key issues, namely, SLBM's and FBS.[196] To get a commitment for a summit between Nixon and Brezhnev, Kissinger agreed to an ABM only treaty so long as it was "coupled with an undertaking to continue working on offensive limitations" and a vague discussion of submarines, but that they would "leave this to detailed negotiations."[197] Face-to-face contacts provided enough credible information that Nixon and Kissinger were beginning to update their assessment of intentions as CST predicted.

Laird, like most in the administration, was surprised by the secret negotiations but accepted them. He did however continue to argue that if an agreement was to be signed, they had to be specific to ensure there was no Soviet cheating.[198] His concern only increased into 1972 as final details continued to be worked out.[199] Laird viewed Soviet

[194] NL, "TELCON Between Kissinger/Dobrynin 11 May, 1971," NSC Files, HAK Office Files, Country Files-Europe-USSR, Box 78, SALT Jan 9- May 20 1971.
[195] Dobrynin, 1995: 215.
[196] Tal, 2017: 76; There was also a significant amount of debate between the U.S. and Soviets over what constituted "heavy" and "light" ICBM's and widening silos to fit larger missiles. Kissinger, 1979: 1218-1219.
[197] NL, "Memorandum of Discussion Between Henry A. Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin, 9 January 1971," NSC Files, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Country Files-Europe-USSR, Box 78, SALT Announcement State Department May 20 1971.
[198] NL, "Secretary of Defense Laird Memorandum to HAK: NSDM 17 and the Delegation's Draft Strategic Arms Limitation Agreements, 20 Jul 1971," SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71- July 71 [1 of 3] to SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug 71 Box 881.
[199] "Conversation Among President Nixon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Others, 10 August 1971," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d190

resistance to a permanent—instead of interim—offensive agreement as anathema. Since the U.S. was agreeing to give away its ABM bargaining chip, he argued the U.S. should continue to increase its SLBM capability to ensure the U.S. retained leverage over the Soviets in follow on negotiations. Without such efforts, he was "convinced that our most immediate goal in SALT must be to reverse the growing Soviet advantage in offensive arms."[200] Yet again, concerns over the trajectory of future Soviet capabilities influenced assessment.

The vagueness of the deal, which Dobrynin used to stonewall Kissinger, meant that for a time Laird's opposition became the biggest obstacle for an agreement.[201] For Kissinger and Nixon, any Soviet capabilities would be far worse without an agreement than with one, even one that excluded SLBM's. As Nixon stated, "But, if we can't, we're better off with an agreement on land-based rather than no agreement at all."[202] Yet even after three years, there was still uncertainty over what the Soviets actually wanted. Kissinger stated, "The arguments against are, first, whether it's negotiable, and whether the Soviets understand what we mean," while Nixon responded, "They understand. The question is whether we understand what they want."[203] Again demonstrating how important understanding an adversary's intentions are.

[200] NL, "Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon: Concerns Over SALT, 15 September 1971," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2] to SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 Jan-April 1972 [3 of 3], Box 882.

[201] Smith, 1980: 322.

[202] "Conversation Among President Nixon, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), 9 March 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d235

[203] "NSC Meeting on SALT, 17 March, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d240

From February to April, Kissinger and Dobrynin continued to negotiate SLBM limits, with Dobrynin holding fast against any commitments.[204] At the same time, and while never explicitly gaining acceptance of linkage, Nixon was incensed by the Vietnamese Easter Offense launched on March 30, and lectured Kissinger to raise the issue on his upcoming trip to Moscow.[205] He specifically suggested—or dictated—what Kissinger should say to Brezhnev and used analogies of previous failed summits, "So we're, this is how it differs from '59, '61 and '67. The other thing, in terms of cosmetics, is to say the President, as a student of history, knows that there have been spirits that have been raised and then dashed. We had the spirit of Vienna. We had the spirit of Camp David. We had the spirit of Glassboro. He does not want this to be that kind of a spirit."[206] Ultimately, Kissinger ignored Nixon's orders, and negotiated directly with Brezhnev. Not only did Brezhnev agreed to SLBM limits, but additionally to help lessen the image of Soviet quantitative advantage by retiring older Hotel class submarines.[207] The sincerity Brezhnev demonstrated convinced Kissinger that they were serious about signing an agreement, again supported by the size and scope of Soviet concessions.[208] The extent to which Brezhnev risked angering domestic hardliners and the military

[204] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Henry A. Kissinger and Anatoliy Dobrynin, 28 January,1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d41; Smith, 1980: 352-355; Grynaviski, 2014: 97-98.
[205] "Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), April 20, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d127; Grynaviski, 2014: 102; Tal, 2017: 90-91.
[206] "Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 19 April 1972" *FRUS*, 1969-1972, XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d126.
[207] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Nixon and Brezhnev, May 23, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d295; Bundy, William P., *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998): 309-312.
[208] Garthoff, 1978: 7; Bundy, 1998: 251-252.

cannot be understated, further supporting the domestic political vulnerability thesis.

Kissinger noted, "Brezhnev also gave us a SALT proposal that is considerably more favorable than we expected. Moscow agrees to include SLBMs at a time when it looked almost certain that we would have to drop this aspect in order to get an agreement by the summit."[209] This also provides support to the alternative Face-to-Face hypothesis and direct negotiations demonstrated to Kissinger Brezhnev was committed to this agreement.

Yet even with Kissinger's trip, Nixon was still wary that it would all end in failure.[210] In a twist of irony, he was now concerned the Soviets would link a resumed bombing campaign by the U.S. in Vietnam as an excuse to cancel the summit, and used an analogy to support this fear. In a moment of conspiratorial fervor, he blamed his 1960 election loss to Khrushchev cancelling the May 1960 summit between Khrushchev and Eisenhower over the shooting down of Gary Powers U-2.[211] He used an analogy of Khrushchev's treatment of Kennedy as a possibility of the Soviets toying with him and ultimately sinking his re-election chances.[212] Yet, Brezhnev not only didn't cancel the summit, but continued to negotiate. Going even further, the Soviets also agreed to drop demands regarding FBS and allied nuclear arsenals (such as France and Britain), and push discussions to SALT II. In large part there was a recognition by the Soviets of the domestic political implications of failing to come to an agreement, and one area in which Kissinger and Nixon were not shy about conveying:

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[209] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, April 24, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d169; Nixon, 1978: 592.
[210] Kissinger, 1979: 1154-1164.
[211] Tal, 2017: 94.
[212] "Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), May 4, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d194

> The Representatives and Senators in our Armed Services Committees will watch every line of the agreement to see if we were placed at a disadvantage or who gained an advantage…This is not a matter of lack of trust but a problem of dealing with an opposition.[213]

In addition to Soviet concessions, the realization of the trajectory of Soviet capabilities again forced Nixon and Kissinger to consider the seriousness of the Soviet offer. As Kissinger noted, "Whatever loopholes may be invented or discovered, we must remember that we will still be vastly better off than without agreement since our own programs were that they were."[214] Even the skeptical Laird was forced to concede that the Soviet political leadership wanted the agreement, but was still skeptical it could control the military, "If the Soviet political leadership wants stability, it must restrain its military leadership."[215] This demonstrates that U.S. policymakers believed Soviet concessions were so costly that they opened the political leadership to domestic opposition and vulnerability. It was clear to even Laird that an agreement has reduced the Soviet leadership's control over domestic political processes.

In the end, the Nixon administration correctly assessed Soviet signals and intention to sign an arms control agreement.[216] Kissinger argued, "Whatever the Soviet reasons, we had little basis for refusing. After all, they were accepting *our* proposals in *our* formulation."[217] Despite initially dismissive of assessing Soviet intentions and

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[213] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Nixon and Brezhnev, May 23, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d296

[214] NL, "Memorandum to Deputy Assistant for National Security Haig from Henry A. Kissinger, May 30, 1972." NSC Files, SALT, SALT Misc. (Post Summit) (Sept. 69-June 72) [1 of 2] to SALT Briefings (Duplicate File) (May 72) Box 887.

[215] The Pentagon's assessment of Soviet SSBN numbers was inflated and a reassessment helped put the final numbers of SLBM's into perspective. NL, "Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger, from Phil Odeen/ Helmut Sonnenfeldt: SALT and New SLBM Intelligence, April 7, 1972," NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2] to SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 Jan-April 1972 [3 of 3], Box 882; Garthoff, 1985: 165.

[216] "Memorandum From President Nixon to His Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), May 20, 1972," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d250

[217] Kissinger. 1979: 1218, 1241. Italics in original.

confident in its bargaining position, both Nixon and Kissinger soon realized the trajectory of Soviet strategic growth necessitated a more engaging posture. Time and again, Kissinger noted Soviet concessions, the cost of those concessions, and the fact the U.S. would be worse off with no agreement. Eventually, policymakers, even the skeptical Laird, believed the Soviet leadership was risking its own political vulnerability to get an agreement. There is also support for the Face-to-Face alternative hypothesis. Direct meetings between Kissinger, Nixon, and the Soviet leadership were instrumental in overcoming mutual skepticism and correctly assessing Soviet reassurance signals.

3.3   SALT II NEGOTIATIONS: CORRECT ASSESSMENT

Despite the optimism of further negotiations after SALT I, it initially seemed like the U.S. and USSR would be unable to sign on the follow-on agreement, SALT II. Even after President Ford and Brezhnev signed the Vladivostok Accords and set the framework for a follow-on agreement, Carter and the new administration failed to appreciate previous Soviet concessions. As Brendan Rittenhouse Green argues in his study of arms control, the Carter Administration "who had entered office so convinced of nuclear stability, were by the end of Carter's term responsible for the climactic acceleration of the arms race."[218] In an ironic twist, Carter's idealist world view pushed for even greater Soviet concessions, while Brzezinski's negative dispositional views collided to hamper negotiations. Nevertheless, constant, sustained, and credible signals by the USSR

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[218] Green, Brendan Rittenhouse. *The Revolution That Failed: Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 191-192.

demonstrated its sincerity. The Soviets, at multiple times, convinced the Carter administration that Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership were going against their domestic constituency, and were willing to risk their political position to gain an agreement. The size and scope of Soviet concessions were also important, ranging from limits on the Backfire bomber and a ceiling reduction on MIRVs and overall numbers. Negative dispositional assessments, however, threatened to derail and undermine any potential agreement. Additionally, SALT II supports to the alternative Face-to-Face hypothesis. Similar to SALT I, direct negotiation between the leaderships was crucial. Nevertheless, despite correctly assessing Soviet signals, SALT II was doomed due to U.S. domestic politics.

The first section details the post-SALT and Vladivostok negotiations. Additionally, it describes the concern regarding Soviet qualitative strategic advances in the run up to Carter's election. The next section describes how Brezhnev gradually solidified support for détente. It also details how despite Soviet skepticism over the prospects for an agreement, they were sincere and committed to signing SALT II. It is then followed with a description of key policymakers' dispositional views towards the Soviets (President Carter, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance). The final section carefully examines how the Carter administration's assessment of Soviet SALT II signals supports DPV.

Table 3.3 SALT II Outcomes

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Yes
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	Limited
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	Yes

3.3.1   Context and Background

The euphoria over SALT I was short lived. Domestic opposition, Watergate, and the increased technical nature of the issues in SALT II created strong headwinds as negotiations resumed. Even after SALT I, concerns continued over Soviet intentions and qualitative improvements such as the Soviets MIRV'ing heavy missiles.[219] Domestically, the Nixon administration was under increasing pressure from hawks in both parties, especially Senator Henry Jackson. Melvin Laird also resigned, and was replaced James Schlesinger, head of the CIA. Even more wary of the Soviets than Laird, Schlesinger

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[219] NL, "Memorandum for Henry Kissinger from John Irwin II, November 16, 1972," NSC Files SALT, SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [1 of 3] to SALT Two-I (Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [3 of 3] Box 888, SALT Two-I-(Geneva Nov 21, 1972-March 1973) 2 of 3.

would come to be an ardent advocate of hardline U.S. negotiating positions and committed to ensuring U.S. capabilities.[220]

In contrast to SALT I's broader focus on the strategic relationship, SALT II was defined by increasingly technical challenges due to technological innovation, especially since SALT II would focus entirely on offensive weapons. The Soviet's main concern was FBS and the development of cruise missiles, while for the U.S. it was MIRVs.[221] However, complicating the focus on MIRVs was domestic opposition—including Schlesinger—to numerical asymmetry.[222] While Kissinger and Nixon argued that the technological advantage of the U.S. compensated for the Soviet numerical advantage (and throw weight),[223] opponents argued the Soviet advantage in new heavy ICBMs eliminated any advantages. The Chairman of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) wrote to Nixon, "We believe the Soviets perceive themselves as approaching the threshold of strategic superiority and that this is a situation of unique significance— unparalleled in Russian history—which will give rise to even greater uncertainties regarding their conduct of foreign affairs."[224] Without numerical equivalency to mitigate the Soviets throw weight advantage, critics argued, the Soviets would could threaten the

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[220] Schlesinger, James R., "The Evolution of American Policy Towards the Soviet Union," *International Security* 1, no. 1 (1976): 37-48.
[221] "The delegations are at loggerheads over the FBS issue although the Soviets have shown a willingness to discuss other subjects (e.g., levels, MIRVs)." NL, "Memorandum from Phil Odeen/Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry Kissinger, March 26, 1973," NSC Files SALT, SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [1 of 3] to SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [3 of 3] Box 888, SALT Two-I-(Geneva Nov 21, 1972-March 1973) 1 of 3.
[222] Talbott, 1980: 31.
[223] NL, "Memorandum for the President from Henry Kissinger, November 8, 1972," NSC Files SALT, SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [1 of 3] to SALT Two-I (Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [3 of 3] Box 888, SALT Two-I-(Geneva Nov 21, 1972-March 1973) 2 of 3.
[224] "Letter From the Chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (Anderson) to President Nixon, April 30, 1974," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXV, National Security Policy, 1973-1976 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v35/d144

Minuteman fields.[225] Phil Odeen noted in a memo to Kissinger, "virtually all of our analysis of the strategic consequences of SALT rest on calculations of Minuteman survivability." But he continued estimates of the threat to Minuteman had been greatly exaggerated, "our calculations are too pessimistic and the task of eliminating Minuteman is much more difficult than our analysis assume."[226] Moreover, the JCS and DoD believed that the USSR's size made MIRVs essential for targeting such a wide area, and were developing a new system—the MIRV'd Trident SLBM—they didn't want to forego. Unable to bridge the gap on MIRV's, numerical limits, and FBS, Nixon left Moscow without an agreement and resigned on August 9, 1974.[227]

In his place stepped Gerald Ford, who was determined to carry on Nixon's policy of détente. To ensure continuity, he kept Kissinger as the chief negotiator and diplomat, but was forced to keep Schlesinger, whom he personally disliked. In his first meeting with Gromyko he stated that he was committed to détente and pointed to keeping Kissinger as Secretary of State as proof.[228] However, the initial prospects were not positive as the Ford administration remained divided over the critical issues of MIRV's, aggregate numbers, and the Soviet insistence on counting FBS.[229] Especially concerning

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[225] Green also notes how policymakers believed Minuteman survivability was overblown due to the stability of the U.S. nuclear triad and the weakness of Soviet SSBN capabilities. Green, 2020: 135.
[226] NL, "Phil Odeen to Henry Kissinger: Minuteman Survivability and SALT, February 24, 1973." NSC Files SALT SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [1 of 3] to SALT Two-I-(Geneva) (Nov. 21, 1972-March 1973) [3 of 3] Box 888, SALT Two-I-(Geneva Nov 21, 1972-March 1973) 1 of 3.
[227] In a memo to the Director of ACDA from John Newhouse, he strenuously criticized the "tendency to ascribe the most sinister meaning to Soviet activities at the strategic level…And we minimize indications pointing the other way." NL, "Memorandum from John Newhouse to Director of ACDA: Planning for SALT, February 21, 1974," SALT II Feb March 1974, NSC Files, SALT, SALT Two-I-Geneva (Jan 74)(Jan 74-April 74) [1 of 3] to SALT Two-I-Geneva (Jan 74)(Jan 74-April 74) [3 of 3]. Box 891, SALT Two-I-Geneva Jan 74 (Jan 74-Apr74) 1 of 3.
[228] Ford Library (FL), "Meeting Between Ford and Kissinger with Gromyko, September 20, 1974," NSA Temporary Parallel File Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office File: USSR-Gromyko File (19) Box 1A.
[229] "Minutes of a Meeting of the National Security Council, October 7, 1974." *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d76

was the revelation that the Soviets were testing four new missiles (SS-16, SS-17, SS-18, SS-19), all MIRV capable.[230] Kissinger nevertheless argued that the U.S. needed to demonstrate some flexibility on an agreement and retain a smaller number of quality systems, than "sacrificing quality for quantity."[231]

Kissinger met Brezhnev in Moscow ahead of Vladivostok. Brezhnev was in a weakened mental and physical state, but argued it was the Soviet Union that was living up to its end of the bargain. Kissinger agreed, but continued to press the aged Soviet leader for concessions on aggregate numbers, reminding Brezhnev there were domestic forces calling for a return to the arms race.[232] Brezhnev realized the seriousness of the ultimatum, and agreed to the Pentagon's favored proposal, numerical equivalence.[233] Kissinger and Brezhnev agreed that the foundation for the Vladivostok talks would be 2,400 launchers, while the U.S. would be permitted 2,200, and both limited to 1,320 MIRV'd missiles by 1985.[234]

Shortly thereafter, both leaders met in Vladivostok to finalize an agreement. Even with the admission of numerical equivalency in Moscow, the 200-missile gap between the U.S. and the Soviets was politically untenable for Ford. Not only would domestic critics such as Senator Jackson assail such a move, so would Schlesinger. Ford began by

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[230] Ambrose, Matthew J., *The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018): 64; Zaloga, 2002: 140-141; Talbott, 1980: 24, 26-31.
[231] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford, October 18, 1974," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d80
[232] FL, "Conversation Between Brezhnev and Kissinger, October 24, 1974," Kissinger Reports on USSR, China, and Middle East Discussion (Box 1-Oct 24-27, 1974-Kissinger/Brezhnev Talks in Moscow) (1).
[233] Kissinger's assessment of Brezhnev's concession, "My assessment is that the Soviets did make an effort to bring their position closer to ours and that we may have some possibility of developing agreed principles on aggregates, MIRVs, and possibly a few other issues." FL, "Memo for President Ford from Brent Scowcroft: Summarizing Kissinger's Report, October 27, 1974." Kissinger Reports on USSR, China, and Middle East Discussion (Box 1-Oct 24-27, 1974-Kissinger/Brezhnev Talks in Moscow) (3).
[234] Tal, 2017: 172.

letting Brezhnev know that he needed an agreement he could sell and would help him win the next election, otherwise, he might be replaced with someone who was less open to détente.[235] Brezhnev pushed back, arguing for the inclusion of Britain and France's strategic arsenals and FBS as compensation. He reminded Ford that he wasn't the only one who had to sell the deal domestically and to the military.[236] Further illustrating how domestically precarious negotiations were for the aging Soviet leader and demonstrating Brezhnev had to overcome domestic opposition, including from the Soviet military. After several hours of negotiations, Brezhnev left the room to consult with Gromyko and other advisors. He returned to stun Ford and the negotiating team. "2,400 launchers for you, and 2,400 for us; 1,320 MIRV'd missiles for you and 1,320 MIRV'd missiles for us." He also agreed to drop demands on FBS. The Soviets had agreed to the most hardline U.S. position presented—numerical equivalency—and the U.S. had not conceded anything.[237] As Kissinger noted, "As it turned out, we did a hell of a lot better than that. There are many things we accomplished—equal aggregates; no FBS compensations; no compensation for the Chinese or what they have called geographic disparities."[238]

However, domestic critics, such as Jackson, argued the threshold was too high.[239] Not only did it fail to reduce the Soviet strategic arsenal, but the threshold was higher than any growth projections of the U.S. arsenal. A second problem was the ability to MIRV whatever 1,320 missiles each side decided. This presented verification problems, as the Soviets could MIRV certain numbers of one missile while keeping the other

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[235] Ford, Gerald R., *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979): 214-215.
[236] FL, "Vladivostok Day One Conversations, November 23, 1974," Kissinger Reports on USSR, China, and Middle East Discussions (Box 1-Nov. 23-24, 1974-Vladivostok Summit (1).
[237] Ford, 1979; 218-219; Talbott, 1980: 32.
[238] FL, "Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 2, 1974," National Security Adviser's NSC Meeting File, Box 1.
[239] Grynaviski, 2014: 133.

missiles non-MIRV'd. Schlesinger and the JCS also insisted a new Soviet bomber, the Backfire, be included in the Soviet strategic arsenal.[240] But Backfire was never assessed as a strategic weapon—unlike the U.S. B-1 Bomber—and could only reach the U.S. on a one-way flight. Additionally, they refused the Soviet demands that Air Launched Cruise Missiles be included in the MIRV'd limit.[241]

Kissinger's discussions continued with Gromyko, and Ford met Brezhnev in Helsinki to sign the Helsinki Accords. Discussions on SALT made little headway however, with the Soviets refusing to agree to the inclusion of the Backfire and insistent that some concession be made over cruise missiles. Ford continued to believe that an agreement was crucial for his election prospects, but gradually began to be worn down from not only domestic critics but the Pentagon.[242] Kissinger pushed back strenuously, arguing that until now the Soviets were the ones who had made all the concessions.

> Our position is impossible. Over the last 15 months, we have made no concessions. They made a massive concession on FBS at Vladivostok. Now they have conceded on verification. We just keep on inventing things to put in the agreement…. The Backfire issue is a fraud.[243]

Finally, Ford fired Schlesinger and replaced him with his Chief of Staff Donald Rumsfeld. Yet, if Ford believed that Rumsfeld would be more supportive, he was sorely disappointed. Rumsfeld was even more skeptical of not only Russian intentions, but SALT itself. Even at one point arguing that the Soviets were cheating on SALT without any evidence.[244] Additionally, Ford's domestic critics were increasingly vocal, criticizing

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[240] Talbott, 1980: 33-34.
[241] Talbott, 1980: 35.
[242] "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, September 17, 1975," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d105
[243] "Memorandum of Conversation, September 19, 1975." *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d106
[244] Tal, 2017: 204.

not only him but the intelligence community's assessments of Soviet intentions.[245] As a result, a competitive intelligence assessment group, Team B, was established under noted historian Richard Pipes, to assess Soviet intentions on the basis of all available intelligence.[246] Instead, what they produced was a critical assessment of previous NIE's that judged the intelligence community as woefully underestimating Soviet aggressive intentions.[247] Furthermore, NIE 11-3/8-76 was written in consultation with Team B and presented the Soviet Union as striving for military superiority with increasingly aggressive intentions.[248]

Brezhnev made one last attempt during Kissinger's trip to Moscow in January 1976 by stating that the Backfire would not be given intercontinental capabilities, lowering the thresholds to 2,300, but that cruise missiles would have to be included.[249] However, Ford tried to separate the cruise missiles and Backfire issues into separate agreements, but the DoD and JCS reversed course and soundly refuted any compromise infuriating Ford.[250] Ultimately, as time grew closer to the election and the chance of an agreement and summit diminished, so did Ford's enthusiasm for negotiations. SALT II would have to wait for the next administration.

[245] Rovner, 2011: 121-125; Cahn, Anne, *Killing Detente: The Right Attacks the CIA* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1998): 49-55; Yarhi-Milo, Keren, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014): 160-163.
[246] Pipes, Richard, "Team B: Reality Behind the Myth," *Commentary* 82, no. 4 (October 1986): 25-40.
[247] "Intelligence Community Experiment in Competitive Analysis, Report of Team 'B,'" *Soviet Strategic Objectives: An Alternate View*, December 1976, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-545-28-1-5.pdf; Rovner, 2011: 127-129.
[248] NIE 11-3/8-76, 15 December 1976; Garthoff, 1985: 786.
[249] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to President Ford: CIA Views on the Implications for Soviet Policy of the Current SALT Impasse December 15, 1975." *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d111
[250] "Message From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft) to Secretary of State Kissinger, January 22, 1976," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d120

3.3.2 Soviet Intentions

Signing SALT dramatically boosted Brezhnev's standing amongst the collective leadership. Détente was showing success, and helped vindicate his policy set out at the 24th Party Congress. Not only did this allow him to justify continued negotiations, but helped ease pressure from the hawkish members of the leadership and the military. Brezhnev was able to gradually replace the anti-détente forces in the leadership. Marshal Grechko eased this process by dying in 1976, enabling Brezhnev to promote Dmitri Ustinov to Defense Minister, and solidified his control over the military by appointing Nikolai Ogarkov as Chief of the General Staff, both strong supporters of Brezhnev.[251] Shortly after in 1977, ardent opponent of détente, Nikolai Podgorny was purged from the collective leadership. Alexei Kosygin, Brezhnev's primary rival was reduced in power until his death in 1980, and eventually replaced by a Brezhnev loyalist Nikola Tikhonov.[252] Yet, while Brezhnev gradually increased his standing, he still adhered to the policy of the collective leadership. Even with the promotion of protégés (Dmitry Ustinov, Grigory Romanov and Geidar Aliev became full Politburo members) Brezhnev still required the consent of the leadership and continued to justify détente, especially as negotiations continued to drag on.[253] This became even more of an issue as Brezhnev dramatically deteriorated in health, giving openings for other members of the leadership to push for more hardline policies.

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[251] Herspring, 1990: 121-125; Garthoff, 1985: 556-557.
[252] Breslauer, George W. *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982): 230-231.
[253] Konstantin Chernenko and Vasily Kuznetsov were promoted to candidate members.

Throughout the 1970s, the Soviets also began to improve its strategic arsenal. While the 60s emphasized reaching numerical parity, in the 70s the Soviets focused on qualitative improvements.[254] Rather than seeking superiority, the Soviets were trying to maintain parity and reduce its vulnerability to the accuracy and MIRV capability of the U.S.[255] Maintaining parity was essential to Brezhnev's Peace Program and the stability of the relationship between the superpowers. The Soviets were sincerely concerned about decapitation strikes and the potential of the U.S. cutting its command and control.[256] This concern increased after the publication of the Schlesinger doctrine, which forced the Soviet military to begin thinking about countering the U.S.'s counterforce ability.[257] Nevertheless, Brezhnev clearly articulated Soviet strategic goals and benign Soviet intentions during a speech on January 19, 1977 in Tula:

> It is nonsense and completely baseless to argue that the Soviet Union is doing more than what is necessary for defense or that we are striving to gain military superiority, to 'acquire a first-strike' capability…No aspect of our policy aims at superiority in armaments. Our policy aims at reducing military power and at lowering the possibility of military confrontation.[258]

As General Detinov, who was a negotiator from the Defense Ministry, noted, "we focused on the notion of parity. We were very attentive to all changes in the strategic sphere so as to preserve strategic parity. And we were really not striving for any

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[254] Green, Brendan R., and Austin Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance," *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 615-619.

[255] Savranskaya, Svetlana, and David A. Welch, "SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust: Transcript of the Proceedings of the Musgrove Conference of the Carter-Brezhnev Project" (Conference transcript, Musgrove, Simons Island GA, May 1994): 18-19; also cited in Green and Long, 2017: 617; Podvig, Pavel. "The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s—A Research Note," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (2008): 121-122.

[256] Zaloga, 2002: 160-163; Savranskaya and Welch, 1994: 24-25.

[257] Marten Zisk, Kimberly, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955-1991*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 92-98.

[258] Quoted in Herspring, 1990: 129; Marten Zisk, 1993: 109-110; Dobrynin, 1995: 379-380.

superiority. What Brezhnev said in Tula reflected our approach to building up Soviet strategic forces."[259]

Not only were Soviet arms control signals consistent, they were continuous. The negotiations in the run up to and during Vladivostok demonstrated the extent the Soviet leadership was willing to send costly signals of their defensive/status quo intentions.[260] Most importantly, Brezhnev accepted U.S. demands on numerical equivalence—against the strenuous objections of the Soviet military—ceding one of the biggest Soviet strategic advantages. Dobrynin reported that not only was the Politburo divided, but he had to force Marshal Grechko to stand down to get Vladivostok signed.[261] Still, Brezhnev continued to negotiate as the Ford administration tried to gain more concessions, specifically regarding the Backfire bomber. It was clear that while the Backfire not a strategic weapon, cruise missiles on U.S. bombers were. This was all the more infuriating since the Soviet leadership dropped their demands on FBS.[262]

When Carter came into office, the Soviets believed that Vladivostok was still in effect. Brezhnev had "shed blood" to get the accord, overcoming significant domestic resistance.[263] To the Soviets, even with a change in administration, the U.S. and Soviets already had an agreement and it was up to the U.S. to uphold its end.[264] Dobrynin, conveying this point to Averell Harriman who was conveying these points on behalf of the President, made sure to note that Carter should understand that "All previous

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[259] Savranskaya and Welch, 1994: 15.
[260] Indeed, as Galen Jackson notes, the Soviets were "eager to cooperate" in other areas than just arms control, such as on Arab-Israeli issues. Jackson, Galen. "Who Killed Détente? The Superpowers and the Cold War in the Middle East, 1969-77." *International Security* 44, no. 3 (2019/2020): 132-133.
[261] Savranskaya and Welch, 1994: 12-13.
[262] Savel'ev and Detinov, 1995: 40-42; Savranskaya and Welch, 1994: 61-62.
[263] Talbott, Strobe, *Endgame: The Inside Story of SALT II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980): 32, 73.
[264] Dobrynin, 1995: 392; Leffler, 2007: 244.

negotiations had been conducted on behalf of the United States, of the country as a whole and the arrival of a new President should not mean breaking off everything positive that had been achieved before him."[265] Gromyko reinforced this message again to Carter "Just remember how many concessions we have already made to the Americans. All of these were big concessions to the US…All of these components are interrelated."[266] This made situations like Vance's trip to Moscow to *begin* new discussions on a more comprehensive arms control agreement anathema to the Soviet leadership.[267] Not only did this not acknowledge the concessions the Soviets made, it ignored how long SALT II had been negotiated.[268] Dobrynin noted, "we had already been deferring for six years, through three administrations. Why defer each issue?"[269] This had the unintended effect of bolstering the views of some of the hawkish members of the leadership and military.

The Soviets were becoming concerned about U.S. intentions, especially with Carter's emphasis on human rights.[270] An emphasis that increased in the wake of the signing of the Helsinki Accords.[271] All of this was on top of the failure of the U.S. to live up to its promises and provide increased economic and trade opportunities. The Jackson-

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[265] "Ambassador A.F. Dobrynin's Conversation with Averell Harriman," December 01, 1976, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Russian Foreign Ministry archives, Moscow; translation by Mark H. Doctoroff. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112013

[266] "Record of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and President Carter," September 23, 1977, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVP RF), Moscow; obtained and translated by Carter-Brezhnev Project. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111256

[267] Dobrynin, 1995: 375, 388-390; "Memorandum of Conversation, Ambassador Dobrynin with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance," March 21, 1977, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Russian Foreign Ministry archives, Moscow; translation by Mark H. Doctoroff http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116951; Ulam, Adam Bruno, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983): 168-174.

[268] Dobrynin, 1995: 430-433; Garthoff, 1985: 805-807; Garthoff, 1978: 135-138.

[269] Savranskaya and Welch, 1994: 47; Garthoff, 1985: 825.

[270] Dobrynin, 1995: 413.

[271] Leffler, 2008: 248-251; "Letter from President Carter to Professor Andrei Sakharov," *FRUS*, 1977-1980, Volume VI, Soviet Union https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v06/d5

Vanik Amendment of 1974 prohibited Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to the USSR, and specifically cited its tax on Jewish emigration as a reason to prohibit MFN.[272] One justification for SALT was that a reduction in tensions would allow the Soviets to import technology and increase trade relations with the West.[273] The failure of these benefits to materialize only added to Soviet concerns.[274] By mid-1978 the Soviets saw the relationship undergo a "serious deterioration and exacerbation," caused by the "growing aggression of the policy of the Carter government" Brezhnev noted.[275] Brezhnev further expressed his concern to Eric Honecker, arguing that the U.S. was still seeking to develop new missiles with no regard for Soviet interests, and that Carter appeared to listening to anti-détente forces but still held hope that he "seems to be aware that it is necessary to search for agreements with us on the cardinal question of war and peace."[276] Additionally, as for one of the key events that is often heralded as a key signal of Soviet aggressive intent, Soviet involvement in the Ogaden conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, "Taken as a whole, these Russian documents seem to have been made available to give a picture of a well-intentioned and relatively benign Soviet Union confronted with a situation it neither anticipated nor desired."[277] And while Carter finally met Brezhnev

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[272] Zubok, 2007: 232-233.
[273] Leffler, 2008: 242-243.
[274] Gelman, 1984: 148-151.
[275] "Speech by L.I. Brezhnev to CPSU CC Politburo, 08 June 1978," June 08, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Center for Storage of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD), Moscow, fond 89, per. 34, dok. 1. Obtained by David Wolff and translated by M. Doctoroff. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111257
[276] "Transcript, Meeting of East German leader Erich Honecker and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Crimea, 25 July 1978 (excerpt)," July 25, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Stiftung "Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR" im Bundesrachiv (SAPMO-BARCH) Berlin, DY30 JIV 2/201/1495. Obtained and translated by Christian Ostermann. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117047
[277] Henze, Paul B., "Moscow, Mengistu, and the Horn: Difficult Choices for the Kremlin." *CWIHP* Bulletin No. 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997): 46.

and signed SALT II, the failure to push through ratification was just another data point to the Soviets that Carter really did not want an agreement.[278]

3.3.3 American Policymaker Views

Despite his desire for a "team approach," in reality much of the debates over foreign policy were conducted by Carter, his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, and his Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.[279] Carter ultimately decided policies, but Vance and Brzezinski were constantly lobbying and pushing Carter in opposite directions.[280] Rather than a series of committees, Carter wanted a simpler NSC system with only two committees codified in Presidential Directive 2 (PD-2).[281] The Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) was chaired by Brzezinski and would deal with the more "urgent" matters such as SALT II negotiations, crises, putting him at the apex of the flow of information, much in the same way as Kissinger.[282]

Carter had an idealistic view of America's role in the world and came into office with ambitious foreign policy ideas. Chief among those were dramatic reductions in

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[278] Garthoff, 1985: 994; Dobrynin, 1995: 416, 428-429.

[279] Glad, Betty, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009): 24; Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 115-116, 126-129; Garrison, Jean A., "Framing Foreign Policy Alternatives in the Inner Circle: President Carter, His Advisors, and the Struggle for the Arms Control Agenda," *Political Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2001): 779; Carter, Jimmy, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995): 53-57; Vance, Cyrus Roberts, *Hard Choices: Four Critical Years in Managing America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983): 35-40.

[280] Rosati, Jerel A., "Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy Beliefs of Political Leaders: Addressing the Controversy over the Carter Administration," *Political Psychology* 9, no. 3 (1988): 485-486; Glad, 2009: 25.

[281] Presidential Directive 2, January 20, 1977; Garrison, 2001: 780.

[282] Glad, 2009: 30-32.

nuclear weapons and the promotion of human rights.[283] Carter held a generally

cooperative view of world politics and Soviet dispositions. "My intention was to

cooperate with the Soviets whenever possible, and I saw a successful effort in controlling

nuclear weapons as the best tool for improving our relations."[284] Carter's biggest

criticism of previous administrations, in regards to détente, was that they emphasized

weapons and interests rather than larger strategic goals.[285] His first letter to Brezhnev,

and initial messages through Averill Harriman, sought to relay his desire to improve

relations and an awareness of the Soviet desire to quickly conclude SALT II.[286] He

followed up after Brezhnev's response to the first letter with a more detailed description

of arms control proposals and that his human rights statements were not directed at

interfering in domestic Soviet politics.[287] The Soviets were hesitant and the response

disappointed him, demonstrating his genuine bewilderment at interests that didn't align

with his idealistic views.[288]

Closer to Carter's views on arms control and the Soviet relationship was his

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.[289] Vance held largely benign views of Soviet intentions,

believing that the Soviets shared the U.S. interest in furthering cooperation and finding

common ground, especially in avoiding military confrontation.[290] SALT was a main

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[283] Carter, 1995: 220; Peterson, Christian Phillip, "The Carter Administration and the Promotion of Human Rights in the Soviet Union, 1977-1981," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 3 (2014): 628–56.
[284] Carter, 1995: 223.
[285] Carter, 1995: 220-222.
[286] Talbott, 1980: 39, 42.
[287] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 127.
[288] Garrison, 2001: 785; Nichols, Thomas M. "Carter and the Soviets: The Origins of the US Return to a Strategy of Confrontation," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13, no. 2 (June 2002): 22; Glad, 2009: 1.
[289] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 127; Rosati, 1988: 485.
[290] Laucella, Melchiore J., "A Cognitive-Psychodynamic Perspective to Understanding Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's Worldview," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, No. 2 (2004): 244-246.

avenue for furthering this cooperation and finding common interests.[291] He further

believed that, "determining the intentions of nations in the international system were

problematic and fraught with uncertainty."[292] Instead of labeling states as aggressive or

revisionist, the U.S. needed to attempt to recognize legitimate Soviet interests.[293] Much of

Soviet actions could be understood of as reactions to American policy, not aggressive

intent.[294] And while he was optimistic about the potential for cooperation, he did

recognize the reality of competition inherent in the relationship between the

superpowers.[295]

      In contrast to the optimistic views of Carter and Vance, Brzezinski held a much

more aggressive view of Soviet intentions.[296] Born in Poland and forced into exile by the

Nazi invasion, Brzezinski eventually became a professor at Columbia, and somewhat of a

rival to Henry Kissinger. Carter was warned, including by Averell Harriman, to not

appoint Brzezinski because he was too "hawkish."[297] But the two men had a chemistry,

with Brzezinski holding lessons for the presidential candidate on foreign affairs. He

mistrusted Soviet intentions and viewed competition as the central component of the

relationship.[298] Yet he did not believe they were unquestionably expansionist and

incapable of selective cooperation.[299] But "selective cooperation" was a problem for

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[291] Garrison, 2001: 776, 787; Vance, 1983: 31, 45.
[292] Laucella, 2004: 245.
[293] Vance, 1983: 26-28; Laucella, 2004: 245; Glad, 2009: 25.
[294] Garrison, 2001: 787-788.
[295] Laucella, 2004: 242-243.
[296] Caldwell, Dan, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Arms Control: The SALT II Treaty Ratification Debate* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991): 14; Glad, 2009: 25.
[297] Talbott, 1980: 49; Vaisse, Justin, *Zbigniew Brzezinski, America's Grand Strategist.*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018): 272.
[298] Campbell, Steven, "Brzezinski's Image of the USSR." (PhD dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2003): 126-128; Garrison, 2001: 776, 787; Vaisse, 2018: 280-281.
[299] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 127-128.

Brzezinski as he did not believe the Soviets could benefit from détente in one area and discard it in others.[300] He believed that the Soviet Union could, and should, be contained, and that SALT was merely one way to halt the buildup of the Soviet military.[301]

3.3.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

The SALT II case is a most likely cast for CST. Nevertheless, it almost became a case of should have been. Almost immediately, the Carter administration compounded already tense negotiations by calling for further reductions. Soviet resistance was greeted by some advisors as evidence of aggressive Soviet intentions. Eventually, the Carter administration successfully assessed Soviet signals despite linking Soviet actions to SALT II and calling for further concessions while offering little in return. This case finds support the domestic political vulnerability thesis, as well as for the Face-to-Face alternative hypothesis.[302] Dispositional assessment also played a role, but almost entirely negative. These assessments were continually used to downplay and dismiss Soviet overtures, which were only overcome through direct negotiation and significant Soviet concessions.

On becoming President, Carter's idealism was quickly confronted by the reality of a nearly completed arms control agreement. Despite his assurances to conclude the SALT II quickly, he soon worried the Soviets with statements about renegotiating the

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[300] Tal, 2017: 219.

[301] Brzezinski, Zbigniew K., *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985): 146, 162; Talbott, 1980: 48. Talbott cites Brzezinski viewing the SALT negotiations as "truth test" of Soviet intentions.

[302] Which as described above in the Soviet intentions section, came after the Soviets "shed blood" to reach sign the Vladivostok Accords with Ford.

Vladivostok accords for even deeper cuts.[303] Carter met with Dobrynin shortly after his

inauguration, arguing the Vladivostok accords were too conservative, and floated moving

the Backfire and cruise missile issues to a separate agreement.[304] However, Vance

recognized there was little hope for this, and argued the Backfire was not a heavy

bomber, challenging the Pentagon.[305] Carter wrote to Brezhnev outlining his ideas and

proposals for a sweeping new agreement. However, the Soviets replied they already had

an agreement, and Carter's proposals would only solidify U.S. strategic advantage over

the Soviets.[306] Brezhnev and the Politburo responded in a letter described as a "bucket of

cold water" to Carter.[307] However, it should not have been a surprise to Carter, as

Dobrynin and the Soviets had repeatedly stressed the importance of signing SALT II

based on Vladivostok.[308]

Undeterred, Carter was committed to renegotiating with the Soviets for even

larger cuts, and sent Vance to Moscow on March 28-31.[309] Almost everyone in the

administration held little hope for a positive Soviet reaction, but Carter was presented

with three options known as Basic Vladivostok, Vladivostok Plus, and Vladivostok

Minus.[310] All options were variations of the current agreement, with relatively minor

changes to the ICBM limits and accommodations for Backfire and cruise missiles.[311]

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[303] Carter wanted to see the "total number of nuclear missiles reduced, by several hundred." "Memorandum of Conversation between President Carter, Anatoliy Dobrynin, Cyrus Vance, and Zbigniew Brzezinski,1 February 1977," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d148

[304] Tal, 2017: 226; Ambrose, 2018: 81.

[305] Carter Library (hereafter CL), "Memorandum to President Carter from Vance and Warnke: U.S. SALT Position, March 18, 1977." NLC-7-55-4-11-8.

[306] CL, "Memorandum from Warnke to Vance on Meeting with Dobrynin, May 9, 1977," NLC, 7-55-5-22-5.

[307] Quoted in Tal, 2017: 227; Brzezinski, 1985: 155-156.

[308] Leffler, 2008: 257.

[309] Ambrose, 2018: 81.

[310] Vance, 1983: 47-49; Talbott, 1980: 46-47, 63-64; Tal, 2017: 228; Brzezinski, 1985: 159-160.

[311] Ambrose, 2018: 90-96.

However, Carter and Brzezinski were disappointed by the proposals, viewing them as too complicated and unimaginative. Carter wanted dramatic cutbacks, "real arms control," not small alterations.[312] He viewed Vance's trip as an opportunity to "test the USSR interest in turning toward peaceful negotiations, and to see if they are prepared to negotiate in good faith."[313] Like Eisenhower, previous Soviet signals were discounted, and further tests were proposed to discern true intentions.

Ultimately, the administration created what became known as the "comprehensive approach" that called for larger cuts in MIRV'd ICBMs, along with provisions for the Backfire and cruise missiles.[314] However, Vance realized the comprehensive proposal was a nonstarter, and pushed to have a backup proposal included in his instructions as well: Vladivostok minus—Vladivostok numbers and leaving Backfire and cruise missile issues to SALT III.[315] Unsurprisingly, Vance's proposals did not go over well with Gromyko and Brezhnev who were particularly incensed at Carter's new emphasis on human rights.[316] While willing to discuss the possibility of deferring some topics to SALT III, Brezhnev argued that there would be no further negotiations unless they signed SALT II based on the already agreed upon Vladivostok accord.[317]

Carter's idealism blinded him to the reality of how far the Soviets had already gone and caused him to seek further gains on arms control, ignoring sincere Soviet efforts

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[312] Talbott, 1980: 47-49, 57-60.
[313] "Memorandum of Conversation of a Meeting of the National Security Council, March 22, 1977," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d155
[314] Talbott, 1980: 60-61.
[315] Talbott, 1980: 62; Tal, 2017: 227-228.
[316] CL, "Memo from Vance to White House, July 1977," and "CIA Report: Soviet Foreign Policy at the Crossroads, July 8, 1977," National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material: Country File: United Kingdom: 11/80 through USSR: 7/77 Box 78, USSR 7/77; Grynaviski, 2014: 137.
[317] Talbott, 1980: 68-75.

to signal longer term benign intentions.[318] At the same time, infighting broke out amongst

the administration over who was to blame for Vance's failed Moscow trip.[319] Some such

as Brzezinski and his aid William E. Odom specifically cited their belief in the negative

dispositional nature of the Soviets and dismissed the notion the skepticism was due to a

lack of information:

> There is a strong inclination in CIA analysis to blame the Soviet military and the
> mechanism of the State Defense Council for bamboozling the majority of the Politburo
> on military policy issues, SALT in particular. This technique is as old as the Soviet
> system. Yet we have been slow to recognize it. And then the wrong inferences are drawn:
> if only the "good guys" in the Politburo had an informed view of Soviet SALT policy, the
> Soviet position would be more moderate, congenial to our own.[320]

To Brzezinski, there were no "good guys" in the USSR, just revisionist opportunists and

had to be treated as such.

Nevertheless, negotiations continued throughout 1977 and into 1978, but with an

added issue. The Soviets developed a new heavy ICBM to replace the older SS-9. Not

only was the new SS-19 MIRV capable, it had increased accuracy, threatening the land-

based U.S. ICBM force. [321] As a result, verification was essential to limiting MIRV'd SS-

19s. However, SS-19s were housed in two missile bases, Derazhnya and Pervomaisk,

with lighter and un-MIRV'd SS-11's, making differentiation almost impossible. The U.S.

also had a similar situation with MIRV Minuteman III and un-MIRV'd Minuteman II

deployed at Malstrom Air Force Base in Montana. If there was going to be any

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[318] Blight, James G. and Janet M. Land, "Using Critical Oral History to Reassess the Collapse of U.S.-Soviet Détente in the Carter- Brezhnev Years," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 2 (2010): 43, 68-69.
[319] Talbott, 1980: 74-77.
[320] "Memorandum From William E. Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski): Thoughts on Soviet Approaches to SALT, April 22, 1977." *FRUS,* 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d162
[321] Vance 1983: 49-52; Talbott, 1980: 99-103.

agreement, this issue had to be resolved and Carter viewed it as an additional test of Soviet intentions.[322]

The deadlock finally broke during Gromyko's visit to the U.S. for the UN General Assembly in September. Gromyko was due to meet Carter, but first met with Vance. Initially reverting to his gruff demeanor, Gromyko relented when Vance threatened him with the potential collapse of SALT if Carter was met with obstinacy. Gromyko said that he was authorized to negotiate a compromise on the MIRV ICBM ceiling if the U.S. agreed to count ALCM carrying bombers under the 1320 MIRV limit set forth under Vladivostok. Furthermore, he carried a letter stating the steps the Soviets would ensure the Backfire did not have intercontinental range (limiting it to 2,200 kilometers and a constant rate of production).[323] This again signaled Soviet sincerity by conceding to significant concessions to American positions. Vance and Brzezinski were ecstatic and set off a desperate scramble to make a counterproposal. At their meeting, Carter countered Gromyko by counting ALCM's but limiting land based MIRV's to 800 and all silos at Derazhnya and Pervomaisk counted in the limit. Carter pushed his luck even further by saying that the U.S. would always continue to speak out for human rights. And while expecting a few days before the Soviet response, Gromyko requested an audience almost immediately. Gromyko accepted the U.S. positions but still wanted higher overall numbers. Eventually it was agreed that the overall ceiling was 2,250, Carter got his MIRV reduction to 1,200, and the ICBM subceiling was lowered to 820.[324] Despite the

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[322] Talbott, 1980: 109-199.
[323] Talbott, 1980: 124-125; Tal, 2017: 236; "Memorandum of Conversation, Vance and Gromyko, September 22, 1977," *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d182
[324] Talbott, 129-130.

U.S. conceding including ALCMs under the MIRV limit and accepting higher numbers

on the Soviet heavy missile force, it was the Soviets who made the biggest concessions:

new subceilings, especially on heavy land-based missiles, allowing the U.S. to mix and

match under the MIRV subceiling, and included Derazhnya and Pervomaisk. There were

still specifics to be worked out, but the foundation of a new SALT II agreement was

laid.[325]

However, just as the breakthrough with Gromyko happened, domestic and

international politics intervened to derail the agreement. First, the Carter administration

encountered increasing domestic opposition. This included congressional and Pentagon

concern over the status of new strategic weapons, such as Trident SLBM and the MX

ICBM.[326] Unsurprisingly, one of the most outspoken opponents was Senator Jackson,

who was particularly incensed the administration had allowed higher ceilings on Soviet

heavy missiles.[327] Opponents viewed the compromises with Gromyko as U.S.

concessions instead of Soviet ones.[328] Domestic groups like the Committee on the Present

Danger (CPD) included such notables as Paul Nitze, Eugene Rostow, and Dean Rusk.[329]

They waged a propaganda battle to influence Congressional and public opinion. At the

same time domestic opposition was increasing, the Carter administration's foreign policy

focus shifted to the peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt along with negotiating

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[325] Talbott, 1980: 130-132; Brzezinski, 1985: 169-170.

[326] CL, "Memorandum to President Carter from Brzezinski: Meeting with the JCS on SALT, October 6, 1977," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, SALT (5/79-7/79) through SALT- Chronology (10/6/77-7/10/78) Tabs [15-32] Box 39, SALT- Chronology (10/6/77-7/10/78) Tabs [15-32].

[327] Talbott, 1980: 133-145.

[328] Vance, 1983: 100; CL, "Memorandum to President Carter from Brzezinski, November 4, 1977," Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, SALT (5/79-7/79) through SALT- Chronology (10/6/77-7/10/78) Tabs [15-32] Box 39, SALT- Chronology (10/6/77-7/10/78) Tabs [15-32].

[329] Tal, 2017: 239-240; Skidmore, David, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996): 129-130.

the Panama Canal Treaty.[330] Importantly, the Panama Canal Treaty, instead of providing an easy foreign policy win, turned into a slugfest and rallying cry for a resurgent right to attack Carter's foreign policies.[331] Ultimately, Congress narrowly passed the treaty but portended a difficult ratification fight for SALT II.[332]

As 1978 dragged on, the Carter administration became disappointed by the lack of progress on negotiations, none more so than Brzezinski—despite the Soviet concessions during Gromyko's visit. The administration began to speculate the Soviet economic situation meant it was desperate for an agreement to reduce defense spending.[333] This is in line with DPV's expectation that perception of weakness *a priori* to the signal is a negative and contributes to incorrect assessment. More concerning was Brzezinski's view of Soviet actions in the third world as evidence of its intention to use détente to stabilize relations with the U.S. while they made advances elsewhere.[334] Brzezinski argued, "The Soviets must be made to realize that détente, to be enduring, has to be both comprehensive and reciprocal."[335] Brzezinski began to reconsider the benefits of a SALT II agreement, believing the Soviets were merely jostling for a better bargain and again relying on his pre-existing dispositional assessments.

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[330] Quandt, William B., *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015): 278, 450.
[331] Zaretsky, Natasha, "Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and U.S. Nationalism after Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 535–562.
[332] Tal, 2017: 252.
[333] CL, "CIA Report on Brezhnev Trip to Vladivostok, 20 April 1978," Brzezinski Material, Country File, USSR: 8-9/77 through USSR: 6/78 Box 79, USSR 2-4/78; CL, "Memorandum to President Carter from Brzezinski: Estimated Soviet Defense Spending: Trends and Prospects (June 1978)," Brzezinski Material, Country File, USSR: 8-9/77 through USSR: 6/78 Box 79, USSR: 6/78.
[334] Vaisse, 2018: 304.
[335] CL, "Memorandum to President Carter from Brzezinski: The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations, March 3, 1978." Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Meetings-SCC 50, 1/9/78 through Meetings- SCC 100, 8/10/78 Box 28; Brzezinski, 1985: 147-151.

No action was as illustrative of Soviet intentions to Brzezinski as the Ethiopian/Somali crisis in the Ogaden. Formerly supportive of Somalia, the Soviet Union eventually shifted its support to Ethiopia's military council, known as the Derg, who proclaimed to adhere to Marxism-Leninism. Soon Soviet advisors and Cuban troops— reminiscent of Soviet involvement in Angola—began arriving in Ethiopia. Some within the administration, especially Brzezinski, were concerned over the possibility of a Soviet presence in the Horn of Africa and its control over the shipping lanes through the Suez Canal. Yet, just as Kissinger and Nixon learned, the Soviets rejected Brzezinski's attempt to link other issues to SALT.[336] Brzezinski's revisionist dispositional view was reinforced during this period, noting, "it [Soviets] is there because it has a larger design in mind. To start thwarting that design, we have to increase the costs to the Soviet Union."[337] And while Brzezinski was unable to persuade Carter that Ogaden was a part of a larger Soviet plan, in large part due to Vance arguing linkage would not work, it did contribute to Carter's increasingly skeptical view of Soviet intentions.[338]

On negotiations, the Soviets provided assurances Backfire would not be given strategic capabilities, but Brzezinski argued for more, believing there was little chance the Soviet military would allow further concessions. But the Soviets had had enough of the Backfire issue and would give no further concessions.[339] By the time of Vance's trip to Moscow in April 1978, the Carter administration realized they had to accept the current situation, and linkage between Soviet conduct and SALT was not going to work.

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[336] "Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Carter, 27 February 1978," *FRUS*, 1977-1980, Vol VI, Soviet Union https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v06/d84
[337] CL, "Memorandum to President Carter from Brzezinski: The Soviet Union and Ethiopia: Implications for U.S.-Soviet Relations, March 3, 1978." Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Meetings-SCC 50, 1/9/78 through Meetings- SCC 100, 8/10/78 Box 28.
[338] Vance, 1983: 84.
[339] Tal, 2017: 249.

However, Vance was told to warn the Soviet leadership its global actions would inevitably make the conclusion of SALT impossible if continued.[340] Gromyko met Carter on May 27 and presented a "gesture of good will," and would release a statement limiting the range of the Backfire and no intention of giving it intercontinental range, which U.S. policymakers had earlier viewed as unlikely due to significant resistance from the Soviet military. He said the Soviets were willing to do away with the upper limit on the range of cruise missiles and hoped that these concessions would elicit some U.S. concessions. Against conceding to the U.S. on an important issue to break the deadlock. The meeting then devolved into specifics, with Carter largely ignoring SALT issues and focusing on minutiae and bringing up Soviet actions in Africa and human rights.[341]

Both Brzezinski and Vance had differing views of the outcome, each viewing Carter as either too soft or too strong. In an effort to propel negotiations, Carter was to give a speech at his alma mater, Annapolis, on SALT and relations with Russia.[342] Brzezinski and Vance presented characteristically opposite versions of the speech, with Carter deciding on the middle course and including both a hard and soft element to his speech.[343] The Soviets reacted negatively, viewing Carter's speech as extremely negative given his focus on human rights and seemingly ignoring continued Soviet concessions.[344]

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[340] Tal, 2017: 250-251.

[341] Tal, 2017: 253-254.

[342] CL, "Draft Review of U.S. Policy Toward the Soviet Union," National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Brzezinski Office File, Country Chron, USSR: 7/78 through USSR: 2/79 Box 80, USSR, 12/1-20/78.

[343] Brzezinski's continued pressure on Carter to be harder on the Soviets and that Détente had to be "global" and "reciprocal" was starting to have an effect. Vaisse, 2018: 305.

[344] Auten argues that this gradual shift was not the product of domestic factors but a changing assessment of the Soviet Union and their strategic programs. In contrast, Skidmore argues it was domestic interest groups that forced Carter to harden his stance and views. Caldwell takes the middle ground between Auten and Skidmore, arguing that domestic politics played a role but the primary driver was assessments of Soviet intentions. See Auten, Brian J., *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of American Defense Policy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008); Skidmore, 1996; Caldwell, 1991; Nichols, 2002: 35-36.

Leading that view was Brzezinski, who used an analogy of SALT I, and previous failed summits, to describe the possibility of the Soviets trying to gain last minute concessions before the summit.[345] He argued the U.S. could not "trust" the Soviets, and was

> …increasingly skeptical of Soviet intentions because of the momentum of its military programs and its intervention in the Third World. In the past, we could discount Soviet intentions because Soviet capabilities were limited; today, even benign Soviet intentions are becoming increasingly suspect because of the implications of Soviet capabilities.[346]

Brzezinski argued despite significant concessions, the fact the USSR was modernizing its strategic capabilities demonstrated revisionist intentions.

Despite some specifics to be worked out, Gromyko and Vance told Brezhnev and Carter they reached an agreement, and agreed to meet in Vienna in June 15-18. Even still, the Pentagon and Brzezinski were concerned Soviet defense spending and trajectory of technological innovation would upend the strategic balance.[347] Nevertheless, Carter agreed to meet Brezhnev. However, Carter immediately pressed his luck by asking for a commitment that production of the Backfire would not exceed 30 per year. Gromyko promptly responded they had already done so, but Brezhnev cut him off and agreed, signaling he was personally committed to the agreement and ending any further dissent from the Soviet leadership. This was an important moment where Brezhnev clearly and personally signaled to Carter he was willing to risk political dissent and committed to the agreement. The Soviets further agreed to not encrypt data relevant to SALT.[348] During

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[345] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter May 12, 1979." *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIII, SALT II, 1972-1980 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v33/d238
[346] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, May 29, 1979." *FRUS*, 1977-1980, Vol VI, Soviet Union https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v06/d197
[347] Ambrose, 2018: 121-124.
[348] Tal, 2017: 265.

Vladivostok, Kissinger noted that Brezhnev was the crucial linchpin in any potential deal since only he could overrule the Soviet military and Kremlin hardliners.[349] This assessment proved true, and Brezhnev risking his own political standing to reach an agreement was the crucial component in the Carter administration successfully assessing Soviet signals.[350]

In the U.S., challenges were growing against an agreement, especially in Congress. Anti-treaty opponents, both in Congress and groups such as CPD, had been waging a sustained campaign to move public opinion against ratification. SALT II barely made it out of the Foreign Relations Committee to be put for a vote. The Carter administration also handicapped itself by creating a crisis over the revelation of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba.[351]

At the same time, Brezhnev's health continued to decline, and decision-making was increasingly controlled by Dmitry Ustinov, Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, and Boris Ponomarev. The Soviets watched U.S. domestic opposition increase and became worried about a U.S. reaction to the fall of the Shah in Iran.[352] Additionally, the placement of Pershing II missiles in Europe concerned the Soviets—which was a U.S. response to the SS-20.[353] Afghanistan was increasingly a source of concern. Eventually the USSR invaded and installed a puppet leader. Despite officially rejecting linkage during SALT negotiations, it was impossible for Carter to ignore Soviet actions.[354]

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[349] Tal, 2017: 196-197.
[350] Tal, 2017: 265-267.
[351] Duffy, Gloria, "Crisis Mangling and the Cuban Brigade," *International Security*, 8, no. 1 (1983) 67-87; Grynaviski, 2014: 138; Vaisse, 2018: 306.
[352] Ambrose, 2018: 153.
[353] CL, "CIA: Outlook of Brezhnev's Successors Towards Détente, November 9, 1979," Brzezinski Material, Country File, USSR: 10/19-31/79 through 2/17-29/80 Box 82, USSR 11/79.
[354] Leffler, 2008: 334-337; Vaisse, 2018: 310-311.

Brzezinski viewed it as vindication of his belief in the revisionist intentions of the Soviets while Vance continued to argue that SALT and Soviet actions should be understood in isolation from one another. SALT II was dead, and Carter's defeat in the 1980 elections eliminated any chance at ratifying an agreement eight years in the making.[355]

Carter and his administration ultimately came to believe Soviet hand tying signals were sincere, even if domestic politics made it impossible to ratify. Soviet tying hands signals, by themselves, were insufficient for the U.S. to correctly assess. As this case demonstrated, a belief that Soviet leaders were personally risking their political standing was crucial for correct assessment. Moreover, there is support for the face-to-face hypothesis, where meetings between Gromyko, Brezhnev, and Carter played a significant role. Without Soviet domestic political vulnerability however, there would have been no agreement.

3.4   CONCLUSION

Despite herculean efforts on both sides, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were never able to translate good faith efforts and nuclear arms treaties into a long-lasting reduction of tensions. Both sides returned to the status quo ante of uncertainty, mistrust, and competition. Nevertheless, when Soviet leaders demonstrated they were risking their own

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[355] Carter wrote to Senator Byrd on January 3, 1980 requesting the Senate delay consideration of SALT II, immediately killing any chance of ratification. In the aftermath, and demonstrating his transition from a desire to eliminate nuclear weapons, President Carter signed PD-50 and PD-59. PD-50 was to assuage domestic critics by laying out stricter parameters for negotiating future arms control agreements while PD-59 revised U.S. nuclear and targeting strategy to emphasize a "war-fighting capability." Garthoff, 1985: 789-790, 971-973.

political position, U.S. policymakers were more likely to correctly assess signals. During the May 10 signal, U.S. policymakers believed that instead of risking domestic political vulnerability, domestic weakness had forced the Soviets into sending reassurance signals. To correctly assess hand tying signals, U.S. policymakers had to believe the Soviet leadership was willing to expend political capital against domestic hardliners and the military. But as SALT I and II demonstrated, belief did not directly translate into an updating of intentions. In SALT I, Kissinger and Nixon became convinced of benign Soviet intentions, whereas in SALT II, events outside negotiations scuttled any chance of the Carter administration assessing benign Soviet intentions.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: CONVENTIONAL TROOP REDUCTION REASSURANCE

SIGNALING

Never one to miss an opportunity to grandstand, Khrushchev took such an opportunity in March 1956 while speaking to the Danish Prime Minister, Hans Christian Hansen, to paint the Soviets as the victims of a "big military psychosis" which led to the creation of NATO. Nevertheless, he argued, the Soviets were committed to demonstrating they had benign intentions in the face of aggressive Western tactics. "We will prove our peacefulness and thereby loosen up NATO. We will unilaterally reduce our armed forces and then it will be hard for you to maintain NATO in front of your public opinion."[1]

Anarchy pushes states towards caution when negotiating with adversaries. To avoid unacceptable levels of vulnerability and cheating, states often take a quid pro quo approach to reducing tensions. Therefore, whenever a state undertakes unilateral reassurance actions it should be viewed as a large and credible signal of a state's benign/status quo intentions. These unilateral moves constitute a credible signal through sinking costs. Paying costs up front makes unilateral moves a sincere demonstration of intention. One of the most common unilateral military reassurance signals is troop reductions. Reducing the size of conventional forces demonstrates the sender's defensive orientations since it reduces the state's ability to launch an offensive. In contrast, an aggressive state with offensive designs would never take an action that would undermine

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[1] Quoted in Hopf, Ted. *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945-1958*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 249.

157

its capability to win in a conflict. As a result, when a sender unilaterally reduces the size of its military, the target should assess it as an attempt to sincerely convey defensive/status quo intentions.

CST commonly cites Soviet unilateral actions as instances of successful signaling and helped end the Cold War. In this chapter, I look at three cases of Soviet troop reductions in 1956, 1960, and 1988. The Eisenhower administration correctly assessed the 1960 signal, but incorrectly assessed the 1956 troop reductions. Gorbachev's 1988 reductions are included because it is commonly cited by the CST literature as a successful case. All cases meet the thresholds CST argues should lead for targets to understand signals as costly: unilateral, large in size, and public. Moreover, CST argues Soviet troop reductions should have been viewed as costly because the USSR was unilaterally giving up a distinct military advantage that weakened its offensive power.

Troop reductions were largely successfully assessed during the Cold War. The size and clarity of the reductions were crucial to correct assessment. Even though public and often very large, U.S. policymakers were wary, often debating the true size of the reductions. In 1956, there was confusion over the actual extent of the reduction, and whether or not Khrushchev's numbers were inflated. While in 1960 and 1988, the sheer size and public nature of the reductions meant that it was impossible to ignore as an attempt at signaling reassurance. In both the 1960 and 1988 cases, U.S. policymakers correctly perceived the Soviet leader's domestic vulnerability by making large troop cuts.

Prior to all three reductions, U.S. policymakers believed any reductions were unlikely due to resistance from the Soviet military, making all three reductions a surprise and forcing U.S. policymakers to assess their meaning. The cases provide mixed support

for the domestic political vulnerability thesis. When U.S. policymakers believed the Soviet leadership was risking tension with the military and other domestic interest groups, signals were correctly assessed, even when policymakers held negative dispositional views. When policymakers believed weak domestic conditions forced Soviet leaders into the reductions, the signals were incorrectly assessed.

Additionally, in the case of the 1988 reductions, U.S. policymakers were concerned Gorbachev exposed himself to too much domestic vulnerability. In that case, U.S. policymakers feared that Gorbachev's signals left him exposed to a coup or overthrow from hardline members of the government. This supports the argument that reassurance signals can be too large, and the sender exposing themselves to too much domestic vulnerability can affect the assessment of the signal. For Gorbachev, his troop reduction was correctly assessed, but it did not lead to an updating of intentions as a result of U.S. policymaker concern Gorbachev could be replaced by hardline members of the Soviet leadership and his troop reductions, as well as the more general cooperative Soviet policies, quickly reversed.

There is some limited support for both alternative hypotheses in the cases. Disposition continued to play a role, albeit largely negative, in undermining and discounting Soviet signals. There was little direct contact between the leaderships during each of the cases, coming only during the 1988 case. Even then, there was limited evidence that direct contact between leaders contributed to successful assessment.

4.1   1956 TROOP REDUCTION: INCORRECT ASSESSMENT

As Chapter 3 demonstrated, the "spirit of Geneva" did not last long after the U.S

and Soviet July 1955 meeting. Despite signing the Austrian State Treaty and the May 10

disarmament proposal, Soviet leaders were unable to signal their benign intentions.

Disarmament negotiations stalled in the wake of Eisenhower's Open Skies proposal, with

the Eisenhower administration believing Soviet reassurance signals were camouflage for

Khrushchev's domestic reforms. Undeterred, Khrushchev announced a cut of 1.2 million

troops in May 1956, which followed a previous cut in August 1955 of 640,000.[2] The

Eisenhower administration viewed the reductions, but was uncertain over the size and

extent of the troop reductions—partly as a result of uncertainty of the overall size of the

Soviet military—and believed the troop cut was designed to modernize Soviet offensive

capabilities.

This case demonstrates how heavily policymakers discount unilateral

conventional troop reductions, especially due to nuclear weapons. Eisenhower assessed

the reductions as merely mimicking actions the U.S. had already undertaken to modernize

its conventional forces for a nuclear battlefield.

This case partially supports the domestic political vulnerability thesis that signals

will be incorrectly assessed when the target believes domestic conditions forced the

sender. Rather than demonstrating domestic vulnerability, the Eisenhower administration

believed the reductions were initiated to reduce, not increase, the Soviet leadership's

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[2] Larson, Deborah Welch. *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 68-69; Garthoff, Raymond L. "Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels: Some Light from the Past," *International Security* 14, no. 4 (1990): 99.

domestic vulnerability. U.S. policymakers—most prominently Dulles—believed that the signals were a *forced* reaction to negative domestic conditions. However, questions and uncertainty over the true size and scope of the troop reductions also undermined any perception that the reductions created domestic political vulnerability for Khrushchev.

First, I begin with a background discussion of the debates inside the U.S. government regarding the relationship between conventional and nuclear capabilities, and how these debates would influence assessments of Soviet conventional force reductions. I proceed with a detailed assessment of Soviet intentions, including Khrushchev's beliefs on the nature and role of conventional forces in a nuclear world and his efforts to increase his domestic power by launching a campaign criticizing Stalin and his policies. While Khrushchev did want to redirect funds away from the military and into domestic economic production, it was not to gain bargaining advantage and did seek to reduce tensions with the United States. Additionally, he did this against significant domestic opposition, from both the military and the elite. I then describe the views of key policymakers in the administration responsible for assessment of the Soviet signal (President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur Radford). The final section examines the U.S. incorrect assessment of the Soviet May 1956 unilateral troop reduction.

Table 4.1 1956 Troop Reduction Outcome

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Limited
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	Yes
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	None

4.1.1 Context and Background

The Eisenhower administration agreed nuclear weapons were crucial to balance against the USSR's overwhelming conventional superiority. Additionally, Eisenhower viewed rampant military spending as a national security risk, and sought to reduce the size and expenditures of the military.[3] As a remedy, the American military was to be scaled down, and European countries would increase their own conventional capabilities backed up by American strategic air power.[4] This formed the core of what became known as the New Look policy.[5] Even with a Soviet nuclear capability, and the apocalyptic

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[3] Trachtenberg, Marc, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 132-146.
[4] Trachtenberg, Marc, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 151-156, 157-164.
[5] Dulles, John Foster, "The Strategy of Massive Retaliation," speech before Council on Foreign Relations, Jan. 12, 1954; Eisenhower, Dwight David. *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956: The White House Years*. (New York: Doubleday, 1963): 449-458; Rosenberg, David Alan. "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960." *International Security* 7, no. 4 (1983): 28-30; Gaddis, John Lewis,

predictions over the size of the Soviet bomber force (NIE 11-3-55), the focus still

centered on a land war in Europe due to the USSR's massive advantage in conventional

forces.[6] Compounding the danger was the inadequate size of NATO's conventional

forces, which forced the U.S. to compensate with nuclear weapons. In the case of general

war, the U.S. would rely on tactical nuclear weapons and NATO conventional forces to

blunt the Soviet offensive in Europe then rely on the newly created Strategic Air

Command to launch strategic retaliation.[7]

Much of the debate centered on the same question that defined discussions over

America's nuclear posture: can limited conflict be controlled? Eisenhower rejected the

argument that wars could be controlled below the level of nuclear weapons, and only a

policy of massive retaliation in the event of war would keep the Soviets from risking such

a clash.[8] While the rest of the administration was split, critics argued the reliance on

massive retaliation limited the options available to policymakers and military

commanders, unduly increasing the risk of miscalculation. Gradually, even Dulles came

to challenge Eisenhower's logic, arguing that in a crisis the U.S. would be stuck between

backing down or launching full blown nuclear war.[9] However, Eisenhower was not

Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 145.

[6] NIE 11-3-55 "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses of Action Through 1960," 17 May 1955; Bowie, Robert R., and Richard H. Immerman. *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 223-224; Roman, Peter J. *Eisenhower and the Missile Gap*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995): 21-26.

[7] Rosenberg, David Alan. "The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960," *International Security* 7, no. 4 (1983): 28-32.

[8] Wells, Jr., Samuel F, "The Origins of Massive Retaliation," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 96 (Spring 1981): 31-52; Bundy, 1988: 255-260; Brands, H.W., "The Age of Vulnerability: Eisenhower and the National Insecurity State," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (1989): 963–89; Trachtenberg, 1991: 142; Craig, Campbell, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*. (Columbia University Press, 1998): 45-49, 59-64, 74-78, 84.

[9] Craig, Campbell. *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 58.

focusing on a warfighting strategy; he rejected the notion that limited war could be controlled from escalating and instead focused on avoiding war.[10] He came into office terrified of the destructive power of nuclear weapons and believed escalation could not be controlled once war began.[11]

Beyond controlling escalation, discussions also included the utility and size of conventional forces in a nuclear era. Some such as Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway believed that the U.S. had to have "balanced U.S. military forces rather than reliance upon atomic retaliatory capability."[12] He further argued that the threat of nuclear weapons made conventional forces more, not less, necessary.[13] Ridgway argued, to the point of insubordination, that conventional forces were both theoretically and practically necessary in nuclear war due to the size and nature of U.S. commitments. Pushing back, Eisenhower argued that since that America's nuclear umbrella provided cover for NATO allies, they should be responsible for contributing the bulk of NATO's conventional forces. As Brendan Green notes, Eisenhower envisioned a "buck passing" strategy that called for Europe to provide ground forces, while the U.S. would provide air and naval resources.[14] Eisenhower believed that with its nuclear deterrent, the U.S. could now

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[10] Craig, 1998: 57-70.

[11] McGeorge, Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988): 253; Erdmann, Andrew P.N. "War no longer has any logic whatever: Dwight D. Eisenhower and Thermonuclear Revolution." In John Lewis Gaddis et al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 97; DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-1961, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 5, 190th Meeting of NSC, March 25, 1954.

[12] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 227th Meeting of the National Security Council, December 3, 1954," FRUS, 1952-1954, National Security Affairs, Vol II, Part 1 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d138

[13] Evangelista, Matthew. "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s." *World Politics* 42, no. 04 (July 1990): 511.

[14] Green, Brendan Rittenhouse. "Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition." *International Security* 37, no. 2 (October 2012): 26.

reduce the size of the conventional military and rely on European allies to contribute.[15]

During the 1952 Lisbon summit, NATO was so concerned about the Soviet conventional

advantage they committed—but never fulfilled—to increasing its conventional forces to

96 divisions, with 35-40 immediately available.[16]

The reliance on nuclear weapons and attempts to reduce conventional forces

created significant issues between the U.S. and its allies. By relying on massive

retaliation, many European allies doubted the U.S. commitment and worried that the U.S.

would not start a nuclear war in the face of low-level Soviet aggression. Additionally, as

General Ridgway noted, there was the unanswered question of how the U.S. would

support its commitments, especially in the Third World. For Eisenhower, the answer was

simple:

> …we would not get involved in a "small war" extending beyond a few Marine battalions
> or Army units. If it grew to anything like Korea proportions, the action would become one
> for use of atomic weapons. Participation in small wars, in his opinion, is primarily a matter
> for Navy and Air. Our job will be to support, but not to engage our main forces which must
> be kept clear for larger scale.[17]

Simultaneously, the U.S. was growing concerned over the spread of Soviet

influence in the Third World. The administration was concerned over the attractiveness

of the Soviet model of economic development. Dulles noted the "phenomenon of

Russia's rapid industrialization," continuing, "these nations and especially those in Asia

were being enormously impressed with the transformation which had been accomplished

by the Soviet Union. The prestige of the 'Great American Experiment' which had begun

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[15] Combs, Jerald. "A Missed Chance for Peace? Opportunities for Détente in Europe." In Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 52-53; Trachtenberg, Marc. *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 149-152.

[16] Trachtenberg, Marc. *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): specifically chapter four.

[17] "Memorandum of a Conference With the President, May 14, 1956," FRUS, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d77

a hundred years ago was being diminished in the light of the 'Great Russian Experiment' which had been achieved in some 30 years."[18] For Radford, the U.S. needed the flexibility to use nuclear weapons in coordination with conventional forces if it was going to compete for influence. The inability to use nuclear weapons limited options and was "getting us further and further from the realm of the possible and the actual." While Eisenhower agreed from a "military point of view," he argued Radford "could nevertheless not ignore the political factor. He did not say that world opinion was right in its views about the use of nuclear weapons in small wars."[19]

However, as Dulles noted, the New Look strategy made every crisis a nuclear crisis.[20] Both these issues continued to be hotly debated amongst the Eisenhower administration. As the U.S. debated its posture between nuclear and conventional forces, it assessed Soviet conventional forces in a very different way, viewing them as *the* central threat, but also discounting reductions as only *increasing* Soviet capability. Policymakers were concerned about the overwhelming Soviet conventional advantage as well as a perception of growing influence in the Third World. These views reinforced negative dispositional views of the USSR and its intentions.

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[18] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 273d Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, January 18, 1956" FRUS, 1955-1957, Foreign Aid and Economic Defense Policy, Vol X
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v10/d14
[19] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 277th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, February 27, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d61
[20] Craig, 1998: 84.

4.1.2 Soviet Intentions

Despite the failure of the Geneva Summit to produce any tangible agreements on disarmament, it was a domestic political victory for Khrushchev. Khrushchev painted the meeting as a vindication of his approach to world politics.

> Our trip to Geneva convinced us once again that no pre-war situation actually existed at that time and that our likely enemies feared us as much as we feared them. That was why they too rattled their sabers and tried to put pressure on us to obtain an agreement that would be advantageous to them…They understood that they had to establish relations with us on a different basis. That's why the trip to Geneva was useful even though it didn't produce any actual results.[21]

Khrushchev was still vulnerable to those members of the Presidium who disagreed with his policies—such as Malenkov, Molotov, and Lazar Kaganovich. In order to distance himself from the deeds of Stalin and break from his policies (both domestic and foreign), Khrushchev decided on what William Taubman called "the bravest and most reckless thing he ever did."[22] On February 25, 1956 at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Khrushchev went on a four-hour devastating critique of Stalin. Part of the goal of such a risky venture was to give Khrushchev the freedom to enact his new, and sometimes radical, policies by breaking with the legacy of Stalinism. Additionally, Khrushchev separated himself from Stalin's crimes, and used to speech to explicitly connect many of his opponents to those very same crimes.[23]

Khrushchev was driven by two goals: improving the domestic economy and creating a Soviet strategic missile capability. Now that the Soviets acquired nuclear weapons he believed "the interests of the Soviet Union and a number of other countries

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[21] Khrushchev, Sergei. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Statesman, 1953-1964*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013): 50.

[22] Taubman, William. *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004): 274.

[23] Taubman, 2004: specifically chapter 11.

would be taken into account."[24] In addition, the security of the Soviet Union would only

increase as its strategic arsenal grew.[25] Nuclear weapons changed the nature of conflict

and competition in world politics, and Khrushchev believed the Stalinist notion of an

impending attack by the West was incorrect. The horrifying reality of nuclear weapons

meant the West could not coerce or threaten the Soviets and, much like Eisenhower, he

believed conventional armed forces would play a smaller role in world affairs. Moreover,

troop reductions would have a further benefit; by reducing conventional forces,

Khrushchev could undermine one of the primary justifications for Western hostility, the

threat of a massive Soviet invasion.[26]

Since nuclear weapons protected the Soviet Union and armed forces would take

on a smaller role, the competition between Communism and Capitalism would be

determined by economics. By focusing on economic competition, Khrushchev was

determined to portray the Soviet Union as the most advanced and successful political

ideology by increasing economic growth. However, the Soviet Union was starting from

behind, and the first task was to catch up to the West. In another attempt to reduce

tensions with the West, Khrushchev opened relations with West Germany and invited its

Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, to Moscow. During his trip, Khrushchev described his

desire to devote military spending to domestic production and in so doing demonstrate

his focus on economic, as opposed to military, competition:

> Both gentleman [Bulganin and Khrushchev] want to raise the Soviet Union to the level of
> the civilized countries within as short a time as possible. They clearly realize that this is a
> gigantic task which will require enormous manpower and expenditure…Khrushchev said
> literally that it was very disturbing for them to have to spend so much on armaments and

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[24] Khrushchev, 2013: 39.
[25] Wohlforth, William Curtis. *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 144.
[26] Blechman, Barry M., and Lincoln P. Bloomfield. *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament, 1954-1964*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1966): 45.

> thus to be forced to postpone other tasks…They are aiming at a breathing spell in armament expenditure in order to be able to devote themselves more forcefully to their other tasks.[27]

Not only would reducing the size of the military allow more investment in the domestic economy, it would free up considerable labor as well. Nevertheless, as Evangelista noted, labor shortages were not so dire to force unilateral troop reductions, and other measures could have been found that would not have been so politically risky. However, in the context of the Five Year Plans they were partially meant "to make up shortfalls in the non-state (mainly, collective farm) sectors of the economy."[28] Therefore troop reductions could stimulate the domestic economy, and were not forced by a poor economic situation as U.S. policymakers would later argue.

Reducing the size of the military allowed Khrushchev to demonstrate that it was the West, not the Soviet Union, who held aggressive intentions. Khrushchev, and CST, argued reducing troops and relying on nuclear weapons demonstrated defensive orientation. The massive size of Soviet and Warsaw Pact conventional forces was constantly cited as an indication of aggressive Soviet intent, which Khrushchev argued the West used it to justify their refusal to negotiate.[29] Since nuclear weapons made large conventional forces unnecessary, Khrushchev could undermine the West's justification for a continued military buildup. By reducing the West's perception of a conventional threat, Khrushchev believed he could draw the Europeans into substantive negotiations, forcing the U.S. to also engage.

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[27] DDEL, John Foster Dulles, Papers 1951-1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series Box. No 2, "Letter from Chancellor Adenauer to President Eisenhower, September 23, 1955."

[28] Evangelista, Matthew. *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999): 104-108.

[29] Richter, James G. *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 60.

Initially, the military accepted the need to downsize the bloated military in the wake of Stalin's death. Khrushchev's first public announcement of unilateral troop cuts came in August 1955 when he announced a reduction in 640,000 troops. However, declassified Soviet documents show that instead of the publicly cited and generally accepted 5.763 million-troop size of the Soviet military in 1955, the authorized strength was actually 4.8 million.[30] Instead of beginning in 1955, the first troop reductions occurred in the wake of Stalin's death when the military was 5.4 million. By January 1956, the size of the military was already reduced to 4.4 million and ultimately resulted in more troops being cut than publicly announced in May 1956.[31]

Mass mobilization had long roots in Russia, stretching back to Imperial Russia.[32] In addition, conscription into a large military fulfilled a number of social and economic roles (such as construction with Railway troops, ideological indoctrination, and even vocational training). The reliance on maintaining a large force of conscripts increased the military's political power and justified the bloated officer corps. Additionally, WWII and memories of Stalin's purges in the 1930's created high levels of anxiety amongst military elites. Moreover, the military had not bought into Khrushchev's belief that nuclear weapons were making conventional forces obsolete.[33] Therefore to push through Khrushchev's reforms, he relied on Defense Minister Marshal Georgii Zhukov, hero of WWII, who was instrumental in gaining the military's acceptance.[34]

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[30] Most analysts previously accepted Khrushchev's 1960 statement on the size of the military in 1955 as accurate and based subsequent estimates off of that number, including post-WWII. See Garthoff, 1990: 93-109; Wolfe, Thomas W. *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970): 164-166.
[31] Evangelista, 1999: 93-95.
[32] Jones, Ellen. "Manning the Soviet Military." *International Security* 7, no. 1 (1982): 105-131.
[33] Garthoff, Raymond L. *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*. (New York: Praeger, 1958): 149-156.
[34] George F. Minde II and Michael Hennessey. "Reform of the Soviet Military Under Khrushchev and the Role of America's Strategic Modernization." In *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.: Past and Prospects*.

Khrushchev pushed through his reductions not only to modernize the military or improve the domestic economy; he was genuinely interested in moving forward on some form of disarmament agreement.[35] Further evidence in support of the sincere nature of the troop reductions is the Soviets proposal on the reduction of conventional forces on March 27, 1956, which called for reducing U.S., USSR, and China's forces to 1-1.5 million troops with Britain and France at 650,000.[36] Khrushchev intended to break out of the "vicious circle" of disarmament proposal and counter proposals, he announced to British PM Anthony Eden during a trip to London in late April that, "They [Soviets] had decided to make, unilaterally, a very considerable reduction in the total strength of their armed forces, including a reduction in the numbers stationed in Germany." The goal was that in doing so, "this would make it plain to world opinion that they did not desire war."[37] By reducing troop levels, Khrushchev believed he could demonstrate the USSR's defensive orientations and desire to cooperate with the West.

4.1.3   American Policymaker Views

Instead of reducing uncertainty over Soviet intentions, the Geneva summit only increased concern that the Soviets were trying to trick the West into agreements that would undermine the West. Most importantly, Soviet unwillingness to allow aerial

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Ed. Robert O. Crummey (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 183, 186-192; Evangelista, 1999: 96-98.

[35] Evangelista, Matthew. "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s." *World Politics* 42, no. 04 (July 1990): 513.

[36] Department of State. *Documents on Disarmament, 1945-1959*, (Volume I, Washington D.C., 1960): 603-607.

[37] "Visit to the United Kingdom of Bulganin and Khrushchev, 19-27 April 1956," 1956, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, FO 371/122836. Document obtained by James Vaughan. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123798

reconnaissance for verification of a nuclear arms control agreement was a continued source of disagreement, as were negotiations over Germany. All three key policymakers—Eisenhower, Dulles, and Radford—were still in office at the time of the 1956 troop reductions and held roughly the same views towards Soviet intentions; that the Soviets would exploit the slightest weakness and continue to exploit any vulnerabilities.[38]

Eisenhower was disappointed that the Soviets rejected his Open Skies proposal and the continued inability to come to an agreement over Germany. Consequently, he grew increasingly skeptical over Soviet intentions.[39] Although he was open to the possibility the Soviets held benign intentions, they needed to undertake further costly signals—in addition to everything the they had already done—to convince him**.** He also believed they realized the necessity of avoiding nuclear conflict. "The Soviets cannot be wholly out of their minds. They must realize, as we do, the seriousness of the situation," continuing, "he was anxious to see what reception our proposals might have in the Soviet Union and in the world."[40] Eisenhower, however, remained open to the possibility the Soviets did not hold aggressive intentions.

However, Dulles conceded that the Soviets had made dramatic changes in policies and made "no pains to disguise the views which they apparently hold," but continued, "I

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[38] George, Alexander L., and Richard Smoke. *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974): 319-320.

[39] He is especially critical of his assessment of Khrushchev after Geneva, although this comes from his memoir and most likely colored from his later interactions. "[Khrushchev] "does not want peace, save on his own terms and in ways that will aggrandize his own power. He is blinded by his dedication to the Marxist theory of world revolution and Communist domination." Eisenhower, Dwight David. *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956: The White House Years*. (New York: Doubleday, 1963): 522.

[40] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 274th Meeting of the National Security Council, January 26, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, Regulations of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d103

think that in the larger questions, relating to the fundamental choice between peace or war and the organization of their internal economy, the Soviet leaders are to a certain extent feeling their way." In large part, he felt that Soviet leaders faced conflicting interests, those of the Russian state and those of Communism. "Current Soviet policies are evidently directed toward disguising the features of militant Communism."[41] But since the Soviet leaders prioritized Communism, they could not be dealt with and were rooted in a messianic mission to spread Communism, whatever the cost. Nevertheless, he saw the West's steadfast approach to the Soviets working.[42] "The Soviet position at Geneva as evidence of weakness rather than strength."[43] With Germany in NATO, the increasing economic integration of Europe, and the overall success of the West in resisting the Soviets, he was gradually coming to see the Soviets as "less menacing" and while the U.S. and Soviets had issues, "We have differences, and they are hard differences, but we know they will not lead to war."[44] Although for Dulles, the key issue was Germany, not disarmament, and viewed Molotov's positions at the foreign ministers meeting following the Geneva summit as a wedge strategy against the West.[45]

For Radford, little had changed. He saw no indication of Soviet benign intentions, merely changed tactics. The failure of the Soviets to accept Open Skies was another data

[41] "Letter From Secretary of State Dulles to Chancellor Adenauer, October 3, 1955" FRUS, 1955-1957, Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955, Vol V https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d287

[42] Pruessen, Pruessen, Ronald W. "From Good Breakfast to Bad Supper: John Foster Dulles Between the Geneva Summit and the Geneva Foreign Ministers' Conference." In Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill ed, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 255-257.

[43] DDEL, Papers as President 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 267th Meeting of NSC November 21, 1955.

[44] Quoted in Pruessen, Ronald W., "John Foster Dulles and the Predicaments of Power," in Richard H. Immerman ed, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 35.

[45] Pruessen, 2000: 262-266.

point which vindicated his view no serious negotiations could begin until the USSR demonstrated, unequivocally, benign intentions. Indeed, Radford argued, the Geneva summit was a propaganda victory for the Soviet leadership—giving them "respectability"—and was especially beneficial to their efforts in the third world.[46] Moreover, to Radford, Soviet efforts to modernize its military and developing its strategic arsenal demonstrated clear aggressive intent. Any attempts to negotiate on disarmament or other issues, such as Germany, would merely invite Soviet aggression.[47] Going into 1956, U.S. policymakers had increasingly negative dispositional views of the Soviets, with all three skeptical of the chances of the Soviets reducing their conventional advantage.

4.1.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

With U.S. nuclear superiority, the USSR had an interest in coming to a nuclear arms control agreement to reduce nuclear asymmetry. In contrast, the Soviet advantage in conventional forces would make any unilateral Soviet reduction a costly signal of defensive/status quo intentions. However, instead of correctly assessing the signal, U.S. policymakers believed domestic economic weakness forced the Soviets into making the troop reduction. Therefore, instead of risking domestic political vulnerability, U.S. policymakers believed the Soviet leaders were sending signals to *secure* their domestic

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[46] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 278th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 1, 1956" FRUS, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d62.

[47] NA, "Memo from Dulles to Radford: United States Post-Geneva Policy, August 15, 1955." NA, RG 218, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chairman's File: Admiral Radford, 1953-1957, 091 Russia (1953-55) to 091 Russia (1956), Box No. 16 HM 1994.

political situation. Additionally, policymakers were unsure about the actual numbers of the troop reduction, and viewed the reduction as a ploy to buy time until the USSR could deploy nuclear missiles and directly compete with the U.S. The uncertainty over the size of the reductions only reinforced negative dispositional views regarding Soviet intentions and led to the incorrect assessment of Soviet troop reductions.

In late 1955 and early 1956, as negotiations with the Soviet Union stalled, the U.S. administration held little hope for a strategic disarmament agreement. Negotiations focused on the viability of an inspection regime for a nuclear arms control agreement, and the U.S. believed the Soviets would not agree to a conventional agreement before nuclear negotiations. U.S. policymakers held negative dispositional views of the Soviets and specifically noted they did not believe the Soviets would unilaterally reduce troops. Admiral Radford commented in 1954, "The USSR, on the other hand, while engaging in propaganda for the elimination of atomic weapons, has made only specious proposals regarding limitation of conventional armaments, although it maintains the largest conventional military establishment in the world."[48] Indeed, of all the disarmament options under discussion, Dulles was most skeptical about the chances of a conventional agreement.

> In this field the Soviet totalitarian system provided Russia with the greatest advantages over the United States, namely, the ability quickly and quietly to secure a very rapid expansion in the number of such forces. Historically, indeed, reduction of military manpower had always proved the hardest nut to crack in all past disarmament schemes.[49]

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[48] "Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Wilson), 23 June 1954." FRUS, 1952-1954, National Security Affairs, Vol II, Part 1 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d119

[49] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 274th Meeting of the National Security Council, January 26, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, Regulations of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d103

Precisely because conventional reductions would reduce the greatest Soviet advantage, U.S. policymakers held little optimism for the likelihood of troop reductions.

Concern over the Soviet conventional military advantage was so great that the JCS argued "nuclear counteraction" was the only thing preventing Soviet forces from overrunning Europe.[50] Radford believed the Soviets were in fact trying to increase its military capabilities, and estimated Soviet conventional forces at 175 combat ready divisions, with another 125 available within 30 days of mobilization.[51] The NIE concurred with the JCS. "We believe that, generally speaking, the personnel strength of Soviet and other Bloc forces will remain substantially unchanged during the period of this estimate. However, the overall effectiveness of these forces will increase." Therefore, the JCS and U.S. intelligence assessments argued if the Soviets reduced forces, it would increase military capability on a nuclear battlefield, not reduce it.[52]

In August 1955, the Soviets announced the first troop reduction, some 640,000 troops. A key question for the U.S. was whether the reductions were actually costly, since policymakers were concerned that Soviet secrecy over the actual size of the military. Stassen pointed out "the Soviet Union has never given in detail figures of its forces, despite inquiries from other representatives in the Sub-Committee, nor has it given any

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[50] NA, "Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Implications of Soviet Armaments Programs and Increasing Military Capabilities, 13 February 1956" RG 218 Records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Geographic File, 1954-56, 350.09 USSR (12-19-49) Sec. 8-381 USSR (3-2-46) Sec 71, Box No. 34, Folder CCS 350.09 USSR

[51] NA, "Memorandum for Admiral Radford: Soviet Ground Forces Mobilization Potential, 15 February 1955" and "Report for Admiral Radford: Increasing Soviet Military Expenditures," RG 218 Records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Geographic File 1954-56, 092 Spain (4-19-46) Sec. 18 350.09 USSR (12-19-49) Sec 7. Box No. 33.

[52] NIE 11-3-55, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses of Action Through 1960," May 17, 1955.

indication of the net effect of the alleged cut of 640,000 men which it does report."[53]

Therefore, the administration had a difficult time assessing whether these reductions were

a new signal, or just a more accurate, updated figure.

The experience of post-1945 reinforced the uncertainty, particularly for Radford.

At an NSC Meeting in January 1956 he cited previous disarmament negotiations between

1945-1950 which had "fortified their [JCS] conviction that we are dealing with a people

[Soviets] who had no intention whatever of keeping any agreement if they can get out of

it to their advantage."[54] When the U.S. had undertaken a massive demobilization, he

argued the Soviets had not and the resulting asymmetry contributed to the Korean War.[55]

Yet, the Soviet announcement of a unilateral reduction of 1.2 million troops was

nevertheless surprising.

With the confusion over the exact size of the Soviet Army, however, the

administration was skeptical the reduction was a costly signal at all. Despite the U.S.

specifically pointing to potential Soviet military resistance, the administration did not

initially believe the reductions were anything more than belated post-war adjustment.

Even if the reduction was of advertised size, the U.S. it only amounted to catching up to

U.S. reductions since the end of the Korean War. The U.S. army after Korea was reduced

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[53] DDEL, WHO Office of the Special Assistant for Disarmament (Harold Stassen): Records, 1955-1958. Box No. 3, DCS Position Papers (8), Special Staff Study for the President NSC Action No. 1320. "Position Paper on Probable Soviet Positions and Proposed US Responses." February 20, 1956.
[54] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 274th Meeting of the National Security Council, January 26, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, Regulations of Armaments; Atomic Energy, Vol XX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v20/d103
[55] DDEL, WHO Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Records, 1952-61, Special Assistant Series, Subject Subseries, Box No. 4. "Memorandum to Secretary of Defense from Admiral Radford, 25 January 1956."; There is a debate over the true size of the Soviet military post-1945, affecting the scale and cost of subsequent reductions. See Karber, Phillip A., and Jerald A. Combs. "The United States, NATO, and the Soviet Threat to Western Europe: Military Estimates and Policy Options, 1945-1963." *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (July 1998): 399–429; Evangelista, Matthew. "The 'Soviet Threat': Intentions, Capabilities, and Context." *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (July 1998): 439–49.

from 1.5 million to 1.1 million by 1955, and soon reach 899,000 by 1958. Eisenhower

believed the Soviets were only copying the U.S. in adjusting to a nuclear battlefield. He

said, "the Soviets would be doing nothing…except to imitate…the so-called "New Look

Strategy."[56] Therefore, Eisenhower perceived the reduction as nothing more than a

propaganda ploy designed to give the Soviets bargaining leverage and paint the U.S. as

obstructionist if it did not reciprocate.[57] To not be caught "flat-footed," he ordered

Stassen to consider some potential responses to any announcement.[58] Secretary of

Defense Wilson backed up Eisenhower's view, "the Russians are coming to the point

where they will have the capabilities to destroy us just as we will have the capability to

destroy them," and that the Soviets had realized there was little ground threat to them and

could reduce troops without increasing vulnerability.[59]

Dulles' own view provides some support to DPV. Instead of signaling

benign/defensive intentions, Dulles thought it represented a weakening—but still

dangerous—Soviet Union that was trying to reposition itself against the U.S. Dulles was

a big proponent that, like the May 10th agreement, the Soviets were drowning under the

weight of defense spending. Since the reductions were forced on the Soviets in an effort

to reduce the defense burden, it was incorrectly assessed. Dulles commented in

November 1955 that Soviet defense spending was "too great a burden" and it was

possible "they would cut their military expenditures even in the absence of any

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[56] DDEL, Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 284th Meeting of NSC May 10, 1956.
[57] Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Waging Peace, 1956-1961: The White House Years*. (New York: Doubleday, 1965): 471.
[58] DDEL, Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 284th Meeting of NSC May 10, 1956.
[59] "Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington, May 18, 1956," FRUS, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d78

disarmament agreement."[60] In addition, when Eisenhower pointed out the imitation of New Look, Dulles added, "the heavy demands on manpower in the Soviet Union and the need of the Soviets to put more people into industry and especially into agriculture." But the more immediate target of the cuts was towards Germany. Dulles thought that any reduction was aimed at undercutting Chancellor Adenauer's rearmament plan and to "strengthen neutralism and pacifism in Germany."[61] Like Eisenhower, he believed the reductions were a ploy aimed at accomplishing other foreign policy objectives.

The U.S. continued to believe the reductions were intended to make the Soviet military more effective on a nuclear battlefield. NIE 11-3-55 assessed the trajectory of Soviet conventional forces by stating, "the overall effectiveness of these forces will almost certainly increase."[62] This assessment remained unchanged with NIE 11-4-56 that added conventional forces would be even more capable due to "adaptation of doctrine and tactics designed to fit Soviet forces for nuclear warfare."[63] Rather than seeing a reduction in the size of Soviet forces as redressing a major imbalance, analysts viewed it as a Soviet attempt to *increase* capability, especially because the discharged troops could be easily recalled. This was how Dulles, especially, perceived it.

> The simple tendency today is to talk of manpower. That is the most meaningless thing to talk about. You take people and have them trained, take them out, and you might at one time have two and one-half million men under arms but you may have seven or eight or ten million standing by thoroughly trained and ready; if they have the arms to pick up, they can at once convert an army of two and one-half million to an army of ten million…. When you try to get this question of manpower and arms figured down, it is an almost

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[60] DDEL, Papers as President 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 267th Meeting of NSC November 21, 1955.
[61] DDEL, Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 284th Meeting of NSC May 10, 1956.
[62] NIE 11-3-55, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses of Action Through 1960," 17 May 1955.
[63] NIE 11-4-56, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Soviet Courses of Action Through 1961," 8 August 1956.

impossible task and I do not feel optimistic about the ability to arrive at an acceptable agreement about conventional weapons.[64]

Radford also continued to view American security as diminishing and dismissed the troop reductions. The trajectory of Soviet strategic growth remained concerning, and the U.S. had to ensure that the "factor of atomic advantage remains in the U.S. favor."[65]

The assessment of the troop reductions, however, was linked to other events that occupied the attention of the administration. Part of the reluctance to engage was the increasing tensions in the Suez and the revelation of Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the Twentieth Party Congress. Khrushchev's nuclear sabre rattling during the Suez crisis undercut his attempts to demonstrate benign Soviet intentions and stoked fears of Soviet advances in the third world.[66] The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 demonstrated to the Eisenhower administration that the Soviets did not intend to give up control over Eastern Europe. However, Dulles viewed the fact they had to use such force to retain control as another indication that Communism was in fact declining.[67] This further supported his belief the Soviets were forced into making the reductions, and therefore not a genuine attempt at communication. For Dulles, the use of Soviet troops demonstrated calls to reduce troop numbers did not "differ fundamentally from those put forward in the past." The reality was the Soviets were calling for "considerable reductions" and not

[64] "Verbatim Minutes of the Western European Chiefs of Mission Conference, Paris, May 6, 1957." FRUS, 1955-1957, Western European Security and Integration, Vol IV
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v04/d249
[65] "Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Radford) to the President, April 17, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, National Security Policy, Vol XIX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d73
[66] Betts, Richard K. *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1987): 62-63.
[67] Gaddis, John Lewis, "The Unexpected John Foster Dulles: Nuclear Weapons, Communism, and the Russians." in Richard H. Immerman ed, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 64-65.

"withdrawal."[68] In what would become a familiar trope throughout the Cold War, U.S. policymakers believed the Soviets were trying to reduce tensions with the U.S. to redirect attention to exploiting opportunities in the Third World.[69]

Moreover, the Eisenhower administration was more concerned understanding the motivations and implications behind Khrushchev's secret speech. Despite occurring in February, the full extent of the speech and its implications only became clear in the succeeding months. Initially, there was significant confusion as to why Soviet leaders decided to attack Stalin not only in that manner, but at that time. Allen Dulles even offered that they could not exclude the possibility that "Khrushchev had been drunk."[70] Indeed, there was so much confusion over the speech that the administration discussed the possibility Khrushchev could be replaced shortly. The debates assessing Khrushchev's speech coincided with those of the May troop reduction. Therefore, even if the administration believed the reductions were genuine, and as this section demonstrates that was deemed highly unlikely, Khrushchev was perceived to be too erratic and could be potentially overthrown. Dulles assessed both events as signals of the weakness of the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev personally. Dulles negative dispositional views were evident during this period. "The Kremlin leaders, being generally recognized as evil men,

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[68] DDEL White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for Disarmament (Harold Stassen): Records, 1955-58 Box No. 7 A80-16, Eisenhower-Bulganin Letters August-December 1956 (5), State Department Intelligence Report, No 7402 December 17 1956, "The Soviet Position on the Disposition of Foreign Troops in Europe."

[69] See Zimmerman, William, and Robert Axelrod. "The 'Lessons' of Vietnam and Soviet Foreign Policy." *World Politics* 34, no. 01 (October 1981): 1–24 on why the monolithic view of Soviet exploitation of opportunities in the third world was overblown.

[70] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 280th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 22, 1956" FRUS, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Vol XXIV https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v24/d34; "Intelligence Brief Prepared by the Office of Intelligence Research, March 30, 1956." FRUS, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Vol XXIV https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v24/d35

had in past years generally been ostracized by civilized people." He questioned

Khrushchev's rationality, making for an even more dangerous foe, "Khrushchev was the

most dangerous person to lead the Soviet Union since the October Revolution.,"

continuing, "Khrushchev was the first top authority in the USSR who was essentially

emotional and perfectly capable of acting without a calculation of the consequences of

his action." Although the U.S. had to be cautious, Dulles said U.S. was in danger of being

"isolated" from its allies if they did not try and "induce" Soviet leaders to "shed their

wicked ways."[71]

Nevertheless, the Soviets were committed to ensuring the U.S. understood the

troop reductions were indeed a costly signal. First, they surprised the administration and

invited Air Force Chief of Staff General N.F. Twinning to Moscow for military

discussions in June. Yet, for Eisenhower the reduction was not enough, indeed, he

wanted further signals to assess Soviet intentions. He "wanted to give the Soviets every

chance to move in peaceful directions and to put our relations on a better basis—and to

see how far they will go."[72] During the visit, Defense Minister Zhukov went out of his

way to reinforce the extent to which the Soviets had gone to demonstrate benign

intentions. "Our government reduced its armed forces in order to facilitate the

strengthening of confidence and removal of fear. In the future, we shall also strive toward

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[71] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 289th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, June 28, 1956" FRUS, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Vol XXIV https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v24/d55
[72] "Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington, May 28, 1956, 11 a.m." FRUS, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Vol XXIV https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v24/d47

this," and even hinting at more reductions to come, "will continue to work stubbornly for further reduction of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union."[73]

Second, Bulganin engaged in a series of correspondence letters with Eisenhower to jumpstart negotiations.[74] On May 14, Bulganin sent a letter that gave specifics of the planned reductions, noting the reductions "shows better than any words that the Soviet Union is a sincere and faithful champion of peace." He followed up with subsequent letters on June 6 and September 11, noting that the Soviets undertook the actions unilaterally and hoped the U.S. would view it as a step that could lead to further negotiations.[75]

However, if the Soviets were looking for a reciprocal step, one was not forthcoming. In a reply letter on August 4, Eisenhower noted that the Soviets were beginning reductions that the U.S. had started after WWII, and "I doubt that such reductions of this particular kind as our governments may make in their respective national interests will contribute effectively to eliminate the fear, and the vast cost, generated by national armaments."[76] Eisenhower was more concerned with an aerial inspection regime and nuclear arms control than conventional forces, which he steadfastly viewed of secondary importance as the USSR increased its strategic capabilities.

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[73] DDEL Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File International Series Box No 50. "Memorandum of Conversation of Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov, G. K., With the Chief of Staff of the USAF, General N.F. Twinning 25 June 1956."

[74] Plischke, Elmer. "Eisenhower's 'Correspondence Diplomacy' with the Kremlin--Case Study in Summit Diplomatics." *The Journal of Politics* 30, no. 1 (February 1968): 137–59.

[75] DDEL White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for Disarmament (Harold Stassen): Records 1955-58 Box No. 7 A80-16, Eisenhower-Bulganin Letters, August-December 1956 (1), "Bulganin Letter to Eisenhower, May 14, June 6, September 11, 1956."

[76] DDEL Papers as President 1953-61 Ann Whitman File International Series Box No 51, Bulganin 7/27/55-1/3/58 (5), "Eisenhower Letter to Bulganin, 4 August 1956."

The fear of the Red Army overrunning Europe forced the U.S. and NATO to plan

for the "very rapid and massive use of nuclear weapons, both tactically and

strategically."[77] Even with a limited nuclear capability, the Soviet threat was almost

entirely based on conventional forces. This made the reduction of conventional forces the

type of reassurance signal which should demonstrate defensive intentions. U.S.

policymakers, however, failed to correctly assess the signals as such, and actually

dismissed them as a cheap maneuver. First, the uncertainty over the size of the actual

reductions undercut how policymakers assessed the cost of the reductions. Policymakers

capitalized on questions as to the true size of the Soviet military and reverted to relying

on their pre-existing dispositional assessments. Second, and most importantly,

policymakers believed domestic weakness was forcing Soviet leaders into making the

reductions. Thus, U.S. policymakers did not believe the troop reductions were a sincere

signal.

4.2   1960 TROOP REDUCTION: CORRECT ASSESSMENT

In January 1960, Khrushchev announced his largest troop reductions yet.

Following three previous cuts, including a 300,000 reduction in January 1958, he stated

the USSR would reduce the military by a further 1.2 million troops, including 250,000

officers. These cuts would reduce the size of the Soviet military from 5.7 million in 1955,

to some 2.4 million troops. He also announced the creation of the Strategic Rocket

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[77] Trachtenberg, 1999: 158.

Forces, and prioritized their importance in maintaining Soviet Union's national security. The large size of this cut dramatically reduced the size of the Soviet military, which if carried out, would result in cutting the Soviet military in half from only five years before. Not only was this a large reduction, but it directly threatened the corporate interests of the military. This placed Khrushchev in dangerous position domestically, as military unrest gave room for other members of the leadership to criticize him of recklessly undermining the USSR's ability to defend itself. As a result, the Eisenhower administration correctly assessed Khrushchev's announced troop reductions. Yet, despite Khrushchev's attempts to signal the Soviet Union's defensive orientations, the Eisenhower administration remained concerned over Soviet intentions and offensive capabilities. Those concerns led to the U-2 incident of May 1960 and a deterioration of superpower relations for the next decade.

In contrast to the 1956 case, the 1960 troop reduction was so large and public it was impossible for U.S. policymakers to quibble about the true size of the reduction. Khrushchev was clearly risking his own political situation by directly threatening the corporate interests of the military. So much so that he reinvigorated the role of political commissars in the Soviet military to ensure loyalty. U.S. policymakers correctly assessed the reductions as a signal to convey defensive orientations. Policymakers, however, remained skeptical because they believed the Soviets were continuing efforts to modernizing the military for use with nuclear weapons.

This case begins by looking at the changing strategic balance between the USSR and the U.S., and the continued issue of Germany—including the 1958 Berlin Ultimatum. These issues are crucial to understanding the context of Khrushchev's announcement and

its subsequent assessment by the Eisenhower administration. The next section describes Soviet intentions and why Khrushchev believed a further troop reduction was a genuine signal of defensive intentions. I continue with the dispositional view of the three key policymakers (President Eisenhower, CIA Head Allen Dulles, and Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates) towards the Soviets. The final section examines the successful assessment of the 1960 troop reduction.

Table 4.2 1960 Troop Reduction Outcome

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Yes
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	Limited
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	None

4.2.1 Context and Background

By 1960, relations between the U.S. and the Soviets had undergone dramatic changes. America's strategic advantage was dwindling as advances in missile technology altered the balance of destruction. The potential of Soviet nuclear weapons reaching the U.S. was no longer only a theoretical possibility. The Soviets tried numerous reassurance

signals to seemingly little avail, and Khrushchev's gambling nature gave rise to using nuclear weapons as bargaining chips in negotiations.[78] As the Soviet strategic stockpile grew, so did U.S. concerns over the feasibility of massive retaliation.[79] Even if the Soviets were largely rational and wanted to avoid nuclear war, the U.S.'s own allies were worried about the U.S. commitment to defend them in the event of a fait accompli or conventional attack. The growth, or perceived growth, in the Soviet strategic capability drowned out assessments of Soviet benign intent. Between 1956 and 1960, two events drove these transformational changes in the relationship: the 1957 launch of Sputnik, and the 1958 Berlin crisis.

Even before the 1958 Berlin crisis, the Eisenhower administration perceived a world where America no longer had an uncontested nuclear advantage.[80] The launch of Sputnik and the 1958 Berlin crisis only heightened this fear. In 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik, startling the U.S. and threatening a nuclear attack with limited warning. Despite a U.S. strategic advantage, the Soviets would soon have the capability to launch a devastating retaliatory strike. The "missile gap" as it came to be known, was even more concerning with the leak of the Gaither Committee report.[81] Set up by the NSC to study America's civil defense preparations, it argued by 1959 America was at risk of a devastating Soviet missile attack. Secretary Dulles admitted such in 1957, "The West no

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[78] Ambassador Thompson wrote, "I believe Khrushchev sees a détente of long duration and a real measure of disarmament if this can be had without jeopardizing the Communist empire in Eastern Europe." Quoted in Gavin, Francis J., *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012): 63-64.

[79] NATO also began to move away from massive retaliation by 1957 with MC 14/2 that allowed for more controlled escalation. Trachtenberg, 1999: 188-189

[80] Garthoff, Raymond L., *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities*. (Washington D.C., Brookings Institution, 1991): 32-35.

[81] Bundy, McGeorge. *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988): 334-351; Craig, 1998: 72-74; Roman, 1995: 30-33.

longer possesses, and perhaps never again will possess, the monopoly of power which made it predominant in the world for so many centuries."[82] Sputnik launched a wave of hysteria over Soviet ICBM capabilities, with intelligence reports estimating the Soviets having of 500 ICBMs by 1962.[83] Dulles himself was concerned that the Soviets would use nuclear weapons to exploit its conventional superiority, "Sino-Soviet manpower and its conventional weapons would become the dominant military force in Eurasia."[84] Even with previous troop reductions, the U.S. still feared Soviet conventional superiority.

Nevertheless, the Eisenhower administration had always accepted the Soviets would gain an ICBM capability, eventually. The issue was how quickly and large the capability would get. Despite the massive political outrage, the main issue highlighted by Sputnik was the continued feasibility of the New Look policy.[85] Even with the fear of ICBMs, which undercut the West's reliance on nuclear weapons to counter a conventional invasion, the USSR continued to reduce its conventional superiority. In January 1958, Khrushchev undertook a third round of troop cuts, and announced a reduction of 300,000—, which included 41,000 from Germany and 17,000 from Hungary.[86] However, this reduction was dismissed in the same fashion as the 1956 reduction. Not only was it viewed as a measure to "allay Western anxieties engendered

[82] Wohlforth, William Curtis. *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 167.
[83] SNIE 11-10-57; NIE 11-5-58; For more on the intelligence community's assessment of Soviet ICBM forces see Freedman, Lawrence. *US Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (2nd ed). (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986): 62-80; Renshon, Jonathan. "Assessing Capabilities in International Politics: Biased Overestimation and the Case of the Imaginary 'Missile Gap.'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 1 (2009): 115-147.
[84] Dulles, John Foster. "Challenges and Response in United States Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 36, no. 1 (1957): 31-32.
[85] Craig, 1998: 71-72; Preble, Christopher A., "'Who Ever Believed in the "Missile Gap"?': John F. Kennedy and the Politics of National Security," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2003): 801–26.
[86] Bulganin also wrote a 16 pg letter to Eisenhower on January 8, strenuously arguing that the reductions were a further good faith measure to signal intent and garner support for disarmament. Larson, 2000:77.

by recent Soviet technological boasts and achievements," but "if carried out reduction is made feasible by technological developments; and would be desirable for economic reasons." There was also speculation whether this was a reduction, or merely part of previous reductions and not a new signal.[87]

Yet the Soviet leadership were just as concerned over their vulnerability with U.S. discussions over "nuclear sharing," forward deploying nuclear warheads, and the potential of a nuclear armed Germany.[88] However, many within the Eisenhower administration failed to perceive how their own actions could be seen as destabilizing.[89] Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum would throw these issues into sharp relief and helps situate the Eisenhower administration's views towards Khrushchev's 1960 troop reduction.

On November 10, 1958, Khrushchev startled the West, and many in the Kremlin, by demanding the allied powers end their occupation of Berlin. The Soviets followed up with a letter on November 27 stating that the Western powers had six months to leave West Berlin. For the Eisenhower administration, defending West Berlin was of the utmost importance, even if it was a "can of worms" as Eisenhower noted. Failure to defend West Berlin would undercut the credibility of the American commitment to Europe.[90] But for the administration, there were several key questions which had to be

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[87] "Assignment of advanced weapons to Soviet forces in GDR may be practical reason permitting some reductions. Other possible factor is that Moscow may have moved additional troops into East Germany as result Polish and Hungarian affairs and is now taking credit for withdrawing them." "Telegram from the Department of State to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Regional Organizations, January 9, 1958." FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol X, Part 1, Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d36
[88] For more on nuclear sharing and NATO nuclear strategy see Trachtenberg, 1999: 193-200.
[89] Evangelista, 1999: 118.
[90] Some, such as General Twinning in particular, argued that the U.S. had to accept the risk of general war, "We must ignore the fear of general war. It is coming anyway." Quoted in Trachtenberg, 1999: 258.

answered. What was the threshold for war? Were threats of massive retaliation over Soviet or East German forces stopping armored vehicles credible? However, threats of limited war were not credible due to a lack of conventional forces, which again demonstrated how threatening Soviet conventional forces remained to the West. Faced with unenviable escalation options, and ceding to Soviet demands out of the question, Eisenhower played for time, and ultimately invited Khrushchev to America for a tour of the U.S. and a meeting at Camp David.[91] Diplomacy won out, in part to Anastas Mikoyan conveying that the six-month deadline was not really a "deadline" and the Soviets were open to negotiations, but questions regarding nuclear arms control and Soviet intentions remained.[92] Nevertheless, Eisenhower was not willing to budge on Berlin, and was unwilling to reciprocate Soviet attempts at creating détente.[93]

4.2.2   Soviet Intentions

On January 12, 1960, Khrushchev gave a speech before the Supreme Soviet announcing a cut of 1.2 million troops, including 250,000 officers. One third of the army was to be eliminated, along with large naval reductions. In its place, the newly minted Strategic Rocket Forces would form the backbone of Soviet military power. Despite only having four operational R-7 ICBMs, Khrushchev was convinced that nuclear weapons, ICBMs specifically, meant the Soviet Union could no longer be threatened. Khrushchev laid out his plans by springing a memorandum on the Presidium on December 14, 1959,

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[91] Craig, 1998:102-106.
[92] Schick, Jack M. *The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971): 24-25, 38-39.
[93] Trachtenberg, 1999: 260-263.

without serious consultation by the military. In it, he argued economic and missile development had put the Soviets in an "excellent" position, and enabled the Soviets to pressure the Capitalist countries and strengthen the peace-loving forces in them.

> If, however, we carry out a further reduction of our armed forces, then such a step would encourage those forces in bourgeois countries…capitalist circles who seek to improve the international situation, to live by the principles of peaceful coexistence. This would strengthen them and weaken the arguments of aggressive, militarist circles, who take advantage of our might and intimidate other countries.

He argued that the Soviet Union "has never sought conquests" and "did not want war." The real fight was economic competition, "our ideological debates with capitalism will be resolved not through war, but through economic competition."[94] This speech was to serve as an unambiguous signal that the Soviet Union was no longer pursuing military competition against the West, and was interested in negotiating a more cooperative stance with the West.

Coming into 1960, Khrushchev's domestic situation had solidified, albeit still somewhat unstable.[95] In 1957, he was the target of a political coup by the leading members of the Presidium (including Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov).[96] But the coup failed because Khrushchev retained the loyalty of the majority of the party, and most importantly, the military. Defense Minister Zhukov played a crucial role by supporting Khrushchev and mustering the military to fly in central committee delegates to Moscow for a vote that ultimately went in Khrushchev's favor. In a further change from Stalin, instead of executing his enemies, the plotters were exiled to meagre appointments, essentially banished from power and importance. Even potential

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[94] Zubok, Vladislav M. "Khrushchev's 1960 Troop Cut: New Russian Evidence." *CWIHP* 8/9 (1996/1997): 416-420.
[95] Richter, 1994: 96-100.
[96] There were other late supporters of the vote to replace Khrushchev with Premier Nikolai Bulganin, but Malenkov, Kaganovich, and Molotov were the leaders of the push.

competitors such as Defense Minister Zhukov was removed from his post shortly thereafter for fear of his support within the military.[97]

With his political position solidified, Khrushchev intensified plans to transform the USSR's military and relations with the West. The launch of Sputnik was a propaganda coup for Khrushchev, validating his approach by demonstrating the technological progress of the Soviet rocket program. More importantly, it illustrated the potential of an ICBM deterrent. For Khrushchev, having the ability to retaliate against the U.S. with ICBMs enshrined the impossibility of the West attacking the USSR. This meant that ICBMs, not the Red Army, would be the new defenders of the motherland. By the early 1960's however, the Soviets only had four operational R-7 ICBMs.[98] Nevertheless, Soviet missile research was developing at such a pace that they would soon have both light and heavy ICBMs, giving the Soviets a strategic deterrent capability.[99] Even Khrushchev's aggressive international actions were designed to force the West to engage.[100] With the Berlin crisis, there are many hypotheses regarding Khrushchev's initial thinking, but what is clear is that whatever the initial motivation, he sought to force the West into negotiating a wide ranging settlement between the USSR and the West.[101]

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[97] For more on the implications surrounding his removal see Kolkowicz, Roman. *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967): 113-134; Colton, Timothy J., *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979): 175-195; Taylor, Brian D. *Politics and the Russian Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1689-2000*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 182-190.

[98] Zaloga, Steven J, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces 1945-2000*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002): 50.

[99] Blechman, Barry M., and Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament, 1954-1964*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1966): 91; Berman, Robert P., and John C. Baker, *Soviet Strategic Forces: Requirements and Responses*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982): 46-50.

[100] Richter, 1994: 83, 118-121.

[101] Most of the debate centers on the timing and nature of the ultimatum, but most generally agree that at the very least Khrushchev was interested in a settlement over Germany's status than just Berlin. See Richter, 1994: 101-125; Richter, James. "Re-Examining Soviet Policy towards Germany in 1953." *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 4 (1993): 671–691; Trachtenberg, 1999: 251-253. In particular, it seems credible that

Ultimately, his "single variant" strategy relying on nuclear weapons and was pushed over the apprehension and opposition of the military. This was a risky strategy, considering how crucial the military's support was to Khrushchev remaining in power during the 1957 attempted ouster. The military had agreed to his 1955 and 1956 troop cuts, but the Soviet militaries patience was fraying by 1960 and was increasingly resistant to Khrushchev's arguments on the primacy of nuclear weapons.[102] As Dale Herspring noted, "Politically, the primary legacy of Khrushchev's tenure in office was a deep sense of suspicions—a feeling on the part of the high command that political leaders would willingly sacrifice the country's security to improve their own domestic position."[103] Opposition was so great that Khrushchev increased the political control of the party over the military, and reinvigorated the power of the political commissars of the Main Political Administration (MPA).[104]

With his confidence growing, Khrushchev decided to undertake a dramatic reform effort that would reset the USSR's relations with the world. This reflected his new strategic outlook, but also would help him foster détente with the West. With little consultation with other members of the Presidium or military, he announced the creation of the RVSN (Strategic Missile Force— *Raketnyye Voyska Strategicheskogo*

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he was concerned over the presence of Western intermediate range nuclear missiles in Germany and the potential of a nuclear armed West Germany. See Lunák, Petr. "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis: Soviet Brinkmanship Seen from Inside." *Cold War History* 3, no. 2 (2003): 53–82; For arguments that it was East Germany who forced Khrushchev into the crisis see Harrison, Hope M. *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). For a general overview see Fursenko, A. A., and Timothy J. Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 186-223.

[102] In part this was due to the influence of Defense Minister Zhukov and his status within the military.

[103] Herspring, Dale, *The Soviet High Command, 1967-1989: Personalities and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 32-37.

[104] Colton, Timothy J. "Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet Union." In *Soldiers and the Soviet State: Civil-Military Relations from Brezhnev to Gorbachev.* Eds. Timothy J. Colton and Thane Gustafson. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 23-25.

Naznacheniya) on December 17, 1959, and the unilateral reduction of 1.2 million troops before the Supreme Soviet on January 14, 1960.[105] The combination of the creation of the RVSN—and its position as the dominant service, along with the massive reductions (which included 250,000 officers)—created significant dissent within the military.[106] The extent to which he had to overcome military dissent lends further evidence to how politically costly the cuts were, and a further effort to present the Soviet Union as a defensive/status quo state. Khrushchev's goal was to signal that the USSR could no longer be threatened—due to the presence of nuclear weapons—but at the time sending, what he believed, was an unambiguous signal of benign/defensive intentions—massive troop reductions.

4.2.3   American Policymaker Views

Going into 1960, Admiral Radford and Secretary of Defense Wilson were replaced In the Pentagon, General Nathan F. Twining replaced Admiral Radford, and Thomas Gates Jr. replaced Neil McElroy who had succeeded Charles Wilson as Secretary of Defense. Thomas Gates would play a more active role in the assessment of Soviet military capabilities, after having served as Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense under McElroy. He played a large role in supporting the voice of the service secretaries in the NSC and continued to be an advocate for the military's viewpoints.

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[105] The creation of the RVSN happened shortly after the successful launch of the first operational R-7 at the new base at Plesetsk. Zaloga, 2002: 58.

[106] Wolfe, Thomas W. *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970): 161-166; Zubok, Vladislav M., and Hope M. Harrison, "Nuclear Education of Nikita Khrushchev," in *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy Since 1945*, ed. John Lewis Gaddis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 151-153.

In 1959 Secretary of State Dulles died of stomach cancer. He was replaced by Christian Herter; however, it was Secretary Dulles' brother and longtime CIA Director, Allen Dulles who played a larger role advising the President and assessing Soviet intentions. Allen, who largely shared his brother's skepticism over Soviet intentions, still adhered to disseminating the consensus view of the CIA's assessments and assessments.[107]

Since 1955, President Eisenhower became increasingly skeptical of Soviet, and specifically Khrushchev's, intentions. After the 1956 events of Suez, Hungary, and the 1958 Berlin Ultimatum, Eisenhower believed the Soviets were at fault for the lack of cooperation and negotiation. He was dismayed by Khrushchev's reckless and manipulative conduct. Eisenhower blamed him for "deliberately" engineering "the breakdown of the foreign ministers' meeting," which paused the Berlin Crisis, he pointedly blamed the Soviet system for "maintaining a closed society" and Soviet delegates "throw[ing] obstacles…across the path of progress," for undermining disarmament.[108] Going into 1960, Eisenhower held a skeptical dispositional assessment towards the USSR.

4.2.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

The size and publicity of the troop reductions overcame the Eisenhower administration's skepticism and policymakers correctly assessed the troop reductions.

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[107] Although his tenure is heavily criticized, in particular for his activist approach to intelligence and covert operations. Kinzer, Stephen. *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War*. New York: Times Books, 2013); Grose, Peter. *Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).
[108] Eisenhower, 1965: 468, 544-547.

Since the reductions were so significant, the administration believed Khrushchev was actively taking on entrenched domestic interests—primarily the military—and exposing himself to political vulnerability. The administration, however, remained unconvinced of changed Soviet intentions, in part due to the presence of nuclear weapons and a lingering skepticism of Khrushchev's brinkmanship tactics.

Coming into 1958, the Eisenhower administration remained uncertain regarding Soviet intentions despite previous Soviet signals including unilateral troop reductions, withdrawing from Austria, and serious arms control negotiation proposals. During an NSC meeting on March 20, 1958, Secretary Dulles continued to rely on his negative dispositional views of the Soviets, "Doubtless the ultimate intentions of the Soviets were still bad, but their behavior, at least, was better." While he conceded Soviet leaders realized the futility of large wars between nuclear-armed powers, and they were "no more likely to take such risks as the United States." While Robert Cutler disagreed, who instead argued the Soviets "would nibble their way into the fabric of the Free World by small aggressions."[109] However, the main issue was Berlin, and the implications for America's alliance with the rest of Europe. The Soviets overwhelming advantage in conventional forces continued to be a looming danger and forced the U.S. to threaten massive nuclear retaliation to defend Berlin and Western Europe. As Allen Dulles pointed out, "he thought the Russians believed this, and that it was extremely important that they continue so to believe."[110] Therefore, a large unilateral reduction should convey

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[109] DDEL, Papers as President, 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 9, 359th Meeting of NSC, March 20, 1958

[110] DDEL, Papers as President, 1953-61, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 10, 364th Meeting of NSC May 1, 1958.

the Soviet's defensive/benign intentions by reducing one of Europe and the U.S.'s chief fears.

Overall, the Eisenhower administration held little hope for détente between the superpowers. The U.S. was unwilling to budge on the issue of Berlin, especially without some sort of disarmament agreement, and there was little belief that the Soviets were seriously interested in a long-term settlement. Reminiscent of Governor Stassen's appointment to organize and standardize the U.S.'s disarmament policy, in July 1959 Eisenhower appointed Charles Coolidge, a Boston lawyer, to head an interdepartmental study (Joint Disarmament Study) of current and potential future U.S. arms control positions.[111] He presented his findings on December 1, 1959, that again questioned Soviet intentions.[112] Coolidge argued that there was "little hope" of a larger nuclear agreement, and that the U.S. should propose "a few limited measures" to "reveal whether Soviet thinking has changed and would provide guidance as to whether it would be worthwhile to propose more comprehensive and complicated measures."[113]

In lieu of a nuclear disarmament agreement, the U.S. would focus on small, gradual steps, which included proposals for test inspection zones.[114] Eisenhower saw a chance to help him reduce U.S. defense spending. He argued, "if conventional armaments were eliminated at least we would not be carrying such a heavy arms burden." He couched his desire for reducing troop numbers as one of the "definite steps" that could

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[111] Tal, David, "From the Open Skies Proposal of 1955 to the Norstad Plan of 1960: A Plan Too Far." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 4 (2008): 85.
[112] On September 17, Khrushchev made a speech before the UN calling for "general and complete disarmament," which occurred shortly after the creation of a new UN committee (Ten Nation Committee) on disarmament was formed earlier in September.
[113] DDEL, Papers as President 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 12, 426th Meeting of NSC December 3, 1959.
[114] Tal, 2008: 85.

lead to an agreement on nuclear capabilities. Yet, like 1956, any potential Soviet reduction was countered by the fact the U.S. had already taken reductions without deriving any "disarmament advantage."[115] To overcome this perception, the Soviets would therefore need to undertake massive reductions, otherwise the Soviets would be perceived as merely imitating U.S. actions, just like the 1956 troop reduction.

Even before Coolidge's proposal, the prospect of the U.S. reducing its conventional forces was largely anathema to most of the Eisenhower administration. Coolidge argued the U.S. should not reduce its size below 2.5 million troops due to the "possibility of limited wars or 'brush fires'." Again, for much of the Eisenhower administration, conventional forces were seen as crucial to U.S. foreign policy. Eisenhower was in favor of reducing forces to reduce the "balance of payments deficit," but to Coolidge and others it would increase doubt about the U.S. commitment to Europe if the U.S. reduced troops absent any Soviet proposal.[116]

By 1960 relations between the superpowers had stalled. Khrushchev's visit to Camp David allowed the leaders to engage, but Khrushchev's spirited optimism was not matched by Eisenhower or the reality of little room for compromise over Berlin, much less Germany.[117] During a visit by Italian Prime Minister Segni immediately after Khrushchev's visit, Eisenhower said he believed Khrushchev wanted "some relief in the disarmament field" to "use the money to benefit the Soviet people." However, he was not

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[115] DDEL, Papers as President 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 12, 426th Meeting of NSC December 3, 1959.
[116] DDEL, Papers as President 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 12, 426th Meeting of NSC December 3, 1959.
[117] "Memorandum of Conversation: Eisenhower and Khrushchev," FRUS, 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria, Vol IX. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v09/d14

convinced Khrushchev was willing to "pay the price of effective inspection."[118]

Khrushchev's proposals were aimed at scoring "propaganda victories," and reaffirmed

that the central concern was inspection and verification. Like before, Soviet signals were

assessed as tactical responses to conditions and did not represent a sincere change of

intentions. And the overwhelming size of the Soviet conventional forces was especially

troubling, with Segni epitomizing a fear of European countries, "that Khrushchev would

seek only atomic disarmament, leaving Europe open to and at the mercy of the huge

Soviet conventional armed forces."[119] This leaves little doubt just how threatening the

large size of the Red Army was to the U.S. and its European allies.

Despite the lack of optimism, the intelligence community confirmed the absence

of a "missile gap," and that previous estimates of Soviet ICBMs were overinflated.

Secretary of Defense Gates pointed out that previous estimates, "talked about what the

Soviets were capable of doing, rather than estimating what they would probably do, had

resulted in a large missile gap." Although the number of Soviet ICBMs was put at

between 140-200 by 1961.[120] Nevertheless, intelligence assessments of Soviet intentions

remained unchanged despite the lowered estimates of Soviet nuclear capabilities. Allen

Dulles summed up NIE 11-4-56, which argued, "The Soviet leaders currently show great

confidence that the trend of world events is in their favor" and had gained a "position of

strength" that gave them the flexibility to escalate or relax tensions whenever they should

choose. Dulles projected Soviet policies would be marked by "swings between a

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[118] "Memorandum of Conversation: President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Segni, September 30, 1959" FRUS, 1958-1960, Western Europe, Vol III, Part 2 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v07p2/d242
[119] "Memorandum of Conversation: President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Segni [disarmament] , September 30, 1959" FRUS, 1958-1960, Western Europe, Vol III, Part 2 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v07p2/d243
[120] NIE 11-8-59.

relaxation of tension and belligerent pressure."[121] Therefore the administration believed

that while tactics may change, Soviet intentions would not.

Khrushchev's swing to relaxation by announcing the troop reduction caught the

Eisenhower administration off guard. Even though Eisenhower had noted the possibility

of a conventional reduction, there was not much thought into the possibility of a

unilateral Soviet move (despite their three previous reductions). Allen Dulles summed up

Khrushchev's speech, noting that if the reduction proposed was carried out, it would

reduce the military to 2.423 million, well below the Soviet level proposed in 1956, and

below the floor proposed by Coolidge for U.S. forces. He also correctly assessed that

Khrushchev believed that since the USSR had strategic capabilities, it could rely on those

systems than a large conventional force.[122] There was some debate over the exact size of

the Soviet military, but Dulles and the intelligence community largely accepted

Khrushchev's figures as accurate.[123] He cited Khrushchev's arguments that a large navy

and surface ships were obsolete, and that the Soviets had dramatically reduced their

bomber program. He noted that the reduction was logical from the Soviet point of view,

"made a good deal of sense for the USSR to reduce its forces in view of the possibility of

serious competition in 1960 through 1962 between the military on the one hand and the

civilian economy on the other as represented by the Seven Year Plan." It was clear

Khrushchev was making an aggressive move to counter military spending and would

revamp the entire Soviet defense industry. He correctly assessed the reduction as a

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[121] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 430th Meeting of the National Security Council, January 7, 1960," 1958-1960, National Security Policy; Arms Control and Disarmament, Vol III
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v03/d82

[122] DDEL, NSC Meeting Key Brief Mention, DDEL Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 12, 432nd Meeting of NSC January 14, 1960.

[123] For more see SNIE 11-6-60, Garthoff, Raymond L. "Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels: Some Light from the Past," *International Security* 14, no. 4 (1990): 97-102.

reflection of Khrushchev as a "missile enthusiast" and wished "to speed up the

rationalization of Soviet forces." Moreover, Dulles recognized the likelihood that,

"Khrushchev's speech reflects the belief that the USSR can overcome capitalism without

general war, indicates great reliance on missile forces as a shield behind which

communism can compete with the West, and seems to exclude general war as a deliberate

Soviet policy."[124]

During discussions over the signal, there was relatively little evidence of negative

dispositional views affecting assessment. Eisenhower and Dulles noted the possibility

that as the Soviets developed economically, they would become more "conservative" in

their foreign policy because they had "more to risk."[125] And despite Eisenhower's

previous arguments that conventional reductions could serve as a springboard for further

negotiations and lessen tensions, there was little discussion over any reciprocal gesture by

the U.S. Indeed, most of the focus quickly returned to the Soviet ICBM program and the

need for inspection. Technology affected the assessment of conventional signals, and

even the size of the Red Army was downplayed as an existential threat to the U.S., which

is curious given how threatening the Soviet conventional advantage was portrayed in the

years prior to 1960.[126] As Eisenhower noted, "we should not forget, when we talk about

the Soviet's conventional power of overrunning us, that we still have navies. We would

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[124] "Memorandum of Discussion at a Special Meeting of the National Security Council, January 21, 1960." FRUS, 1958-1960, National Security Policy; Arms Control and Disarmament, Vol III https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v03/d85
[125] Papers as President, 1953-61 Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 12. 434th Meeting of NSC February 4, 1960.
[126] Despite receiving "extensive and reliable information on the deactivation of major elements of the tactical, air defense, and naval air force components," and "Over the next year the intelligence community observed the first significant reduction in the basic army ground force structure, from the durable figure of 175 divisions to about 140, with at least half of these at reduced strength," the Eisenhower administration continued to focus on strategic systems and ignored the reductions in conventional forces. See Garthoff, 1990: 1012.

then restore the ocean's capacity to safeguard us." This is a remarkable change from previous debates where the threat of Soviet conventional forces required the U.S. to rely on nuclear weapons. Secretary Gates was especially dismissive of Soviet gestures, and against negotiations since the Soviets had not made any offer on "effective inspection."[127] Secretary Herter also saw little hope for a disarmament agreement. He cited the Soviet emphasis on "general principles, it seems purely for semantic reasons," and that the U.S. needed "to see certain concrete steps."[128]

Even though the troop reductions were correctly assessed, subsequent responses to the signal were dismissed because policymakers remained focused on nuclear missiles. U.S. policymakers knew Khrushchev was risking himself politically by taking on the military, but it wasn't perceived as a move which would weaken Soviet offensive power. With little optimism for the chances of agreements—whether on disarmament or Berlin—the need for a more accurate assessment of Soviet capabilities became the central concern.[129] Without an inspection regime, the U.S. had to rely on espionage to gauge Soviet capabilities. Especially since it was clear the Soviets were focusing all their efforts on developing large ICBMs. Eisenhower argued, "Khrushchev here and there was telling the truth, but the danger was that there might be one lie out of twelve truths."[130] Soviet signals failed to create any trust within the Eisenhower administration, and the potential

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[127] Memorandum of Discussion at a Special Meeting of the National Security Council, February 18, 1960. FRUS 1958-1960, National Security Policy; Arms Control and Disarmament, Vol III https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v03/d244
[128] "Memorandum of Conversation: Foreign Ministers Meeting, April 11, 1960" FRUS, 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria, Vol IX https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v09/d117
[129] Trachtenberg, 1991: 207-208; Larson 2000: 100-104.
[130] "Memorandum of Discussion at a Special Meeting of the National Security Council, February 18, 1960." FRUS 1958-1960, National Security Policy; Arms Control and Disarmament, Vol III https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v03/d244

for cheating remained a central concern. Additionally, the troop reduction had failed to dissuade Secretary Gates of the Soviets using conventional forces to coerce the West.

> I perceive no fundamental change in the threat to the freedom and safety of Berlin. Recent developments, including statements of Mr. Khrushchev, do not indicate any modification of the long-term objectives of the Soviet Union with respect to Germany and Berlin, nor do they foreshadow any lessening of Communist control in East Germany.[131]

Short of totally removing Soviet troop from Germany, troop reductions were not an effective means of communicating intent during the Eisenhower administration.

Continued skepticism of Soviet intentions contributed to what was perhaps the most dangerous period of the Cold War. The decision to gain updated information over Soviet strategic capabilities led to Eisenhower authorizing the fated U-2 mission that was shot down by the Soviets in May 1960.[132] Ultimately, the Paris Summit, set in the middle of May, collapsed. Allen Dulles had "the general impression that Khrushchev was attempting to prevent a worsening of the international situation." He believed that Khrushchev's rhetoric was an attempt to not only defend himself against anti-détente elements in the Kremlin, but other communist countries.[133] Dulles focused on Khrushchev's actions since leaving the Summit, rather than his conduct at the summit, to argue he was not planning a return to Stalinist foreign policies.[134] In contrast, Eisenhower and Secretary Gates argued Khrushchev's true intentions had been on display at the

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[131] "Letter from Secretary of Defense Gates to Secretary of State Herter, April 15, 1960" FRUS, 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria, Vol IX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v09/d128

[132] Beschloss, Michael. *Mayday: Eisenhower, Khrushchev, and the U-2 Affair*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

[133] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 445th Meeting of the National Security Council, May 24, 1960" 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria, Vol IX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v09/d193

[134] DDEL, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs: Records, 1952-61, NSC Series, Briefing Notes Subseries, Box No. 18, [USSR] [1954-60]. "CIA: Office of National Estimates, Memorandum: Implication of a Break-Off of the Summit Conference. May 17, 1960."

summit. Both relied heavily on dispositional assessments to criticize recent Soviet actions. Secretary Gates viewed the Summit's failure as a justification of his previous view that the Soviets were unlikely to make any concessions or come to an agreement. Eisenhower was even more adamant that the outcome was Khrushchev's fault.

> …it was undesirable to talk too much about what is going on in the Soviet hierarchy because we can only guess at what motivates the Russians. The President, however, felt sure that Khrushchev deliberately decided to blow up the Summit Conference, knowing that he (the President) could not accept the demands Khrushchev made.[135]

Eisenhower argued, "as long as a powerful government suspected the intentions of another powerful government, intelligence activities would be carried on."[136] Therefore, while the U.S. correctly assessed the signal, it continued to suspect Soviet intentions.

The Eisenhower administration correctly assessed Khrushchev's 1960 unilateral troop reductions as a reassurance signal. Due to the size and publicity of the troop reductions, the Eisenhower administration correctly assed the troop reductions. Allen Dulles summary, in particular, of the motivations behind the troop reductions was largely accurate. This is surprising given the negative dispositional views the policymakers held regarding the Soviets. Despite citing Soviet conventional forces as a continued threat, and one that forced the U.S. to rely on massive nuclear retaliation, the Eisenhower administration did not believe the troop reductions represented a serious change in Soviet military capabilities.

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[135] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 445th Meeting of the National Security Council, May 24, 1960" 1958-1960, Berlin Crisis, 1959-1960; Germany; Austria, Vol IX
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v09/d193
[136] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 445th Meeting of the National Security Council, May 24, 1960" 1958-1960, Volume X, Part 1, Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus.
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v10p1/d153

4.3   1988 TROOP REDUCTION: CORRECT ASSESSMENT

The literature on the end of the Cold War is voluminous. In addition, much of the CST literature cites Gorbachev's U.N. speech and the subsequent meeting at Governor's Island between Reagan, President-elect George H.W. Bush, and Gorbachev as a crucial turning point in U.S.-USSR relations.[137] In December 1988, Gorbachev announced a unilateral troop cut of 500,000 troops, including the withdrawal of 240,000 from Eastern Europe. Taken together, these cuts were 20 percent higher than the highest Western demands at the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions talks.[138] These cuts came after multiple summits and agreements between Reagan and Gorbachev, the most important of which was the INF Treaty. Over the course of the late 1980s Gorbachev and Reagan developed a constructive, cooperative relationship. Nevertheless, Gorbachev was intent on ensuring this relationship continued with the newly elected President George H.W. Bush. His speech at the U.N. was intended as a clear signal of the USSR's defensive orientations. Indeed, the U.S., including Reagan and Bush, correctly assessed the message of the signal. Prior to Gorbachev's announcement, the U.S. did not believe Gorbachev was willing or able to take such a politically risky move. Just like in 1960, U.S. policymakers' belief that Gorbachev was risking domestic political vulnerability led to correct assessment. However, like 1960, the correct assessment did not translate into an updating of intentions despite correctly assessing the signal, in large part because U.S.

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[137] Kydd, Andrew H. *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 232-233; Glaser, Charles L. *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010): 211-212.
[138] Collins, Alan R. "GRIT, Gorbachev, and the End of the Cold War." *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 210.

policymakers believed Gorbachev created too much domestic vulnerability and risked being overthrown.[139]

The first section describes the background leading up to Gorbachev's 1988 announcement. It looks at Gorbachev and Reagan's relationship, and how the nature of this relationship influenced a growing cooperation between the U.S. and the USSR. The next section describes in detail Gorbachev's new foreign and security policies. Specifically, how those policies were crucial to his ideas and efforts to reform the USSR. The next section details the dispositional views of the key policymakers assessing Gorbachev's speech (President Ronald Reagan, President elect George H.W. Bush, and Bush's National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft). Despite Reagan ending his term, his influence and views on Gorbachev were important to Bush and Scowcroft's own assessments. The final section evaluates the success of the U.S. assessing Gorbachev's speech. The case shows the importance of U.S. policymakers believing Gorbachev risked domestic political vulnerability announcing the troop reductions. However, it was only during the Malta meeting between Bush and Gorbachev that Bush began to change his assessment of Soviet intentions.

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[139] Wheeler, Nicholas J. *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 145.

Table 4.3 1988 Troop Reduction Outcome

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Yes
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	None
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	Limited

4.3.1   Context and Background

Reagan came into office with a world view divided between good and evil. He made it evidently clear who and what was evil in his famous 1983 "Evil Empire" speech. Reagan—and much of his staff—were convinced the U.S. had to demonstrate strength and fortitude in resisting the Soviet Union.[140] This adversarial approach was bolstered by the belief the Carter administration had failed to understand the "true nature" of the Soviets. The Soviets were not interested in serious arms control and only interested in

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[140] Shimko, Keith L. *Images and Arms Control: Perceptions of the Soviet Union in the Reagan Administration*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Rathbun, Brian C. *Reasoning of State: Realists, Romantics and Rationality in International Relations*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019): 256-261; Shifrinson, Joshua R. Itzkowitz. *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018): 120-125.

growing strategic capabilities and using its military to expand power and influence. The failure of SALT II and the invasion of Afghanistan demonstrated as much.

In response, Reagan began a massive military buildup to remedy the perceived failings of previous U.S. policies. He began a large-scale modernization of the strategic arsenal, believing nuclear superiority would increase U.S. leverage over the Soviets. This included lobbying Congress to fund the heavy MX ICBM. Fears over heavy Soviet ICBM's and the threat to the Minuteman fields continued to dominate American threat perception. However, Reagan gradually became concerned by the prospect of inadvertent nuclear war and was under increasing pressure (from NATO allies and domestic opinion) to restart arms control negotiations—including INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) and START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) negotiations.[141] Reagan launched an ambitious, and technologically impossible, effort to create an ABM system known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—commonly known as Star Wars. While the arms control proposals and SDI programs were criticized as unrealistic, many in the Reagan administration have since tried to claim that they were merely maneuvers to increase the pressure on the Soviets and convince them of the impossibility of winning an arms race.[142]

The negative view of the Soviets continued to the mid 1980's as Keren Yarhi-Milo notes, "At the time no one actually believed that the USSR had benign intentions. Indeed, both Schultz and Reagan continued to describe the USSR's aims publicly in

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[141] The Intermediate Nuclear Forces negotiations focused on eliminating ground launched ballistic and cruise missiles with a range of 500-5,500 kilometers. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty talks focused on reducing the number of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles. Rathbun, 2019: 261-268

[142] Matlock, Jack F. *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*. (New York: Random House, 2005): 38-46, 59-60; Shifrinson, 2018: 125-129.

terms of expansion of power and influence through military means. Schultz, too, though that the Soviets were willing to use their military force to change the status quo, directly or indirectly." The intelligence community also "presented hostile assessments of Soviet intentions."[143] However, as Gorbachev came to power and the negative picture of the Soviet economy became clearer, assessments of Soviet intentions gradually softened in 1986. Many of the arguments for this change are the personal connection that developed between Gorbachev and Reagan.[144] Eventually the leaders would meet at four summits, starting with their 1986 meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland. Despite a lack of agreements, many scholars argue this meeting was instrumental in Reagan believing he found a Soviet leader who shared his concerns and could be worked with.[145]

By 1988 Gorbachev made numerous, iterated overtures to demonstrate benign intentions. As William Wohlforth notes, "What is striking about the whole story is how many unprecedented signals and gestures were needed to reduce American uncertainty about Soviet intentions (and how few such signals the Americans had to send to reduce Gorbachev's uncertainty concerning their intentions)."[146] Gorbachev undertook dramatic domestic reforms, withdrew forces from Afghanistan, and articulating a new military doctrine of "strategic sufficiency." One of the biggest signals was the successful signing of the 1987 INF Treaty.[147]

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[143] Yarhi-Milo, Keren. *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014): 194, 204-205.
[144] Rathbun, 2019: 270-320.
[145] Garthoff, Raymond L. *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1994): 252-299; Wilson, James. *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014): 135-142; Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 179, 199-200.
[146] Wohlforth, William. "Scholars, Policy Makers, and the End of the Cold War," In, *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War,* ed. William Wohlforth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 263.
[147] The treaty was signed during Gorbachev's 1987 visit to Washington and ratified by Congress in time for Reagan's 1988 trip to Moscow.

By signing the INF Treaty, the two sides agreed to reduce one of the greatest sources of tension in Europe. For the Soviets, they eliminated the SS-20 missile, while the West eliminated GLCM's (Ground Launched Cruise Missiles) and Pershing II missiles. For the U.S., it reduced concerns that the Soviets were striving for superiority in a potential war in Europe. While for the Soviets it was a seminal achievement that Gorbachev argued, "was an important moment in establishing mutual understanding with the American leadership. It was probably even a key moment in finding a common language."[148] However, Gorbachev was willing to go further to signal benign intentions. Critics of the INF Treaty argued that it left the Soviet conventional superiority intact, and removed the capability that had deterred the Soviets from overrunning Europe since Eisenhower. However, Gorbachev had raised the issue of conventional reductions, and specifically cited the need for such reductions due to Western critic arguments of Soviet conventional superiority as justification for retaining intermediate range capabilities.[149]

Despite the close personal rapport that developed between Gorbachev and Reagan, and numerous reassurance signals, there was still a high level of uncertainty and skepticism regarding Soviet intentions. Even with the realization that, as National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci noted before the 1987 Washington Summit, "the Soviets need more from us than we need from them," Soviet military capabilities remained a potent and dominant threat.[150] Negotiations continued to lower nuclear competition, but the threat of the Red Army overrunning Europe remained as real as ever. Without some

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[148] National Security Archive, "Politburo Session, December 17, 1987."
https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/russian/Final1987-12-17Politburo%20Session.pdf
[149] National Security Archive, "Memorandum of Conversation Between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, December 8, 1987, 2:30-3:15 p.m."
https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB238/usdocs/Doc%2015%20(Memcon%20Gorby%20Reagan%2012.08.87).pdf
[150] Quoted in Shifrinson, 2018: 129.

reduction in conventional forces, competition between the West and the USSR would continue.

4.3.2   Soviet Intentions

Leonid Brezhnev finally died in 1982 after years of deteriorating physical and mental health. In his place stepped longtime KGB head Yuri Andropov. Andropov had long been responsible for much of the decisionmaking inside the Kremlin (along with Dmitry Ustinov, Andrei Gromyko, and Boris Ponomarev) as Brezhnev's health declined. By the early 1980s, it was clear that the Soviet economy needed reforming. In response, Andropov instituted a number of reforms to make the Soviet economy and society more efficient. This including launching a wide-ranging anti-corruption push which continued throughout Gorbachev's tenure.[151] However, Andropov died before he could fully institute his reforms, passing away in February 1984. Replacing Andropov was Konstantin Chernenko, who like the previous Soviet leaders, was in poor physical health. He spent much of his tenure in the hospital, and died in March 1985 shortly after coming into office.

With the turnover in Soviet leaders, the Soviet leadership selected the comparatively younger Mikhail Gorbachev as the new leader of the Soviet Union. With Gorbachev came a cadre of younger and more independently minded advisors, who recognized the need for reforms.[152] However, much of the bureaucracy still remained

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[151] CIA. "The Soviet Anticorruption Campaign: Causes, Consequences, and Prospects." August 1985. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP08S01350R000200600002-8.pdf

[152] Larson, Deborah Welch and Alexei Shevchenko, "Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Organization* 57, no. 1 (2003): 77–109.

wedded to the old system and resistant to change.[153] Gorbachev himself largely placated

the old cadres by nominally committing to continue defense and security policies. Indeed,

Gorbachev sought to revitalize the Soviet system, not destroy it.[154] Influenced by

Andropov's initial reforms, Gorbachev launched his reform agenda *perestroika*.

Gorbachev announced this "new thinking" at the 27th Party Congress in February/March

1986, which included a reference to a new defence concept called "reasonable

sufficiency."[155] However, to advance his new policies he sought to create a new source of

power with the general population's support in order to pressure the bureaucracy that

resisted his reforms. To do so he instituted *glasnost*, which lessened restrictions on

speech and discussion. And like Khrushchev before him, he came to realize that to fully

enact his reforms, he needed to lessen tensions with the West. The Soviet Union could

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[153] Cohen, Stephen, "Was the Soviet System Reformable?" *Slavic Review* 63, no. 3 (2004): 459–88.
[154] There is a voluminous literature on the pressures and causes that forced Gorbachev and the Soviet system to reform. For an overview see Suri, Jeremi. "Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 4 (October 2002): 60–92; For arguments that material pressures were dominant see Wohlforth, William C. "Realism and the End of the Cold War," International Security 19, no. 3 (1994): 91–129; Brooks, Stephen and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas*," International Security* 25, no. 3 (2000-2001): 5-53; For arguments that ideas were the dominant factor see Checkel, Jeffrey, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution," *World Politics* 45, no. 02 (January 1993): 271–300; Risse-Kappen, Thomas, "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 185–214; English, Robert D. "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End: A Reply to Brooks and Wohlforth," *International Security* 26, no. 4 (2002): 70-92; Mendelson, Sarah E. *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); For arguments on the force of the international system see Deudney, Daniel and G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change," *International Security* 16, no. 3 (1991): 74-118; Koslowski, Rey and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, "Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire's Demise and the International System," *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994): 215–47; For arguments that emphasize the domestic conditions and Gorbachev's personality see Evangelista, Matthew. "Norms, Heresthetics, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 5–35; Evangelista, Matthew, "Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case," in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds Richard Rosecrance, and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 154-178; Brown, Archie. *The Gorbachev Factor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[155] Snel, Gerard. "A (More) Defensive Strategy': The Reconceptualisation of Soviet Conventional Strategy in the 1980s," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 2 (March 1, 1998): 217.

not compete with the U.S. in an arms race and reform its domestic economy.[156] Therefore to reduce tensions with the West, Gorbachev, influenced by his reform-minded advisors, sought to redefine the Soviet conception of security.[157]

To enact his reforms, Gorbachev needed to persuade, cajole, and justify his new approach to security. He needed to redefine what the Soviet Union's defense interests and needs were.[158] In the early 1980s, the Soviet military began to re-evaluate its own strategies, in part due to qualitative improvements in NATO and Western capabilities.[159] Many Soviet officers used this impetus to re-orient the military away from a purely offensive posture, to one which included defensive operations. At the same time, civilian academics at institutions such as IMEMO (Institute of World Economy and International Relations) and ISKAN (Institute for USA and Canada Studies), began involving themselves in security debates.[160] However, they advocated a much more defensive posture than the one being debated by the military—reasonable sufficiency. They soon ran into opposition from the military, which had an almost exclusive monopoly over technical and strategic debates.[161] That monopoly was gradually weakened since Gorbachev came into power with the least relationship to the military of any previous

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[156] Snyder, Jack. "Limiting Offensive Conventional Forces: Soviet Proposals and Western Options," *International Security* 12, no. 4 (1988): 48-49, although as Evangelista, 1999 notes the pressure was not so great as to force unilateral reductions.

[157] Meyer, Stephen M. "The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security," *International Security* 13, no. 2 (1988): 127-128; Snyder, Jack. "The Gorbachev Revolution: A Waning of Soviet Expansionism?" *International Security* 12, no. 3 (1987-1988): 93-131.

[158] Herman, Robert G. "Identity, Norms, and National Security: The Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War," in *The Culture of National Security*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press): 271-316; Meyer, 1988: 125-126.

[159] See Zisk, Kimberly Marten. *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955-1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[160] Snel, 1998: 213-214.

[161] Phillips, R. Hyland, and Jeffrey I. Sands. "Reasonable Sufficiency and Soviet Conventional Defense: A Research Note." *International Security* 13, no. 2 (1988) 164-178; Rice, Condoleezza, "The Party, the Military, and Decision Authority in the Soviet Union," *World Politics* 40, no. 01 (October 1987): 55–81.

general secretary.[162] The influence of civilian academics into a debate that was previously

dominated by the military was, as Kimberly Marten describes, both a top down and

bottom up process.[163] Civilian academics acted as a new source of institutional support

and justification for Gorbachev's efforts, much in the same way Khrushchev tried to

create a new source of support in the Strategic Rocket Forces.[164] As Snel notes the

change to a military policy of "reasonable sufficiency" was primarily driven by "changes

in policy beliefs of Soviet decision makers and in civil-military relations, in combination

with the activity of transnational groups of experts."[165] Through this new definition of

security Gorbachev could gain the domestic support necessary to forge a new,

cooperative relationship with the West.

The Berlin Declaration of the Warsaw Treaty Organization of May 1987 officially

enshrined the concept of sufficiency into Soviet strategy, and Gorbachev aligned himself

with the more academic concept of defensive orientations.[166] For the first time,

Gorbachev explicitly linked a more defensive posture with the expense of the arms race

and the need to cut military expenditures. On September 17, 1987, he wrote in Pravda,

"structure of the armed forces of a state that they would be sufficient to repulse a possible

aggression but would not be sufficient for the conduct of offensive operations."[167]

Privately, at a Politburo session, he further argued that, "perestroika and its success will

change people's perception of the security issues and break down the stereotypes of

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[162] Larrabee, F. Stephen "Gorbachev and the Soviet Military," Foreign Affairs 66, No. 5 (Summer, 1988): 1005-1008; RAND, *The Soviet Military Under Gorbachev: Report on a RAND Workshop*, eds Alexander R. Alexiev and Robert C. Nurick (Santa Monica: RAND, 1990).
[163] Zisk, 1993: 122-130.
[164] Meyer, 1988: 130.
[165] Snel, 1998: 205; Evangelista, 1999: 290; Meyer, 1988: 144-150; Zisk, 1993: 141-162.
[166] Evangelista, 1999: 296-297; Snel, 1998: 210; Zisk, 1993: 162-164.
[167] Quoted in Snyder, 1988: 51.

reckless and oftentimes pointless disposal of means on military needs. The security of our nation plus the living conditions of our people—this is the equation that we should constantly keep in mind.”[168]

Publicly committing to reducing troops and articulating a new defensive strategy was Gorbachev's way of demonstrating the sincerity of new Soviet thinking and defensive orientations.[169] An announcement would pick up where the INF left off, and reduce Western threat perception by mitigating one of the Soviet's greatest advantages. Moreover, it would help Gorbachev lobby the West for diplomatic and economic support in return for his military reductions.[170]

Gorbachev's December 1988 U.N. speech announcing troop reductions was a very public way of announcing his reassurance signal. Indeed, many commenters previously called for Gorbachev to make such reductions if he was sincere about Soviet intentions.[171] By doing so, and in a large and public fashion, he was making as big of a statement of Soviet benign intentions as possible. During a February 25, 1988 Politburo session, Gorbachev cited the "opportunity" to reduce military spending because "politically we have entered into a new situation in our relationship with the United States."[172] By March he realized that there was likely little movement on START negotiations with the Reagan administration leaving office, and that the focus of arms

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[168] National Security Archive, "Politburo Session, February 25, 1988 [Excerpt from notes of Anatoly Chernyaev]" https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/2.pdf
[169] Legvold, Robert. "Gorbachev's New Approach to Conventional Arms Control" *The Harriman Institute Forum* 1, no. 1 (1988), 1-8.
[170] Zubok, Vladislav M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 289-311.
[171] Blackwill, Robert D. "Conceptual Problems of Conventional Arms Control," *International Security* 12, no. 4 (1988): 28-47; But others such as Snyder never believed they would undertake *unilateral* cuts. Snyder, 1988: 61.
[172] National Security Archive, " Politburo Session, February 25, 1988 [Excerpt from notes of Anatoly Chernyaev] https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/2.pdf

control was shifting towards conventional weapons in Europe.[173] Recognizing the

domestic situation of the U.S., Gorbachev advisors like Georgy Arbatov argued it was an

"appropriate moment for unilateral actions," especially regarding conventional weapons,

which should "be able better to illustrate the truth about our intentions and proposals to

the Western publics."[174] Gorbachev agreed, and committed with a small circle of advisors

to "present 'the new us,' and show them how we are changing." The Soviets would

unilaterally reduce the size of their military as evidence of a new Soviet security doctrine.

To publicize the signal, he should make a speech to, "Present the basic principles of our

new military-political doctrine, as concrete as possible, and what it means for the

international situation," and "we [USSR] should make public the figures regarding our

armed forces. Name the reductions that we are going to make unilaterally."[175] The

unilateral nature and large size of the reductions (larger than even the most extreme

Western conventional arms control proposals) was a costly gesture by Gorbachev that

angered the military and hardliners in the Soviet Union.

 Nevertheless, Gorbachev and his advisors were concerned about presenting their

proposals to the leadership. His domestic and military reforms were causing increasing

concerns amongst sectors of the government and military. The military, especially Chief

of the General Staff Marshal Akhromeyev, and much of the Politburo opposed

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[173] National Security Archive, "Politburo Session, March 10, 1988 [Excerpt from notes of Anatoly Chernyaev]" https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/3.pdf; National Security Archive. "Dobrynin Memorandum to Gorbachev on U.S.-Soviet Relations. September 18, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=5427861-Document-02-Dobrynin-Memorandum-to-Gorbachev-on
[174] National Security Archive, "Arbatov memorandum to Gorbachev. June, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5427860-Document-01-Arbatov-memorandum-to-Gorbachev-June
[175] National Security Archive, "Gorbachev's Conference with Advisers on Drafting the U.N. Speech, October 31, 1988" https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5427862-Document-03-Gorbachev-s-Conference-with-Advisers; Chernyaev, Antoly. *My Six Years with Gorbachev.* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000): 194-195.

Gorbachev's efforts to cut defense spending.[176] Specifically unilateral troop reductions

and removing them from Warsaw Pact countries. Gorbachev had to gain their buy-in for

the proposal and could not simply force the decision on them.[177] The failure of

Khrushchev's reforms was present in Gorbachev's mind.[178] Ultimately, Gorbachev

gained their acceptance by outlining the broad outlines of his strategy, but leaving out the

specific numbers. This was a politically risky strategy, especially considering how large

the numbers he left out were.

4.3.3 American Policymaker Views

They key policymakers responsible for assessing Gorbachev's 1988 troop

reduction were President Reagan, President-elect George H.W. Bush, and National

Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft. By Gorbachev's 1988 speech, Reagan was at the end

of his term, and Vice President Bush had just been elected president. Reagan's time in

office saw him transition from hawkish skepticism to a personal, and positive,

relationship with Gorbachev, although not necessarily of the Soviet government.[179] And

even though he was leaving office, his views were influential on the assessment of the

Soviet reassurance signal. While George H.W. Bush entered his own administration

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[176] Evangelista, 1999: 317-331; Herspring, Dale B. "On Perestroyka: Gorbachev, Yazov, and the Military," *Problems of Communism* 36, no. 4 (July-august 1987): 99-107; Gorbachev replaced much of the defense leadership in the wake of the Rust Affair in which a German teenager landed a plane on Red Square. Indeed, instances such as Khrushchev's reductions were specifically cited as a reason to not unilaterally reduce troop numbers. Larrabee, 1988: 1014.

[177] National Security Archive, "Chernyaev Memorandum to Gorbachev on the Armed Forces, November 10, 1988" https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5427864/Document-05-Chernyaev-Memorandum-to-Gorbachev-on.pdf

[178] National Security Archive, "Chernyaev Diary, November 3, 1988" https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5427863-Document-04-Chernyaev-Diary-November-3-1988

[179] Shimko, 1991; Rathbun, 2019: 246-269; Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 180-181.

skeptical of Soviet intentions, despite serving as Vice President and witness to the

negotiations and debates of the last eight years. Bolstering this view was Bush' new

national security advisor Brent Scowcroft.[180] Moreover, even if Bush and Scowcroft were

willing to concede that Gorbachev himself was sincere, like Reagan, they believed he

could easily be ousted by hard liners in his government and the underlying aggressive

intentions of the Soviets remained unchanged.[181] Ultimately, all three policymakers

played a large role assessing Gorbachev's 1988 troop reduction.

By the time of the Moscow summit in 1988, Reagan and Gorbachev's rapport led

to the dramatic reduction of tensions and numerous agreements.[182] His personal

interaction and ability to connect with Gorbachev marked a dramatic turnaround from his

initial perception of the Soviets as aggressive, intransigent, and manipulative. This

underwrote his personal willingness to negotiate and consider concessions that would

have been seen as ill-advised from earlier in his presidency. The signing of the INF

Treaty and the progress on the START and CFE (Conventional Forces Europe) treaties

demonstrated the seriousness to which Reagan considered Gorbachev a partner.

However, Reagan's views of communism never changed, what he instead found was a

partner who he was able to deal with.[183] Additionally, this changed assessment did not

truly begin until 1987 and after numerous personal meetings.[184] Arguably, one of the

most important was the Moscow summit in 1988, when Reagan presented a ratified INF

[180] Bush, George H. W., and Brent Scowcroft. *A World Transformed*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1999): 11-12.

[181] Chollet, Derek H., and James M. Goldgeier, "Once Burned, Twice Shy? The Pause of 1989" in *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates* ed. William C. Wohlforth (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press, 2003): 142.

[182] Rathbun, 2019: 270-302; Wilson, 2014: 148-150.

[183] Rathbun, 2019: 284.

[184] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 199-200; Garthoff, 1994: 300-337.

Treaty, and Gorbachev announced a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and numerous domestic changes.[185] The continued interaction meant that Reagan had a positive view of Gorbachev by the time of his 1988 announcement.

Despite being Reagan's Vice President, President Elect George H.W. Bush was not as optimistic about Soviet intentions. As former CIA Director, he authorized the infamous Team B affair that criticized U.S. assessments of Soviet intentions as too optimistic. Moreover, he came into office believing that the power of Reagan's charisma and ability to form personal connections also was one of his weaknesses. Bush did not believe Soviet intentions had changed, even if Gorbachev was more open to cooperation. Bush was not convinced that Gorbachev and the rest of the leadership were beyond manipulating Reagan and the U.S. for their benefit.[186] Indeed, he was worried that U.S. policy was actually strengthening the Soviets at the expense of U.S. interests by being so accommodating.

Brent Scowcroft shared Bush's concerns. If anything, he was more concerned that Reagan and his advisors were taken in by Gorbachev's charm and had placed their personal connections ahead of realistic assessments of Soviet intentions and U.S. interests.[187] Scowcroft was concerned that the Soviets were manipulating the U.S. to their advantage. Even if Gorbachev was sincere, the rest of the leadership was not, and the reforms could be changed in an instant. The precarious nature of Gorbachev's domestic position and the belief he was vulnerable to hardline members of the leadership reinforced dispositional views of aggressive Soviet intent.[188]

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[185] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 204-205.
[186] Shifrinson, 2018: 128-130.
[187] Wilson, 2014: 150.
[188] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003: 150-151.

4.3.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

By the time of the May 1988 Moscow summit, relations between the superpowers had undergone a dramatic change. Reagan and Gorbachev's relationship built the framework for discussions on numerous contentious issues that plagued the relationship for years, including human rights, regional conflicts, and most prominently arms control. Highlighting the trip was the conclusion of the INF Treaty and the reduction of inadvertent escalation in Europe. The Soviets hoped Reagan and Gorbachev could make further agreements on a variety of negotiations including START (begun in 1982) and CFE. In so doing, Gorbachev could use the foreign policy successes to bolster his domestic position by pointing to his successes with the West. Gorbachev's hope was driven partly by necessity and partly by the rapport he had developed with Reagan. With the conclusion of the INF Treaty, he believed that the U.S. understood Soviet benign intentions.

However, the U.S. did not share the optimism of the Soviets. The Reagan administration was skeptical of going too far and agreeing to general principles the administration believed the Soviets had misused before—such as the Basic Principles Agreement.[189] There was a fear the Soviets were baiting the U.S. for concessions to shore up their domestic and international situations.[190] In fact, going into the Moscow Summit much of the administration was cautioning against "exaggerated expectations on the future pace and achievement of U.S.-Soviet relations."[191] Increasingly bleak assessments

[189] Matlock, 2005: 299-300.
[190] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 228-231.
[191] National Security Archive, "National Security Decision Directive No. 305, 'Objectives at the Moscow Summit,' April 26, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/8.pdf

cautioned that despite Gorbachev's efforts and apparent commitment to cooperation, he was not fully in control and beholden to conservative forces, including the military. This supports DPV by demonstrating target policymakers pay key attention to the political context and environment of the sender. Indeed, some in the administration believed the more Gorbachev compromised, the greater the risk of Gorbachev's ouster and the USSR returning to its competitive ways in line DPV.[192] Moreover, with Reagan's time in office ending, the administration sought to consolidate gains rather than engaging in complex negotiations on a shortened period.[193]

At the summit, Gorbachev pressed Reagan over START and further arms control negotiations.[194] Gorbachev even hinted at his willingness to reduce troops. He referred to the recent approval of a Warsaw Pact proposal to reduce the number of troops in Europe by 500,000 on both sides, and argued if the sides exchanged data, it would show the Soviets did not have the conventional superiority the West claimed it did.[195] By the end of the summit, it was clear that Reagan and most in the administration had changed their views on Gorbachev. Most telling was Reagan's comments walking back his famous "Evil Empire" speech and giving Gorbachev credit for the reforms underway in the Soviet Union.[196] Reagan recognized Gorbachev's sincerity and efforts to portray the

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[192] Gates, Robert M. *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007): 439.

[193] National Security Archive, "National Security Decision Directive No. 307, 'Review of the United States Arms Reduction Positions in Preparation for the Moscow Summit,' May 27, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/14.pdf; This is consistent with Shifrinson's argument the Reagan administration pursued a weakening strategy against the Soviet Union. Shifrinson, 2018: 125-129.

[194] National Security Archive, "Record of Conversation between General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan, May 30, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/17.pdf

[195] National Security Archive, "Memorandum of Conversation, First Plenary Meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, May 30, 1988." https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB251/16.pdf

[196] Matlock, 2005: 302-303.

Soviets as defensive, security seekers. Gorbachev's domestic reforms bolstered this view.[197] Yet, Gorbachev's charisma and connection could not overcome the technical details and skepticism of the Reagan administration to any further commitments. The Reagan administration was still concerned that while Gorbachev was sincere, the rest of the Kremlin was not.

Despite Gorbachev's hints that he was open to some conventional force reductions, the intelligence community was skeptical the USSR would surrender its primary advantage. Even with the INF Treaty, estimates predicted, "the basic elements of Soviet defense policy and practice thus far have not been changed by Gorbachev's reform campaign."[198] Instead, the CIA judged that the Soviets would prefer to negotiate mutual reductions, especially given the complexities of negotiations and the fact an agreement could take years. Additionally, SNIE 11-16-88 argued, just like reductions during the Eisenhower administration, that the Soviets intended any cuts to modernize their force structure rather than a unilateral reduction.[199] The prospect that the Soviets would unilaterally reduce their troop numbers was considered almost farcical by the CIA and most intelligence analysts. Douglas MacEachin, director of the Office of Soviet Analysis at the CIA, confirmed this fact during testimony to the Senate shortly after Gorbachev's U.N. speech.

> In all honesty, had we said a week ago that Gorbachev might come to the UN and offer a unilateral cut of 500,000 in the military, we would have been told we were crazy. We had a difficult enough time getting air space for the prospect of some unilateral cuts of 50 to 60,000.[200]

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[197] Haas, Mark L. "The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?" *International Organization* 61, no. 01 (2007): 147.

[198] NIE 11-3/8-88 "Soviet Forces and Nuclear Capabilities for Strategic Nuclear Conflict Through the Late 1990's," December 1, 1988.

[199] SNIE 11-16-88 "Soviet Policy During the Next Phase of Arms Control in Europe."

[200] U.S. Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, Soviet Task Force, Testimony of Doug MacEachin Testimony of Doug MacEachin, Director, Office of Soviet Analysis, CIA; Bob Blackwell, National

Even with all previous Soviet reassurance signals, the intelligence community was surprised Gorbachev would announce such reductions. Once it was announced, however, the size and publicity of the reductions forced even a skeptical intelligence community to assess the reductions as a reassurance signal.

Gorbachev's announcement was a powerful signal designed to eliminate doubt at his efforts to create a more cooperative relationship with the U.S. He announced cuts of 500,000 troops, including withdrawing over 240,000 from Warsaw Pact countries and renounced the use of force to maintain control over Eastern Europe—commonly known as the Brezhnev Doctrine—and demonstrated that the Soviets were willing to negotiate in good faith by unilaterally reducing their perceived greatest advantage in conventional forces. Shortly after Gorbachev's speech, Reagan and President-elect Bush met with Gorbachev on Governor's Island. The transcripts reveal how insistent Gorbachev was on signaling to Bush the Soviet Union's defensive orientation and continuing the relationship he developed with Reagan. He reiterated his calls for the U.S. to work with the Soviet Union on regional issues and there was no need for Bush to be "suspicious" of Soviet intentions.[201] However, Bush demurred—with Gorbachev largely focusing on Bush and ignoring Reagan's presence—playing ignorant of the substance of Gorbachev's speech. Reagan interjected to comment that the U.S. "was on Gorbachev's side concerning the reforms he was trying to make in the Soviet system." It was clear Reagan believed Gorbachev's sincerity, but had little influence on his Vice President's

Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union, CIA; and Paul Erickson, Deputy Director, Office of Soviet Analysis, CIA. December 7, 1988: 38.

[201] National Security Archive, "Memorandum of Conversation. The President's Luncheon with Gorbachev, December 7, 1988," https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5448836-Document-X4-Memorandum-of-Conversation-The; Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 231-235.

determination to pause the relationship. Despite Bush saying he wanted to build on what Reagan and Gorbachev had accomplished, he wanted time to "formulate prudent national security policies" before committing to anything.[202] Despite the effort, Bush and his new administration deflected Gorbachev's overtures and remained committed to slowing down the pace of negotiations and cooperation.[203] Bush and Scowcroft believed that a reassessment of policies and strategies was required to ensure the Soviets were not manipulating the U.S.[204]

Furthermore, Gorbachev's personal entreaties to Bush reinforced the signal of the USSR's defensive orientations. Bush and Scowcroft correctly assessed Gorbachev's signal, but they remained skeptical over Soviet intentions. Gorbachev's signal was correctly assessed because policymakers believed he risked his domestic political position, but there were concerns he was so weak he could be replaced and his moves reversed. A CIA assessment from April 1989 wrote, "At times, however, domestic crises—some of which may not be visible on the surface—will probably distract the Soviet leadership from foreign policy. This could result in temporary reversals on specific issues."[205] This played into fears that Gorbachev was not as domestically secure as he projected, and had potentially overextended his position. The reductions could possibly be too large, and just the justification hardliners and the military needed to out Gorbachev and reverse his policies.

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[202] National Security Archive, "Memorandum of Conversation, "The President's Private Meeting With Gorbachev," December 7, 1988, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/us08.pdf
[203] Chollet and Goldgeier, 2003: 152-153.
[204] Shifrinson, 2018: 129-130.
[205] National Security Archive, "CIA: 'Rising Political Instability Under Gorbachev: Understanding the Problem and Prospects for Resolution: An Intelligence Assessment'," April, 1989, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134869

As 1989 began, the Bush administration publicly voiced their skepticism.[206] Even though Gorbachev demonstrated he was sincere, U.S. policymakers believed he has possibly reduced his control over domestic politics too much and could be soon pushed out of office. Bush himself embodied the concern when he told a joint session of Congress in February, "prudence and common sense dictate that we try to understand the full meaning of the change going on there, review out policies, and then proceed with caution." He continued, "Fundamental facts remain that the Soviets retain a very powerful military machine in the service of objectives which are still too often in conflict with ours."[207] Scowcroft supported this view, who earlier on January 22 argued that Gorbachev himself was, "interested in making trouble within the Western alliance. And I think he believes that the best way to do it is a peace offensive, rather than bluster, the way some of his predecessors have."[208] This line of argument mirrors many of the same put forward in the Eisenhower administration to criticize Khrushchev's efforts, that weakness forced the Soviet signals. Even after all Gorbachev's efforts, Bush and Scowcroft remained unconvinced of changed Soviet intentions. Bush continued his public stance during on May 12 during a speech at Texas A&M's graduation,

> The Soviet Union says that it seeks to make peace with the world and criticizes its own postwar policies. These are words that we can only applaud, but a new relationship cannot simply be declared by Moscow or bestowed by others; it must be earned. It must be earned because promises are never enough. The Soviet Union had promised a more cooperative relationship before, only to reverse course and return to militarism.[209]

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[206] Garthoff, 1994: 375-408.
[207] Wilson, 2014: 149.
[208] Beschloss, Michael R, and Strobe Talbott, At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993): 17-18.
[209] Bush, George H.W. "Commencement Address at Texas A&M University," May 12, 1989
https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-12-1989-commencement-address-texas-am-university

Even with such a large and public reduction, Bush and Scowcroft did not believe the reduction demonstrated changed Soviet intentions. Yet again, further evidence of changed intentions was needed.

Even after Gorbachev's announcement and face-to-face pleas, both Bush and Scowcroft remained skeptical of Soviet intentions. They correctly assessed the signal Gorbachev intended to send, but their assessment of changed intentions remained suspect.[210] National Security Directive 23, published in September, wrote "The USSR has indicated an interest in rapprochement," but, "a new relationship with the international system cannot simply be declared by Moscow…it must be earned through the demilitarization of Soviet foreign policy and reinforced by behavior consistent with the principles of world order." It concluded that if the Soviets wished to demonstrate credibility, "We [U.S] seek, instead, fundamental alterations in Soviet military force structure, institutions, and practices which can only be reversed at great cost, economically and politically, to the Soviet Union."[211] However, in October, the intelligence community confirmed that Gorbachev's words at the U.N. in fact matched the U.S. desire for deeds. "Soviet reductions in Eastern Europe are proceeding in a manner consistent with Gorbachev's commitment; they will result in a significant reduction in the combat capability of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe." Although the report conditioned this by noting, "Most of what the Soviets are doing makes military sense."[212] This represented the double-sided nature of the skeptical arguments that

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[210] Snyder, Sarah B. "Beyond Containment? The First Bush Administration's Skeptical Approach to the CSCE," *Cold War History* 13, no. 4 (November 2013): 464-466.
[211] National Security Directive 23, *United States Relations with the Soviet Union*. September 22, 1989. https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/nsd/nsd23.pdf
[212] CIA, NIC M 89-10003, *Status of Soviet Unilateral Withdrawals*, October 1989. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/at-

domestic economics were driving Gorbachev's reforms. First, that cooperation was driven by the need to redirect funds into the domestic economy and away from the military. But at the same time arguing those military cuts were in fact intended to modernize the military. Despite correctly assessing Gorbachev's signal, it was, by itself, insufficient to overcome Bush and Scowcroft's skepticism of Soviet intentions.

Gradually, the intelligence community opened up to the prospect that Gorbachev was committed to a new relationship.[213] NIE 11-4-89 accepted Gorbachev was sincere in his reforms, but questioned whether he would be able to sustain them given internal opposition. It also noted, "Some analysts see current policy changes as largely tactical, driven by the need for breathing space from the competition."[214] Specifically on the troop cuts, NIE 4-1-84 argued that while the announced cuts were significant, they did not dispel the Soviet or Warsaw Pact ability to launch an attack, merely "extend the preparation time."[215] There was still a high probability that the announced cuts were merely part of a larger Soviet scheme to modernize forces in light of domestic reforms and nuclear arms negotiations.

With Bush and Gorbachev set to meet at Malta near the end of 1989, many in the administration lowered the expectations of the summit. Scowcroft laid out the goals of the summit in a memo to Bush. The focus was "to put a damper on expectations," and to

cold-wars-end-us-intelligence-on-the-soviet-union-and-eastern-europe-1989-1991/16526pdffiles/NIC89-10003.pdf

[213] Yarhi-Milo, 2014: 185-186.

[214] NIE 11-4-89, "Soviet Policy Toward the West: The Gorbachev Challenge." April 1989. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/us11.pdf

[215] NIE 4-1-84, "Warning of War In Europe: Changing Warsaw Pact Planning and Forces." September 1989. https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/at-cold-wars-end-us-intelligence-on-the-soviet-union-and-eastern-europe-1989-1991/16526pdffiles/NIE4-1-84.pdf

not "negotiate arms control; the future of Europe; or economic issues."[216] Secretary of State James Baker supported Scowcroft by arguing the goals were, "to gain a clearer understanding" and "probe Gorbachev's thinking."[217] Especially because Bush and Scowcroft believed that Reagan had gone too far with strategic arms control. Before any further strategic cuts could be made, the Bush administration wanted conversations on a number of issues like conventional force reductions and the reunification of Germany. The U.S.-Soviet relationship had to be reevaluated before negotiations could continue.

But like Reagan before him, Bush developed a personal rapport with Gorbachev. Soon the Soviets followed up Gorbachev's announcement with serious proposals for the CFE Treaty that had the potential, combined with the INF treaty, to leave the West in a better military position in Europe. Moreover, growing calls for democratic representation in Warsaw Pact countries and German reunification gained strength throughout 1989 and into 1990. Gorbachev's conversations reassured Bush that there was little chance the Soviets would use force to prevent German reunification or the burgeoning democratic movements in Eastern Europe. What became even clearer after Malta was that the Soviet Union was in no place to offer resistance. Domestic political reforms had unleashed the Soviet Union's own nationalist movements and made Gorbachev's need for Western guarantees of aid to support the faltering economy even greater. Gorbachev could not stand in the way.

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[216] National Security Archive, "Memorandum to The President from National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. "National Security Council Meeting, November 30, 1989."
https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB298/Document%207.pdf
[217] National Security Archive, "Department of State. Memorandum for The President from Secretary of State James Baker. "Your December Meeting with Gorbachev." November 29, 1989
https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB298/Document%206.pdf

Ultimately, all the key U.S. policymakers understood the content of Gorbachev's U.N. speech and renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine. This case demonstrates how important it was for U.S. policymakers to believe Gorbachev risked domestic political vulnerability to correctly assess the signal. But the signal was insufficient to alter assessments of Soviet intentions. Additionally, in contrast to assessing the signal, Bush, Scowcroft and much of the intelligence community were worried that Gorbachev had risked his political position too much. By sending so many signals, the U.S. feared he could be overthrown or replaced and many of his policies reversed.

4.4   CONCLUSION

The cases presented here demonstrate the limitations of unilateral sinking cost actions as reassurance signals. All three cases exhibited how difficult it is for the sender to convey clear and credible signals of defensive intentions through unilateral troop reductions. Soviet troop reductions were successfully assessed by U.S. policymakers a majority of the time. The size and publicity of the reductions often made it difficult for policymakers to ignore the signals. However, troop reductions did not lead to a subsequent reassessment of Soviet intentions and was often ignored in favor of focusing on strategic arms control.

A crucial component of the assessment process was the extent to which U.S. policymakers linked the reductions to other issues or factors. Specifically, policymakers often believed the reductions made military sense, especially given the presence of nuclear weapons. Despite Soviet conventional superiority being a constant threat to the

West, policymakers were more inclined to view the reductions as increasing, rather than decreasing, Soviet capabilities by making them more capable on a nuclear battlefield.

All three cases provide some support the domestic political vulnerability thesis. For correct assessment, it was crucial U.S. policymakers believed Soviet leaders risked domestic political vulnerability by announcing troop reductions and were challenging domestic interests, such as the military. Additionally, when policymakers believed the reductions were forced on Soviet leaders by negative domestic conditions, the reductions were incorrectly assessed, such as in 1956. However, it is clear that in cases like 1988, policymakers became concerned Gorbachev had overextended himself and, in many cases, may have become too vulnerable. This left him exposed to ousting by hardline members of the government or military, and potentially lead to a reversal of policies.

In all cases, dispositional assessments played a role in assessment. Assessments of Khrushchev as irrational were commonplace in both cases, and specifically Eisenhower's dispositional view of Khrushchev in 1960 was affected by his previous interactions and experience with the Soviet leader. Additionally, a positive dispositional assessment of Gorbachev in 1988 contributed to a correct assessment, but did not translate into an updating of defensive/status quo Soviet intentions. There was little support for the other alternative hypothesis. There was little evidence for the face-to-face theory, even in 1988, with no evidence Gorbachev's meeting with Bush had an independent effect on assessment.

5.0   CHAPTER FIVE: DE-ESCALATION REASSURANCE SIGNALING

In crises, one way to demonstrate resolve is to raise risks. By increasing the chance of conflict, states can demonstrate they are not bluffing and signal resolve over an issue. Part of the costs attached to these signals come from the potential loss of control, which, as Schelling notes, makes "the final decision is not altogether under the threatener's control."[1] By giving up control and raising the risk of conflict, senders demonstrate they are not bargaining and intent on defending their position. The potential of uncontrolled escalation then incentivizes both sides to come to an agreement, since they have demonstrated their true positions, thus avoiding war. In reassurance signaling, however, states pursue a strategy of de-escalatory signaling intended to reduce the risk of escalation and conflict. De-escalation signals remove, or at least minimize, sources of friction with an adversary.

To reduce the potential for inadvertent escalation and competition, states seek to codify, standardize, and improve conflict resolution between sender and target through agreements and treaties specifically dealing with relations and conduct.[2] Specifically, agreements intended to support the status quo rather than re-negotiate or overturn situations or relationships. De-escalation signals can be sent by engaging in negotiations that relinquish claims which could be used to justify offensive actions, such as yielding territory or ensuring neutrality, as well as supporting the neutrality of strategically

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[1] Schelling, Thomas C. *The Strategy of Conflict*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960): 188; For more on Schelling's views on the manipulation of risk see Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966): 92-126.

[2] An example is Lynn-Jones, Sean. "A Quiet Success for Arms Control: Preventing Incidents at Sea," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 154-184.

important states. Additionally, states can send de-escalation signals by giving concessions on a smaller issue in the hopes it will build trust and lead to further negotiations on larger, or more complex, issues.

The track record of de-escalation signals during the Cold War is at both complicated and mixed. Some of the largest agreements which aimed to standardize and temper competition between the superpowers either failed, or even in cases of successful assessment, were soon overshadowed by a return to competition. This chapter examines the ability of U.S. policymakers to believe Soviet de-escalation signals. The U.S. and USSR signed numerous agreements which sought to standardize relations in multiple areas including sea, space, and even Antarctica. However, none were more important or contested than the Austrian State Treaty in 1955, the Basic Principles Agreement (BPA) in 1972, and Helsinki accords (CSCE) in 1975. In each of these cases, the Soviets sent signals to demonstrate benign intentions by creating mutually understood standards of conduct to help reduce the uncertainty over each other's actions. To do so, the Soviet leadership risked significant domestic costs by angering domestic constituencies (such as the military in exiting Austria) or directly lowering their control over domestic politics (such as in Basket III of the Helsinki Accords). The Soviets considered these agreements and negotiations as some of the most important during the Cold War, and went to extreme lengths to convey the importance they held to American policymakers. Yet, U.S. policymakers only believed the Soviets were sincere in the Helsinki Accords, and did not believe the Soviets were genuine in the Austrian State Treaty and BPA.

This chapter finds that U.S. policymakers were largely uninterested in de-escalation signals and instead primarily focused on arms control negotiations. Most

232

striking was the importance of the wider nature and context of the relationship of the two countries to U.S. policymakers. Rather than being viewed in isolation, as CST predicts, Soviet signals were selectively linked to other issues or situations. For example, during discussions over the Basic Principles Agreement (BPA), Nixon and Kissinger linked the agreement not to the ongoing SALT discussions, but Soviet conduct in the third world and Vietnam. Other times, policymakers did link negotiations strategic arms talks and how de-escalation signals would benefit the U.S. negotiation position. Even in the correct case of the Helsinki Accords in 1975, policymakers only belatedly recognized Soviet signals in part due to negotiations on SALT II. Arms control negotiations played a key role in how important policymakers viewed de-escalation signals.

Dispositional assessments also played a key role in assessment outcome, especially in the case of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955. Policymaker skepticism of the Soviets created a high hurdle for the Soviets to signal their intentions to come to standardize conduct or as concessions to demonstrate a willingness for further negotiations. Ultimately, de-escalation signals were not viewed as particularly costly and were often closely linked by U.S. policymakers to arms control negotiations.

5.1   THE AUSTRIAN STATE TREATY: INCORRECT ASSESSMENT

As Chapter Three described, the death of Stalin and Malenkov's subsequent "Peace Offensive" challenged the Eisenhower administration's Soviet policies. Despite the statements and appeals of a new foreign policy, the administration remained unconvinced and Eisenhower called for Soviet actions to match their words in his Chance

for Peace speech. One of the steps to prove benign intentions was for the Soviets to withdraw from Austria. The Eisenhower administration viewed this as unlikely, because "At the time of Stalin's death, Austrian treaty negotiations reached their lowest point in the almost eight years that the East and West had been trying to reach an agreement regarding Austria."[3] Yet, on May 15, 1955 the USSR and Austria signed a peace treaty that gave Austria independence and unilaterally withdrew all Soviet troops from the country, sending a costly signal of Soviet benign intentions.[4] Even with this signal, and the Soviet disarmament proposal of May 10, the Eisenhower administration did not believe the Treaty was a sincere reassurance signal.

The Austrian State Treaty is a most likely case for CST. Not only did the Soviets withdraw unilaterally without any concessions from the U.S., but it fulfilled a key requirement set forth by the Eisenhower administration to demonstrate sincerity. The Soviet withdrawal was a direct turnaround from previous Soviet policy, and faced resistance from within the Soviet military. In line with the predictions of the domestic political vulnerability theory, the signal failed because U.S. policymakers did not believe the treaty entailed any serious costs for the Soviet leadership. Since the Soviet leadership faced no costs for withdrawing from Austria, the Soviet signal was assessed as a bargaining ploy tied the larger issue of Germany. While not necessarily incorrect, at least in relation to hopes of future negotiations regarding the status of Germany, U.S. policymakers rejected the possibility that the signal was intended to both demonstrate a

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[3] Bischof, Gunter. "The Making of the Austrian Treaty and the Road to Geneva." in Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 117-160.
[4] Larson, Deborah Welch. "Crisis Prevention and the Austrian State Treaty." *International Organization* 41, no. 01 (1987): 27–60.

sincere willingness to negotiate on the larger issue of Germany by building trust and demonstrate status quo/defensive intentions; thus incorrectly assessing Soviet signals. This case also demonstrates the effect of dispositional views in policymakers discounting the cost of the signal (despite being listed by Eisenhower as an act that would demonstrate sincerity) by arguing it could be easily reversed. Policymakers ignored this possibility and incorrectly assessed the Austrian State Treaty as a maneuver intended to undermine the U.S. position in Europe.

The first section reviews the context and background that led to the signing of the Austrian State Treaty, including the Eisenhower administration's debates over how to deal with the Soviets in the wake of Stalin's death. It includes an in depth look at how the administration viewed Soviet positions on Austria during the Berlin Foreign Ministers meeting in 1954. The next section describes the post-Stalin leadership dynamics and Soviet intentions signing the Austrian State Treaty. Much of this information was covered in Chapter Three, but particular attention is given to policymaking and the issues related to the Treaty. Next, I detail the dispositional views of President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Arthur Radford. This section also mirrors much of the information provided in the May 10 case in Chapter Three and will provide a brief overview. I then use process tracing to analyze the Eisenhower administration's failure to correctly assess the Soviet de-escalation signal of the Austrian State Treaty.

Table 5.1 Austrian State Treaty Outcomes

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	None
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	Yes
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	None

5.1.1   Context and Background

Stalin's death upended not only the Soviet leadership, but the Eisenhower administration's planning for how to deal with the USSR. As described in the May 10 case in Chapter Three, most of the administration believed Malenkov's "Peace Offensive" was merely a propaganda ploy, and the Soviets had not changed their intentions.[5] The first Basic National Security Policy laid out the general consensus, "Although the USSR has recently assumed a more conciliatory posture in its dealings with the west, there is no basis for concluding that the fundamental hostility of the kremlin toward the west has abated, that the underlying objectives of the Soviet rulers has

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[5] Although Eisenhower left open the possibility that they were sincere. DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, 139th Meeting of NSC, April 8 1953; Bowie, Robert R., and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 115.

changed, or that the menace of communism to the free world has diminished."[6] A NSC meeting on 28 April 1953 demonstrated how confused the administration was regarding the new Soviet leadership and on what actions the U.S. should take. Discussions at the meeting, and over the next few days, ranged from increasing the U.S. effort in Korea to broader discussions on how Stalin's death could fundamentally change the course of world history.[7]

Yet the administration grudgingly recognized the need for Eisenhower to at least appear to engage with Soviet overtures. But it was Eisenhower who was the force behind the administration's decision to publicly test Soviet intentions.[8] Eisenhower's famous "Chance for Peace" Speech on April 16 called on the Soviets to take costly actions to match their words. Eisenhower laid out a series of steps—such as support an armistice in Korea, end hostilities in Indochina, and begin negotiations over German reunification— the Soviets could take to demonstrate benign intentions.[9] One of those signals was to sign a peace treaty and withdraw all troops from Austria. Indeed, Secretary of State Dulles himself said that "next to Korea the clearest test of Soviet intentions" would be Austria. And indeed, Eisenhower himself said that all the U.S. needed were "sincere acts" … [such as] the Austrian Treaty…and we'll welcome that and we'll meet them halfway."[10] Making Austria a costly signal was the fact that the powers had almost concluded a treaty to withdraw troops in 1949, but an abrupt reversal by Stalin dashed all chances for a

[6] NSC 153/1, June 10, 1953 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d74
[7] Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War.* (NY: Hill and Wang, 2007): 110-111.
[8] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 118-119.
[9] Leffler, 2007: 106-109.
[10] Larson, 2000: 47.

treaty.[11] If the new Kremlin leaders signed a treaty, it would be a clear break from

Stalin's policies in Eastern Europe. This was seen as unlikely, considering such an abrupt

change in Soviet policies would make it appear as if the new Soviet leadership was

saying Stalin had been incorrect, which would lead to other questions about what else

Stalin had been mistaken. This could have potentially disastrous implications for the new

Soviet leadership since it would call into question not just the legitimacy of their rule, but

the entire Soviet state.

Despite the unprecedented step of reprinting Eisenhower's speech in both the

main Soviet newspapers *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, any hope of an immediate reconciliation

was quickly dashed.[12] Two days after Eisenhower's speech, Foster Dulles gave a speech

in front of the same audience in a much stronger tone, arguing the U.S. would not let its

guard down and that a strong NATO was prepared to defend against any Soviet

aggression.[13] Key advisors Walt Rostow and C.D. Jackson supported this hardline view,

seeing Stalin's death and Malenkov's overtures as an opportunity to undermine and

weaken the USSR.[14] Dulles himself believed that the best defense was to go on the

offensive using covert and psychological actions to weaken the Soviet Union and their

hold on Eastern Europe.[15]

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[11] Naimark, Norman M. *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019): 256-260.

[12] Key policy advisor C.D. Jackson argued, "…the American newspapers were hailing it as a great and concrete concession by the Soviet Union. This, of course, was not so. The Soviets, far from offering any real concession, were very cleverly justifying their own virtue and rectitude." DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, 141st Meeting of NSC April 28, 1953.

[13] Rostow, Walt Whitman. *Europe after Stalin: Eisenhower's Three Decisions of March 11, 1953*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982): 54-55; Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 120-121. Although some such as Osgood believe the speech was purely a psychological ploy to demonstrate the true nature of the Soviets and not a sincere test of intentions. Osgood, Kenneth, "The Perils of Coexistence: Peace and Propaganda in Eisenhower's Foreign Policy." In Larres, Klaus, and Kenneth Alan Osgood (eds). *The Cold War After Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006): 33.

[14] Leffler, 2007: 101, 110-111.

[15] Leffler, 2007: 122-123.

With the administration divided on how to proceed, Eisenhower set up a review committee to analyze various policies towards the USSR called Project Solarium.[16] Solarium was made up of three task forces: A, B, and C, with each responsible for formulating and presenting the various policy options.[17] The baseline assumption of the task forces was that despite the "peace offensive," Soviet intentions remained confrontational and aggressive.[18] The reports came to varied conclusions, and sparked off a strenuous debate inside the NSC. What emerged was NSC 162/2, which did not select a single approach, but cited the danger of military spending and the crucial role of nuclear weapons in controlling the expansion of communism.[19]

Central to dealing with the Soviet Union was the issue of a divided Germany.[20] Both countries saw Germany as central to security in Europe and integral in any larger discussion of East-West relations. The West wanted a rearmed Germany inside Western security structures such as the EDC—and eventually NATO—while the Soviets wanted a neutral and unified Germany free from any Western alliances.[21] However, the West refused to discuss unification until a popular vote was held, viewing Soviet controlled

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[16] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 123-137; Gallagher, Michael J. "Intelligence and National Security Strategy: Reexamining Project Solarium." *Intelligence and National Security* 30, no. 4 (2015): 461–85.
[17] Task Force A was led by George Kennan and advocated containment, Task Force B also advocated containment but to pursue it more aggressively and utilize the U.S.' nuclear capabilities, Task Force C focused on rollback and aggressive pushing back against the Soviets. DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box 4, Memorandum of Meeting of NSC, Minutes of 155th Meeting of NSC, July 16, 1953.
[18] NIE-99: *Estimate of the World Situation Through 1955*, 16 October 1953, "despite the change in regime in the USSR and the shifts in Soviet foreign and domestic tactics, there has been no change in the USSR's basic hostility to all non-Soviet power. The USSR will continue the cold war against the Free World…and there is little likelihood of any major Soviet concessions."
[19] Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 139-146; Garthoff, Raymond L., *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities*. (Washington D.C., Brookings Institution, 1991): 6-9.
[20] Trachtenberg, Marc. *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 78-86.
[21] Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956: The White House Years*. (New York: Doubleday, 1963): 397-402; Trachtenberg, 1999: 125-128.

East Germany as illegitimate. A neutral, independent Germany held risks for both sides. For the West it would deprive a potential 12 army divisions from new security structures, while for the Soviets it could continue to undermine their hegemony over Eastern European countries.[22] Moreover, the 1953 revolt in East Germany bolstered Eisenhower and Dulles' perception of a strengthened bargaining position and weakened Soviet legitimacy in Eastern Europe.[23]

Without a clear resolution on Germany, both sides understood the situation in central Europe as unstable and open to revision by either side, fostering a potential source of crisis and miscalculation. Austria was therefore a crucial test whether or not an agreement could be made over Germany due to their similar strategic importance and joint occupation.[24] A JCS report from 1950 demonstrates the strategic importance of Austria. "By virtue of its geographical location, Austria is an important strategic link in the defense of Western and Southern Europe. Any weakening of our present military position in Austria, such as would be brought about by a substantial "neutralization" of Austria, the creation of a military vacuum in Austria, would have a serious impact upon the entire NATO defense concept."[25] The military and political importance of Austria led U.S. policymakers to believe there was little likelihood of Soviet concessions. Therefore,

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[22] Larson, 2000: 55-57.

[23] Coleman, David G. "Eisenhower and the Berlin Problem, 1953–1954," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 15-16; Baras, Victor. "Stalin's German Policy After Stalin." *Slavic Review* 37, no. 02 (June 1978): 259–67.

[24] Steiner, Kurt. "Negotiations for an Austrian State Treaty," in Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin (eds). *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 71-73. For more on the inter-related nature of the issues see NA, "From H. Land to M. Colladay: Present United States Policy With Respect to Austria, September 7, 1951" RG 59, 611.62B/4-1652 to 611.631/1-2530 Box 2836.

[25] NA, "Report by the Director to the JCS on Further Action by NATO Deputies with a View to Immediate Strengthening of Defense Forces, 16 August 1950," RG 218 Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Modern Military Records Division.

Eisenhower and the administration decided to include Austria as a demonstration of Soviet sincerity.

5.1.2   Soviet Intentions

To understand the importance of Austria and the timing of the treaty, one has to understand the domestic context and the status of Germany. During the contentious period after Stalin's death, Georgy Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev waged a competition for influence amongst the new leadership. Both Khrushchev and Malenkov agreed Stalin's foreign policies of competition were ineffective and a new relationship with the West was needed. Yet, to argue Stalin was wrong on Austria opened further questions of what else he had been mistaken and made such assertions a politically risky move. During his rule, Stalin was viewed as infallible, and had created the entire system upon which Khrushchev and Malenkov now sat. Therefore, to question Stalin could potentially undermine their own legitimacy and domestic control.

And although Khrushchev largely agreed with Malenkov's policies, he sought to undermine Malenkov by criticizing his policies of accommodation for being too radical and failing to reduce tensions with the West. Precisely because he was challenging Stalin's policies, Khrushchev painted Malenkov as a heretic and traitor to Stalin's legacy. With Khrushchev and Malenkov focusing on consolidating power domestically, Molotov stepped into this vacuum and continued the Stalin era line towards Germany and the

Western powers; inflexible, and resistant to compromise.[26] Except for relations with the U.S., the status of Germany was the dominant policy concern for the Soviets.

After Stalin's death, the chief Soviet concern was German rearmament and its inclusion into the proposed European Defence Community. To head off this possibility, Malenkov launched his "Peace Offensive" shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. At the same time, the Soviets faced a serious problem in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The leader of the GDR, Walter Ulbricht, was pushing through a crash course to speed up the development of Socialism that led to massive migration to West Germany—some 120,000 people in the first four months of 1953.[27] In response, Malenkov and Beria demanded that the GDR authorities' reverse course and enact a rash of liberal policies. These policies were too late, and resulted in large scale protest that eventually had to be put down by Soviet troops, ultimately weakening Malenkov through his association with efforts to liberalize the GDR.[28]

Khrushchev viewed an opening to not only take the reins of foreign policy, but advance agreements with the West that would enable the diversion of funds from military programs to domestic production, and stabilize the status of relations between the Soviets and the West—including potentially avoiding the incorporation of West Germany into NATO.[29] The argument that the strength of the Soviet Union enabled it to reach out and

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[26] Most commonly cited is Molotov's refusal to seriously negotiate at the 1954 Foreign Minister's Conference. Zubok, Vladislav. "Soviet Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955" in Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (LSU Press, 2000): 56; For an opposing view that argues Molotov was more willing to negotiate see Roberts, 2008: 24-40.

[27] Kramer, Mark, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe (Part I)." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, No. 1 (1999): 12-14.

[28] Richter, James G, *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994): 49.

[29] "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Morning," January 31, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 2, op. 1, d. 127. Obtained for CWIHP and translated by Vladislav Zubok. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111995; Bischof, 2000: 135; Cronin,

reduce tensions with the West was now more palpable due to Khrushchev's framing and the inability of Molotov's orthodox positions to achieve results.[30]

By seeking to reach accommodations with the West, Khrushchev could demonstrate peaceful intentions, forcing the West to take a more realistic and less aggressive posture towards the Soviet Union. After Eisenhower's call for Soviet actions to demonstrate benign intentions, Khrushchev realized a more manageable first step was needed. He could not immediately break from Stalin's policy towards Europe by immediately negotiating over Germany, especially since he had used that tactic to undermine Malenkov.[31] Austria's situation was similar to Germany—and one that Khrushchev privately blamed Stalin for—albeit on a smaller scale.[32] But conceding on Austria was no cheap ploy. The Soviets had refused to negotiate over Austria until a German peace treaty was signed, and changing policies would look like a surrender to the West.[33] For the Soviets, Austria provided leverage in negotiations with Germany. Austria was a crucial hedge for the Soviets to maintain a presence in central Europe in the event they ever lost Germany. But by withdrawing, the Soviets could fulfill one of Eisenhower's specific demands and at the same time hopefully jumpstart serious negotiations over the status of Germany. Coming to an agreement over Austria would force the West to negotiate and undercut Western arguments of Soviet intransigence, while validating Khrushchev's new policies.[34]

Audrey Kurth. *Great Power Politics and the Struggle over Austria, 1945–1955*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986): 1393-140.

[30] Richter, 1994: 68-70.

[31] Evangelista, Matthew. *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999): 48-51; Zubok, 2000: 56-58.

[32] Khrushchev, Sergei. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Statesman, 1953-1964*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 3.

[33] Richter, 1994: 64; Larson, 1987: 42-43.

[34] Richter, 1994: 70; Cronin, 1986: 153; Larson, 1987: 55.

Part of the failure to reach agreements, Khrushchev argued, was the result of overly aggressive negotiation positions of the orthodox Stalinist line—and Molotov—which had allowed the Capitalist West to paint the Soviets as aggressors and unwilling to negotiate.[35] With Malenkov largely out of the picture, Khrushchev needed to eliminate Molotov, and there was no better way than to undercut his policies.[36] He had to tread carefully, since the end of WWII Austria was a key part of the Soviet's German strategy. Khrushchev justified the necessity of an Austrian treaty during a speech to the Central Committee on July 12, 1955. He accused Molotov of misleading not only the Soviet Union, but Stalin himself, stating, "I will frankly say that I believed Molotov's word on everything, [and] like many of us, thought that he was a great and experienced diplomat." But gradually, he began to question why Molotov continued to delay negotiations on Austria, and why the issue continued to drag on. Khrushchev then laid out a short history of how the Presidium had then agreed to a treaty over Austria, but Molotov continued to deflect. For Khrushchev, the only reason to maintain a presence on Austria was that Molotov wanted war. He recalled a conversation with Molotov to illustrate the point, "Then what are you achieving by having our troops sit in Vienna? If you stand for way, then it would be correct to stay in Austria…If [you are] not for way, then we have to leave…Why are we sitting in Austria; and what are we waiting for there?"[37] Khrushchev likely intended the public lambasting of Molotov to not only ensure support for the

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[35] Fursenko, A. A., and Timothy J. Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*. (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 23.

[36] Khrushchev, 2006: 8-11; Fursenko and Naftali, 2006: 26-27; Larson, 1987: 44-46.

[37] "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Concluding Word by Com. N. S. Krushchev," July 12, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD f.2, op.1, d.176, ll.282-95. Translated by Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110452

Austrian State Treaty, but undermine any chance of Molotov revising history and claiming it as his success.

The Kremlin realized its policy of obstinance towards Germany had accomplished nothing by 1955 and a dramatic new policy was needed.[38] By unilaterally signing a treaty with Austria and removing troops, Khrushchev gave away a powerful pawn in negotiations over Germany. Moreover, the treaty was driven entirely by Soviet policies and no change in Western negotiating positions.[39] To the Soviets, the treaty represented a serious concession and was such a reversal from previous positions that Khrushchev wondered what else the Soviets could do to signal their benign intentions?[40] Khrushchev remarked after signing the treaty, "Is there any stronger proof necessary to show that the Soviet Union does not want to seize Europe to carry on any sort of war?...Who would evacuate troops if he wanted to attack?"[41] Withdrawing from Austria dramatically undercut the Soviet ability to launch an invasion of Western Europe and strengthened the Soviet argument that they had no expansionist designs. As such, the Austrian State Treaty fulfilled CST's conditions and should have been correctly assessed by U.S. policymakers.

5.1.3 American Policymaker Views

The key policymakers involved in this case are President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Arthur W. Radford. As

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[38] Cronin, 1986: 151-153.
[39] Cronin, 1986: 151.
[40] Allard, Sven. *Russia and the Austrian State Treaty: A Case Study of Soviet Policy in Europe.* (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970): 144-147, 155.
[41] Quoted in Larson, Deborah Welch. *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000): 13.

discussed in the May 10 case in Chapter Three, Eisenhower held relatively benign views of the Soviets. He did not view them as ideologues solely bent on world power, but rather as individuals who could and should be negotiated with. He felt much of the tension between the two countries was due to an unwillingness to meaningfully engage and test Soviet intentions. Eisenhower was dismayed by many advisors and the State Department which appeared unwilling to engage with the new regime. He said, "I don't know what I've got State Department advisors for except to tell me things like this and not keep them to themselves all the time," continuing that he realized they could not solve the major issues right away. "Obviously we aren't going to liberate east Europe tomorrow," but his Chance for Peace speech could deal with "the simple things…THEN we can go ahead to the big things."[42]

In contrast, Dulles believed that the Soviets were driven by expansionist, revisionist intentions. However, he saw Soviet overtures—combined with the riots in East Germany—and continued leadership infighting as an opportunity for the U.S. to exploit rather than engage. He was unconvinced of the sincerity of a change in Soviet intentions after Stalin's death, and believed they were merely changing tactics after realizing the failure of their hardline policies. Admiral Radford held even more negative dispositional views towards the Soviets. While Dulles was at least willing to concede the Soviets were trying new strategies, Radford did not believe there was any evidence the Soviets had changed or altered their approach or outlook. Soviet efforts to increase their strategic arsenal and modernize their forces was only further proof for Radford that the

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[42] Quoted in Bowie and Immerman, 1998: 118.

Soviets had no intention of seriously engaging with the West or conducting a more cooperative foreign policy.

5.1.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

As Khrushchev noted, what else could the Soviets have done to signal their benign intentions? Signing the Austrian State Treaty was not only costly for the Soviets, but Eisenhower himself cited it as an action that would demonstrate the sincerity of a Soviet willingness to enter into a more cooperative relationship. Nevertheless, the Eisenhower administration incorrectly assessed the Soviet signing of the Austrian State Treaty. Perceived to be easily reversed and without costs to the Soviet leadership, the Eisenhower administration incorrectly assessed Soviet signals.

After Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" speech, optimism the Soviets would fulfill some of the actions listed waned. Gradually, the Eisenhower administration assessed Malenkov's overtures as nothing more than a temporary respite and tactical maneuver away from Stalin's hardline policies which were no longer working. Which is why the administration was surprised when the Soviets accepted a foreign minister meeting in early 1954.[43] While Eisenhower agreed to the conference and open to a neutralization of Austria, he was more focused on how the U.S. would react to another blockade of Berlin. Dulles held little hope for anything positive and that there was a negligible chance of an agreement.[44] His negative dispositional views of the Soviets

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[43] Larson, 1987: 42.
[44] DDEL, "Memorandum of Breakfast Conference with the President January 20, 1954." Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda Series, Box no. 1 A67-28, Meetings with the President 1954 (4); DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series, Box No. 5, 181st Meeting of NSC January 21, 1954.

dominated his assessment of the conference, in part influenced by a negative assessment of previous Soviet efforts.

Radford emphasized the strategic importance of Austria, and strenuously advocated against seriously negotiating with the Soviets until there was irrefutable proof of changed intentions. Austria was a key front in any conflict, and the U.S. could not risk giving the Soviets an advantage until there was clear proof of changed intentions.[45] Moreover, he believed in 1954 the best-case scenario of a neutral Austria would require a serious reorganization of NATO defense strategy and open its southern and central regions to Soviet invasion.[46] He, and the JCS, were concerned that Western troops should not be removed due to the fear the Soviets could gradually undermine Austria's government through subversion.[47] Radford remained convinced that any Soviet overture was a ploy to weaken Western unity and increase the Soviet position in Europe.

At the conference, held from 25 January to 18 February 1954 in Berlin, Molotov returned to Stalin-era positions and refused to seriously engage in discussions with the West over numerous issues, most prominently Germany and Austria. Molotov, rather clumsily, repeated a demand to tie Austria and Germany's status, and that without an agreement on Germany the Soviets would not sign a treaty granting Austria independence. He argued for a wider conference to discuss European Security including the heads of state. Moreover, he wanted clear provisions that prevented Austria from joining any alliance. The U.S. Embassy summed up its conclusions in a memo to

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[45] Karber, Phillip A., and Jerald A. Combs. "The United States, NATO, and the Soviet Threat to Western Europe: Military Estimates and Policy Options, 1945-1963." *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (July 1998): 414.
[46] Steininger, Rolf. "1955: The Austrian State Treaty and the German Question." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 3, no. 3 (1992): 496; Cronin, 1986: 121-122.
[47] Larson, 1987: 46-47.

Secretary Dulles that the Berlin Conference was a "clear demonstration that the Soviets intend to keep troops in Austria indefinitely." They concluded the likelihood of a Treaty was almost nonexistent,

> It seems clear from the soviet attitude at Berlin, and their behavior since, that they are at present determined to maintain troops in Austria until a settlement of the German question satisfactorily to them is forthcoming. They will not, therefore, in the foreseeable future accept a treaty which involves the withdrawal of their forces.[48]

To the U.S., Molotov was angling to upset any potential introduction of Germany into the EDC, and was unwilling to give away Austria as a bargaining chip.

Molotov's hardline positions in Berlin only reinforced Dulles' view that the Soviets had not changed since Stalin and were continuing the same policies of aggressive, revisionist expansion. In his first public comments after the summit he derided the Soviet unwillingness to negotiate, "Our discussion…has revealed that the Soviet Union believes that its security depends upon maintaining such a huge preponderance of power that every other country of Europe will in fact be subject to its coercion."[49] And his private remarks to Eisenhower were only slightly more nuanced, "the only evidence of a 'New Look' in Soviet foreign policy revealed at the Conference was the attempt of the Soviet representatives to appear personally friendly."[50] Dulles continued at an NSC meeting on February 26 that the Soviets would not "accept any terms which would relax the grip on the areas of Europe that they now control. They may pretend to be willing to relax this grip, but only a means of extending it." He summed up by stating "The whole episode

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[48] NA, "State Department Telegram, From Emb. Vienna to Secretary of State: U.S. Policy in Austria, July 23 1954" RG 59 State Department Central File, 611.62B/4-162 to 611.631/1-2550 Box 2836.
[49] DDEL, "Public Statement By Secretary Dulles at the Closing Session of the Meeting of the Four Foreign Ministers, February 18, 1954." C. D. Jackson Papers, 1931-67 Box. No. 34 A72-26, Berlin.
[50] DDEL, "Memorandum for the White House March 2, 1954." Papers of John Foster Dulles, White House Memoranda Series, Box no. 1 A67-28, White House Correspondence 1954 (4).

was shocking, but it was a clear revelation of Soviet intention."[51] For Dulles, the Berlin meeting clearly demonstrated Soviet revisionist intentions and reinforced his negative dispositional views.

With optimism about an agreement at an all-time low, the only thing more striking than the total reversal of Soviet positions was the speed with which it happened. On February 8, 1955 Molotov made a speech to the Supreme Soviet specifically laying out Soviet positions and a willingness to negotiate on the status of Austria.[52] When there was no immediate response from the West, the Soviets went ahead and invited Austrian Chancellor Raab to Moscow and concluded an agreement from the 12 to the 15 of April, which as Larson notes, "The Soviet Government conceded on *all* the disputed issues." And despite some last-minute wrangling caused by Western mistrust, the foreign ministers signed the Austrian State Treaty on 15 May 1955.[53] In one year the Soviets had gone from refusing to even discuss Austria's status without linking it to negotiations on Germany, to conceding all Western demands and unilaterally signing a treaty giving Austria independence.

Instead of being a signal to demonstrate Soviet defensive orientations, Radford, Eisenhower, and Dulles all viewed Soviet actions in Austria through the larger lens of the status of Germany. All policymakers completely dismissed any danger posed to Khrushchev by not only reversing a long-standing Stalin and Soviet policy, but conceding unilaterally. Radford was only concerned with the military implications of a treaty, and viewed it as a ploy to weaken German rearmament. In a letter to Secretary of

[51] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series Box. No 5, 186th Meeting of NSC February 26, 1954.
[52] Steininger, 1992: 498
[53] Larson, 1987: 46-47.

Defense Wilson, Radford and the JCS argued the treaty may stem from a Soviet belief "that the terms thereof would serve as precedent for a German settlement advantageous to the USSR. The Joint Chiefs of Staff consider it to be of the utmost importance that the Austrian treaty not be linked in any way with any future German settlement."[54] Eisenhower and Dulles also agreed that the Austrian Treaty was aimed at answering the German question. Dulles noted, "Germany was indeed the key to Soviet policy as evidenced in Austria," and Eisenhower concurred, "the Soviet gambit on Austria was definitely made with Germany in mind as the real target."[55] Dulles summed up his assessment of the Austrian Treaty signal by noting that it was one component of the recent "Soviet diplomatic offensive" and an attempt to "build up a neutralist bloc of nations in Central Europe, to block German and Japanese rearmament, and to get as much backing as possible for the attempt to force the United States to withdraw from its overseas bases."[56] Rather than being seen as a demonstration of Soviet intentions, policymakers viewed the signing of the treaty as a pawn in a larger game to wrest the U.S. from Europe.[57] This was an almost total reversal from earlier estimates which emphasized the strategic and military importance of Austria. Instead, the administration totally ignored any strategic benefit from a Soviet withdrawal and focused on how the

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[54] DDEL, "Memorandum for Secretary of Defense Wilson from Chairman Radford, Joint Chiefs of Staff April 22, 1955." White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries Box No. 7, NSC 164/1 Policy Towards Austria (1).

[55] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 245th Meeting of NSC April 21, 1955.

[56] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 248th Meeting of NSC May 12, 1955.

[57] Although Ambassador Bohlen wrote to Dulles arguing that "I do not believe that 'basic' Soviet motivation in reopening Austrian question is related to their present position on Germany…" His assessment was cited by Dulles during an NSC meeting on April 21, but quickly dismissed as policymakers converged around an agreement that the Austrian Treaty was directed at the status of Germany. "Telegram from Ambassador Bohlen to Secretary of State Dulles, March 31, 1955" *FRUS* 1955-1957 Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955 Vol V
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v05/d17

Treaty potentially weakened the U.S. position in Europe. In this sense policymakers viewed the Treaty as potentially destabilizing for the balance of power since it undermined efforts to integrate Germany into NATO and strengthen the Soviet position in Eastern Europe.

Beyond separating Austria from German negotiations, the administration was focused on ensuring Austria remained independent and neutral against Soviet interference. Back in 1953 Radford warned about the negative effect on U.S. strategic interests' neutrality would cause. "Neutralization should be strongly resisted as being contrary to United States and NATO security interests."[58] At NSC meetings on April 28 and May 12, Eisenhower spoke on his concerns over Austria's neutrality. He argued that the treaty had to include provisions for "<u>armed</u> neutrality" and on May 12 that the "real Russian objective was to provide themselves with an excuse to move into Austria at some later time."[59] A perception the Austrian treaty could be reversed was heightened due to negative dispositional assessments of the Soviets. Since the Soviets were revisionist actors, they would not hesitate to reverse course should the need arise.

Despite conceding that the Austrian Treaty was "the most significant action since the end of World War II," Dulles believed it represented "a greater degree of weakness" in Soviet policy than a change of intentions.[60] Dulles, once again, believed weakness *forced* the Soviets into withdrawing from Austria, thus contributing to incorrect

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[58] DDEL, "Admiral Radford Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, NSC 164: U.S. Objectives and Policies with Respect to Austria, October 9, 1953." White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries Box no. 7, NSC 164/1 Policy Towards Austria (2).

[59] Underline in original text. DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 246th Meeting of NSC April 28, 1955; DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 248th Meeting of NSC May 12, 1955.

[60] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 245th Meeting of NSC April 21, 1955.

assessment. Radford supported this conclusion arguing there was "no real evidence of any genuine change in the Soviet attitude."[61] Dulles and Radford's conviction that Soviet intentions remained unchanged after the Austrian State Treaty drove their concern about the subsequent Geneva summit between the heads of state.[62] At a dinner with Dulles, C.D. Jackson noted how Dulles was concerned that since Eisenhower was "so inclined to be humanly generous, to accept a superficial tactical smile as evidence of inner warmth, that he might in a personal moment with the Russians accept a promise or proposition at face value and upset the apple cart."[63] This sentiment reflected Dulles' assessment the Treaty was nothing more than a ploy to undercut American interests in Europe. His report to the NSC over the final discussions of the Treaty displayed his negative dispositional views of the Soviets since he said they "exhibited their characteristic trickery."[64] But Eisenhower argued that his goal at Geneva was to really figure out the intentions of the Soviets and look for "concrete evidence" of a Soviet change.[65]

Ultimately, Dulles argued that the Austrian State Treaty was a sign of weakening Soviet resolve and a reflection the staunch U.S. position was working.[66] Geneva confirmed to the policymakers that it was East Germany which was crucial to the Soviets and control over Eastern Europe. At an NSC meeting Eisenhower argued, "Soviets

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[61] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman File, NSC Series Box No. 7, 2545th Meeting of NSC July 7, 1955; Immerman, Richard. "Trust in the Lord but Keep Your Powder Dry: American Aims at the Geneva Summit." in Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000): 53.
[62] Bischof, 2000: 149.
[63] DDEL, "Notes from Dinner with Dulles, July 11, 1955." C.D. Jackson Papers, 1931-67, Box No. 69 A72-26, Log 1955 (2).
[64] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 6, 249th Meeting of NSC May 19, 1955.
[65] Eisenhower, 1963: 506.
[66] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 7, 267th Meeting of NSC November 21, 1955; Larson, 1987: 50-51.

obviously regarded East Germany as the key to their entire satellite structure."[67]

Therefore, Dulles, Radford and Eisenhower concluded the Austrian State Treaty was a recognition by the Soviets they could not defeat the West head on, and had to maneuver in order to regain leverage.[68] By conceding Austria, the Eisenhower administration believed the Soviets thought they could pressure the West for concessions over Germany since the Soviets had unilaterally agreed to all Western positions in Austria—in addition to the May 10 disarmament proposals. But instead of seeing it as a costly signal and cooperative gesture to demonstrate benign intentions, it was assessed as a maneuver to counter the strengthened U.S. pressure. Dulles summed up the administration's view, "Their [Soviet] objective here was to preserve the semblance of agreeable relations with the West, without making any substantial concessions."[69] As a result, Austria was not seen as a credible reassurance signal since weakness forced the Soviets into conceding, and was instead part of a bargaining ploy the Soviets could potentially reverse.

Despite meeting Eisenhower's demands for deeds to match Soviet words, the Eisenhower administration did not believe the Austrian State Treaty signal sent by the Soviets. Even though Eisenhower called for the treaty, it was assessed as a bargaining ploy connected to Germany instead of a separate signal to demonstrate Soviet intentions. Moreover, it was viewed as a relatively inexpensive signal that could be reversed. This is curious because before the signing of the treaty and in discussions over Eisenhower's "Chance for Peace" speech the administration viewed the signing of an Austrian Treaty

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[67] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 7, 265th Meeting of NSC November 10, 1955.
[68] Cronin, 1986: 143-145.
[69] DDEL, Eisenhower Papers, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series, Box No. 7, 267th Meeting of NSC November 21, 1955.

as a costly and important signal. Ultimately, in partial support of DPV predictions, a lack of perceived cost to Soviet policymakers and a perception that domestic and international weakness forced the Soviets into withdrawing from Austria led U.S. policymakers to assess the Soviet signal as a bargaining maneuver.

5.2   BASIC PRINCIPLES AGREEMENT: INCORRECT ASSESSMENT

Like the Austrian State Treaty, the Soviets signaled the Basic Principles Agreement (BPA) in conjunction with efforts to negotiate nuclear arms control. The driving rationale behind the BPA was that in addition to a stable nuclear relationship, the superpowers had to establish a framework for standardizing interaction. The BPA set forth a series of principles and standards of conduct both in how the superpowers would interact with each other directly, and in response to crises or events affecting the interests of both. Not only would these agreements reduce the potential for misassessment and inadvertent escalation, the Soviets hoped it would enshrine a new political, in addition to the strategic, parity with the U.S. The Nixon administration, however, was focused on nuclear arms control and ending the war in Vietnam. While the U.S. agreed to sign the BPA, as Erick Grynaviski notes, "the BPA meant different things to each superpower."[70] For the Nixon administration they were guiding principles and a "road map" to relations, while the Soviets viewed the agreement as the most important agreement signed.[71]

[70] Grynaviski, Eric, *Constructive Illusions: Misperceiving the Origins of International Cooperation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014): 69.
[71] Garthoff, Raymond L., *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1985): 292-293.

Despite believing Soviet arms control signals, the Nixon administration did not believe Soviet signals regarding the Basic Principles Agreement.

During the first Nixon administration, the U.S. was primarily interested in reaching a strategic arms agreement—and if possible, Soviet help in ending the war in Vietnam. There was little interest in signing a treaty that would help standardize the larger issue of cooperation and competition between the superpowers. Kissinger and Nixon did not believe that such an agreement would benefit U.S. balance of power, and devoted little time and attention to studying negotiations. Secretary of State Rogers was not even aware of the discussions until Nixon announced them during the Moscow summit. Even though Nixon signed the agreement, both he and Kissinger believed the document allowed the U.S. to insert language that would restrict Soviet actions without any limitations on U.S. actions. They saw the BPA as a policy tool and not a signal of Soviet intentions.

The case begins with the context surrounding BPA, including a brief description of the influence of strategic arms, but paying particular attention to the views of the superpowers towards competition in the third world. It then continues with a study of Soviet intentions. I emphasize the Soviet desire to establish a mutually understood framework for interactions and to legitimize the relationship between the superpowers. The following section briefly describes the dispositional views of the key policymakers (President Nixon, National Security Advisor/Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird). The final section uses process tracing to examine the short but important negotiations surrounding the BPA agreement and its assessment by U.S. policymakers.

Table 5.2 Basic Principles Agreement Outcomes

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	None
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	None
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	None

5.2.1 Context and Background

American policymakers were largely confident in nuclear superiority throughout the beginning of the 1960's and focused on Soviet efforts to expand its influence globally. The U.S. feared the spread of communism throughout the third world, and by implication Soviet influence, from the Middle East to Asia. "One week it was Venezuela or British Guiana; the next week it was Ghana or the Congo; the following week Chile and Brazil; then India and Algeria; and back to Zanzibar or Indonesia."[72] The U.S. believed communist insurgencies were controlled by Moscow, making every conflict a competition between the U.S. and USSR for global supremacy. Understanding the nature and context of competition in the third world is crucial for understanding why the Soviets

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[72] Leffler, 2007: 207.

placed so much importance on developing the BPA as a mechanism for crisis resolution. Moreover, it is necessary to understand how differently the U.S. understood the nature of competition and why its conclusions were so different from the Soviets regarding the content of the BPA.

As the USSR focused on reaching for strategic parity, the U.S. grew consumed with fears over the expansion of communism in Southeast Asia. The conflict in Vietnam grew exponentially, along with America's commitment. But the Johnson administration did not believe the Soviets were solely responsible for the conflict, and in fact were more interested in détente than conflict.[73] Nevertheless, Johnson and the administration believed a failure to support South Vietnam would lead to the spread of similar conflicts across the third world.[74]Influenced by domino theory, Johnson and his advisors decided to dramatically escalate the conflict, and viewed supporting South Vietnam as essential to U.S. credibility.[75] Détente took a backseat to stopping the spread of communist ideology and world revolution.

At the same time, the U.S.—particularly Defense Secretary Robert McNamara— believed the Soviets were coming around to accepting Mutually Assured Destruction. Since the Soviets shared McNamara's rationalist approach to nuclear weapons, they could be persuaded that having a sufficient retaliatory capability—even if still inferior to the U.S.—was preferable to a continued arms race.[76] This was partly due to the large

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[73] "We think that important pressures in the Soviet scene and the international setting will eventually favor the chances for a new Soviet effort to make the relaxation of tensions with the West the basis of the USSR's foreign policy." NIE 11-9-65 "Main Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy," January 27, 1965.
[74] Lebovic, James H. *Planning to Fail: The US Wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[75] Leffler, 2007: 222-223.
[76] Cameron, James, *The Double Game: The Demise of America's First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 62-66, 90.

American qualitative and quantitative advantage in strategic weapons. In 1965 the U.S. believed it had such an advantage in nuclear weapons that it retained escalation dominance over any and all Soviet threats. However, the Soviets would not enter into negotiations before they reached strategic parity and were making serious efforts to reduce the strategic gap.[77] New intelligence in 1966 revealed the extent of the Soviet buildup. "We estimate that the USSR will have some 670-765 operational launchers in mid-1968. This is considerably more than we anticipated in our last estimate and reflects our belief that construction of launchers has been started at a higher rate than ever before."[78] Moreover, while President Johnson wanted to reign defense spending, he could not be seen as ceding nuclear superiority just as he could not be seen as losing the war in Vietnam.[79] Between 1968 and 1969 the Soviets almost matched the U.S. in numbers of land-based missiles, throwing into question America's nuclear umbrella.[80]

The Soviets were concerned by their own version of the domino theory. Czechoslovakia was experimenting with liberal reforms—known as the Prague Spring— under Alexander Dubcek in 1968. Not only did the reforms threaten Soviet control over Czechoslovakia, potentially becoming another Yugoslavia, but the position and legitimacy of the leaders of other Warsaw Pact nations like East Germany and Poland.[81] After failing to pressure Dubcek into reversing course, Brezhnev, despite his hesitation,

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[77] Zaloga, Steven J, *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces 1945-2000*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002): 101-134.
[78] NIE 11-8-66, "Soviet Capabilities for Strategic Attack," 20 October 1966: 2.
[79] Reducing defense spending was crucial to his Great Society program. Cameron, 2018: 50-52; Brands, Hal, "Progress Unseen: U.S. Arms Control Policy and the Origins of Détente, 1963–1968," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (2006): 275-276.
[80] Cameron, 2018: 110.
[81] Dawisha, Karen. *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Williams, Kieran. "Review Essay: The Russian View(s) of the Prague Spring." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 131-135.

ordered the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia. Initially Brezhnev was worried

about the European and U.S. reaction. But the lack of a response emboldened the belief

that the correlation of forces had shifted by the late 1960's and Soviet parity defused a

potential Western response.[82] As one of Brezhnev's speechwriters noted, "From the

crucible of Czechoslovakia emerged a different Brezhnev."[83] It led to the famous policy

known as the Brezhnev Doctrine. This policy legitimized the use of force to prevent the

reversal of Socialism in allied countries towards Capitalism. The Soviets used the

Brezhnev doctrine to justify their invasion of Czechoslovakia and ensure their continued

hold on the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

During the 1960's, both superpowers became concerned over the spread of

nuclear weapons to regional powers. Most prominently the FRG and China.[84] The

Kennedy and Johnson administrations were concerned that with France's acquisition of

nuclear weapons the FRG would seek to acquire nuclear weapons due to complaints over

a limited voice in NATO decision making. One proposal to counter German unclear

ambitions was the Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF) which gave each member of the

alliance input and partial control over NATO's nuclear capabilities.[85] At the same time,

China's test of nuclear weapons in 1964 sparked serious concern in both Washington and

Moscow over how to deal with emerging powers' nuclear ambitions.[86] And while it was

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[82] Green, Brendan R., and Austin Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance," *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 615-616.
[83] Zubok, 2009: 209.
[84] FRG stands for Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany. East Germany was known as the GDR (German Democratic Republic). Brands, Hal. "Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT." *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (2007): 390-391.
[85] Brands, 2007: 393-394.
[86] Gavin, Francis J., *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012): 77-80.

too late to forestall China's nuclear ambitions, Washington and Moscow eventually

agreed to the establishment of a nuclear non-proliferation regime that would help

dissuade other countries from pursuing nuclear ambitions. The Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT) was signed in 1968 and represented the first clear demonstration of the possibility

of détente.[87] The NPT demonstrated the ability of the superpowers to jointly cooperate on

issues of mutual interest and concern. Ultimately, the NPT helped shaped the foundation

of détente and propelled both sides towards negotiation.[88]

By the Nixon administration the war in Vietnam and Soviet parity incentivized

both sides towards negotiations. The U.S. wanted Soviet help to end the war in Vietnam

by exerting influence over communist North Vietnam, while the Soviets wanted the U.S.

to recognize that Soviet strategic parity translated into political and military equality. But

the failure to understand each other undermined the chances of a successful resolution.

5.2.2 Soviet Intentions

As the SALT I case in Chapter Three discussed, the Soviet leadership grew

concerned over Khrushchev's brinksmanship tactics towards the U.S. When it became

clear that this policy of continual crisis was not only ineffective but dangerous,

Khrushchev was ousted. He was replaced with Brezhnev, who led with a more coalitional

approach by occupying the middle position amongst the leadership.[89] And although

Brezhnev's relative power and influence varied across issues and time, often occupying

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[87] Gavin, 2012: 102.
[88] Brands, 2007: 391.
[89] Breslauer, George W. *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982): 10-14.

the center between competing positions, his support for détente was crucial.[90] The

leadership agreed revitalizing the Soviet economy was a central priority. Détente was one

avenue that could help accomplish that goal by importing Western technology and

diverting military spending. [91] But like Khrushchev, economic growth was an added

benefit of reduced tensions, not a driving force. Nor were the economic imperatives so

strenuous that they forced hardline members of the leadership to agree to negotiations

with America.[92] As Vladislav Zubok writes, "It was Brezhnev's personal and

increasingly emotional involvement and his talents as a domestic consensus builder that

proved to the most important factor in securing the policy of détente in the period from

1968-1972."[93] His initial push for détente was opposed by various members of the

leadership, but as negotiations began to show promise (such as potential opportunities

with West German Chancellor Willy Brandt's policy of *Ostpolitik*) he pushed for the

primary Soviet objective: political recognition by the U.S. of Soviet security interests and

position in the international system.

   With the asymmetry between the Soviet and U.S. strategic capabilities

diminishing, Brezhnev began serious nuclear arms control negotiations with the U.S. Yet

parity was a means to an end, not the end in itself. What the Soviets had been striving for

since 1945 was political recognition by the U.S. of the relationship and status of the

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[90] Although there have been various debates as to the true nature of Brezhnev's leadership style, a single approach cannot fully capture the complex dynamics of Brezhnev's tenure. Rather, his broadly "coalitional" approach was buffeted by his relative power against the other members of the leadership and the issue under discussion. Anderson, Richard Davis, *Public Politics in an Authoritarian State: Making Foreign Policy During the Brezhnev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1993): 7-13.
[91] Nelson, Keith L., *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Nelson argues economic considerations were the most important factor that forced both sides into détente.
[92] Zubok, Vladislav M, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009): 223.
[93] Zubok, 2009: 223.

superpowers.[94] Most importantly, the Kremlin sought recognition of the USSR as a global power and that its interests, security, and views had to be taken into account. Soviet strategic inferiority dominated perceptions of vulnerability, and for the first time the USSR had an opportunity to negotiate with the U.S. on an equal level.[95] This was even more important to the Soviet leadership with Nixon's trip to China and the possibility of a growing U.S.-China rapport.[96]

As SALT became increasingly likely to be signed, Brezhnev and the pro-détente forces approach seemed to be vindicated.[97] Parity was paying dividends as it looked as if the U.S. was recognizing military and political parity between the superpowers. So much so that Brezhnev made détente official policy at the 24th Party Congress where he laid out his famous "Peace Program."[98] To ensure peaceful coexistence, Brezhnev wanted a broad agreement that enshrined policies of non-intervention and mutual security, but most importantly equality.[99] In the agreement itself, the first principle was written by the Soviets and demonstrates their conception of cooperation under parity. It states that relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union will develop "normal relations based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual advantage." Moreover, Brezhnev stressed in March 1972 "the key to their [disarmament

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[94] "the achievement of equality (parity in the Western vernacular) or—even better if there was a chance for it—superiority over the United States was seen by Moscow as something highly valuable in political and ideological, not to mention strategic, terms." Savel′ev, Aleksandr G, and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995): 3.
[95] Husband, William B. "Soviet Perceptions of U.S. 'Positions-of-Strength' Diplomacy in the 1970s." *World Politics* 31, no. 04 (1979): 499-502.
[96] Dobrynin, Anatoly. *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995): 228.
[97] Zubok, 2009: 220-222.
[98] Dobrynin, 1995: 216-220; Nelson, 1995: 101-102.
[99] Shevchenko, Arkady N., *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1985): 206.

talks] success is recognition by both sides of the principle of equal security."[100] He went

so far as to say the agreement was "even more important" than any other aspect of the

negotiations.[101] For the Soviets, political parity was even more important in many regards

than strategic parity. By signing the BPA, the Soviets believed they were gaining a

broader and more permanent acceptance of the nature of the relationship between the

superpowers, that codified accepted norms of competition and a recognition of Soviet

security interests globally.

The BPA was crucial for Brezhnev to placate the more hardline members of the

leadership. Brezhnev continued to face significant opposition from not only the military,

but hardline members of the party. By gaining U.S. acceptance, Brezhnev was able to

justify cuts and concessions in the arms control negotiations that he otherwise would

have been unable.[102] But since the U.S. had agreed to the principles of mutual security,

the Soviets perceived that a mutual framework had been established that lessened the

incentive for one side to strive for superiority. As a former advisor to Foreign Minister

Gromyko noted, the BPA "Weren't just words to the Soviet leadership. They represented

a fundamental change in Washington's policy toward the Soviet Union."[103] For the

Soviets the BPA did not represent one policy option among many, but reflected a

fundamental change in relations with the U.S.[104] This demonstrates why the Soviets were

so interested in signing the BPA than focusing on achieving cuts in U.S. armaments.[105]

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[100] Quoted in Anderson, 1993: 199-200.
[101] Garthoff, 1985: 294.
[102] Anderson, 1993: 200.
[103] Shevchenko, 1985: 206.
[104] Blacker, Coit D., "The Kremlin and Détente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations." In *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, ed. Alexander George (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979): 120.
[105] Savel′ev and Detinov, 1995: 34.

American recognition of political parity therefore meant the superpowers would cooperate—instead of competing—on issues where there was mutual advantage, while avoiding each other's vital interests.[106] This included conflicts in the third world, such as the Middle East or Asia, where the two could cooperate on the basis of equality to solve crises.[107] This connected to the Soviet fear over inadvertent escalation to nuclear war between the superpowers involved in a crisis originating in the third world (including China).[108] Therefore, to reduce the potential of nuclear war, the Soviets believed the BPA enabled both parties to agree to cooperate to settle such situations, instead of exploiting or competing, before events spiraled. Moreover, it rejected the notion of linkage and separated issues from one another.[109] The Soviet conception of the BPA agreement defined a broader relationship between the superpowers that filtered down to the handling of individual situations and topics, free from the previous eras of issues defining or threatening bilateral relations.[110]

5.2.3   American Policymaker Views

The key policymakers in the BPA case are President Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. However, in contrast to the longer discussions and debates over the interim agreement and the ABM Treaty,

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[106] Grynaviski, 2014: 60-61.

[107] George, Alexander. "US-Soviet Efforts to Cooperate in Crisis Management and Crisis Avoidance." in Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin (eds). *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 589.

[108] Ulam, Adam Bruno, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983): 40-45.

[109] Husband, 1979: 504.

[110] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Brezhnev and Nixon, May 22 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d257

Nixon and Kissinger were the two most influential voices regarding the BPA.

Nevertheless, Laird's views on the broader strategic relationship influenced the context in which the BPA was negotiated and assessed by Nixon and Kissinger.[111]

As Chapter Three noted, Kissinger and Nixon largely tried to avoid dispositional assessments influencing their perceptions and negotiate on a practical level. Both Nixon and Kissinger believed the U.S. could connect Soviet actions in one issue area directly to others during negotiations. This policy of linkage specifically tied Soviet help on ending the Vietnam war to arms control negotiations.[112] Nixon in particular challenged the notion that issues or competition could be siloed from each other.[113] Nixon wrote to Secretary of State Rogers shortly after inauguration, "But I do believe that crisis or confrontation in one place and real cooperation in another cannot long be sustained simultaneously." He continued, "I believe that the Soviet leaders should be brought to understand that they cannot expect to reap the benefits of cooperation in one area while seeking to take advantage of tension or confrontation elsewhere."[114] He was particularly afraid of the Soviets gaining from SALT discussions while conceding nothing to the U.S. on other issues. Unless the Soviets were willing to work with the U.S. on issues it cared about—such as Vietnam—Nixon would not give them the benefits of détente.

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[111] In contrast, Secretary of State Rogers had no knowledge of the agreement's existence prior to Nixon's announcement at the Moscow summit. Kissinger, Henry, *White House Years*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979): 1205-1209, 1213.

[112] Garthoff, 1985: 69-72.

[113] Litwak, Robert S., *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 93-97.

[114] "Letter from President Nixon to Secretary of State Rogers, February 4, 1969," *FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol XII, Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970* https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d10

Kissinger's approach emphasized the need to gain Soviet acceptance of the international system and bolster the legitimacy of the positions of the two superpowers.[115] Kissinger's intention was not simply to stabilize the relationship, but to limit Soviet growth and freedom of action.[116] Kissinger wanted to use détente and negotiations to the U.S. advantage. He wrote to Nixon shortly after meeting with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, "In other words, we have the 'linkage.' Our problem is how to play it." Continuing to argue, "My own view is that we should seek to utilize this Soviet interest, stemming as I think it does from anxiety, to induce them to come to grips with the real sources of tension, notably in the Middle East, but also in Vietnam."[117] Negotiations were simply one avenue to accomplish that goal. Therefore, an agreement with the Soviets on the nature of the relationship would allow Kissinger and Nixon to achieve several policy goals, namely, a retreat from the universal interventionism that they believed had overstretched America in the post-WWII era.[118]

While for Defense Secretary Laird, the strategic relationship was more important than gaining buy in from the Soviets to the international system. But he agreed with Nixon's policy of linkage, and wanted Soviet help to pressure the North Vietnamese to end the war in Vietnam. He stated that there needed to be "signs of progress" on a variety of issues before the U.S. would agree to strategic arms talks.[119] Indeed, Laird viewed

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[115] Del Pero, Mario, *The Eccentric Realist: Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010): 82-85; Litwak, 1984: 90-92.
[116] Kissinger, Henry, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982): 235-246.
[117] "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, February 18, 1969" *FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol XII, Soviet Union, January 1969-October 1970* https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d17
[118] Del Pero, 2010: 82.
[119] Quoted in Litwak, 1984: 94.

negotiations and agreements as a path to undermining and slowing down the Soviets, instead of finding a robust system of coexistence.[120]

5.2.4   U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

Nixon and Kissinger ignored an opportunity to understand Soviet intentions and instead focused on obtaining bargaining advantage. U.S. policymakers devoted surprisingly little study into analyzing Soviet signals and whether or not to believe their sincerity, as well as the divide between both sides on the importance of the treaty. This divide helps explain the incorrect assessment of Soviet signals despite the signing the BPA. There was little evidence that policymakers evaluated Soviet signals as the DPV predicts. Ultimately, the BPA demonstrates how difficult is it is to signal reassurance through risk reduction agreements.

Upon entering office, Nixon and Kissinger believed the U.S. was in an advantageous position over the Soviets.[121] Still believing the U.S. held nuclear superiority and the Soviets needed détente, Nixon was in no hurry to begin negotiations. Instead, he wanted to create a situation in which the U.S. could pressure the Soviets on a range of issues while withholding nuclear arms negotiations. Nixon believed the Soviets wanted to use détente to ease the pressure of direct competition with the U.S., while at the same time redirecting their focus to supporting communist movements across the third world.[122] Kissinger echoed Nixon's beliefs, arguing that the Soviets wanted to solidify

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[120] Van Atta, Dale, *With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008): 194.
[121] Kissinger, 1979: 129-130.
[122] "Memorandum of Conversation," 25 February 1969, NA, Record Group (RG) 59, Records of the Department of State, Executive Secretariat Conference Files, 1949–72, Box 489, Vol. 1.

their strategic gains with arms control talks and redirect resources into other areas of competition.[123] Although as Chapter Three demonstrated, the administration soon realized that the U.S. had in fact lost its strategic superiority and the USSR essentially reached quantitative parity with the U.S.[124] Undeterred, the administration still sought to leverage arms control negotiations for concessions on other issues, such as help ending the war in Vietnam.

Despite seeing "détente as a strategy, rather than as an objective," Kissinger and Nixon appealed to domestic and international audiences by framing it in many of the same terms as the Soviets. Justifying the approach away from power politics, and towards a "durable peace."[125] But the reality was designed to condition Soviet actions towards more favorable policies and creating punishments should the Soviets violate the rules or exploit opportunities. Kissinger wrote, "To foreclose Soviet opportunities is thus the essence of the West's responsibility. It is up to us to define the limits of Soviet aims."[126] And the administration did not hesitate to link other issues to pressure the Soviets. Nixon held the normalization of trade relations with the Soviets as a valuable bargaining chip, seeking to leverage it at different points in negotiations for Soviet concessions.[127]

However, the Soviets immediately and forcefully pushed back against linkage. Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin rejected Nixon's attempts to link Vietnam with arms control negotiations.[128] As discussed previously, the Soviets viewed détente as a

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[123] NL, "Memo for President from Henry A. Kissinger, "Analysis of Strategic Arms Limitation Proposals." May 23, 1969," NSC Files, SALT, SALT January-May Vol I to SALT June-July Vol II, Box 873.
[124] Terriff, Terry, *The Nixon Administration and the Making of US Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995): 19-21; Gavin, 2012: 112.
[125] Garthoff, 1985: 29.
[126] Kissinger, 1979: 119-120.
[127] Garthoff, 1985: 91.
[128] Garthoff, 1985: 48-49, 71, 130.

recognition of both military *and* political parity. Therefore, each issue should be dealt with in isolation and not affect the larger, overall relationship. The Soviets demonstrated this during June/July 1970 when they approached the U.S. about the need to collaborate on action against a third party, with Dobrynin specifically proposing a complimentary agreement to the ABM Treaty focused on reducing the "accidental or unsanctioned" use of nuclear weapons.[129] In a memo to Kissinger from his advisors Laurence Lynn and Harry Sonnenfeldt, "It would thus appear that in any agreement, whether limited or comprehensive, the Soviets will press hard to include something under this general heading." They continued that "there is no doubt that the 'third country' they are concerned about is China."[130] Rather than seeing this as a genuine Soviet effort to manage inadvertent escalation or nuclear crises, Kissinger saw it as a Soviet attempt to spoil potential U.S.-Chinese rapprochement.[131]

Interestingly, and demonstrative of the larger debates over the political relationship with the USSR, Kissinger only briefly discussed the possibility with Nixon before getting his ok to ignore the Soviet proposal.[132] Despite reports from Gerard Smith and the SALT negotiating team that "Whatever the gist of motivation in the Soviet proposal, it is apparent that (A) it is primarily political rather than technical, (B) must reflect decision at highest policy levels, and (C) is being developed with such care and insistence as to suggest great importance in Soviet eyes."[133] The U.S. would not agree to

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[129] Garthoff, 1985: 181.
[130] NL, "Memorandum to Secretary Kissinger from Laurence E. Lynn Jr and Harry Sonnenfeldt: SALT: Accidental, Unauthorized and Provocative Attacks July 1, 1970" NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol X 6/13/70-6/30/70 to SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol XI 7/1/70-7/19/70 Box 878.
[131] Kissinger, 1979: 556-558.
[132] Kissinger, 1979: 554-555.
[133] NL, "USDEL to SECSTATE, Comments on the Soviet Proposals on Measures to Guard Against a Provocative Attack, July 13, 1970" NSC Files, SALT, SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol X 6/13/70-6/30/70 to SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol XI 7/1/70-7/19/70 Box 878.

Soviet proposals since Nixon and Kissinger saw little strategic benefit from doing so. Ultimately, Kissinger dismissed the Soviet overture and only signed the Accidents Measures Agreements in 1971 after a summit had been agreed to and the ABM Treaty was linked to limitations on offensive weaponry.[134] We now know Kissinger could not have agreed to the Soviet proposal because it would have undermined U.S. strategy towards China. In order to pressure the Chinese to develop better relations with the U.S., Kissinger continually emphasized the danger posed by the Soviet Union.[135] Agreeing to Soviet overtures would have eliminated Kissinger's biggest source of leverage in negotiations with China.

The importance the Soviets placed on the political implications of the Accidents Measures treaty seemingly failed to affect Nixon and Kissinger who were focused on offensive limitations and Vietnam. This was the same for Secretary Laird, who was only concerned with limiting Soviet offensive weaponry and potential Soviet cheating.[136] Eventually, after the May 20th agreement, Nixon agreed to sign something like the accidental war agreement at the summit, although he made it clear it was not important what was signed as long as something was.[137] Kissinger wrote to Nixon on the larger political relationship should SALT be concluded just as the Soviets presented their proposals on preventing nuclear war,

> At the same time—and we should be quite clear about this—this would not prevent
> Soviet leaders from moving drastically in Eastern Europe if they felt that the effects of

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[134] Smith, Gerard C., *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980): 292-298.

[135] Goh, Evelyn, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 475-502.

[136] "Conversation Among President Nixon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Others, 10 August 1971," *FRUS*, 1969-1972, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d190

[137] Tal, David, *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiation and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-1979* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 65.

> "détente" undermined Soviet hegemony there; it would not stop the Soviets from seeking to advance their interests and to damage ours in Western Europe, the Middle East and Mediterranean and elsewhere… The Soviets would probably reason that our own stake in preserving the agreement is sufficiently great to oblige us to tolerate such a range of Soviet actions, especially if there were no plausible evidence that the USSR was violating the actual terms of the SALT agreement.[138]

This quote illustrates Nixon and Kissinger's thinking on the issue. An agreement of that nature would do nothing to benefit the U.S. and only increase the Soviet power and capabilities. Unless the Soviets agreed to limit their global adventurism—and therefore increasing the trajectory of the balance of power in U.S. favor—Nixon saw little justification for giving the Soviets another benefit from détente.

At the same time, Nixon failed to gain the leverage he anticipated as the Soviets genuinely viewed the Chinese as a threat to both nations.[139] The priority was to get Soviet—and Chinese—help on ending the war in Vietnam. Nixon and Kissinger never believed the Soviets were wholly responsible for North Vietnam's actions, but did want their help in forcing them into negotiations. When Nixon's first linkage attempts were rejected, the administration shifted to a more trilateral and less blunt approach.[140] And the issue of Vietnam would play a large role in the subsequent summit meetings between the superpowers.

Understanding the importance of making progress, Brezhnev invited Kissinger to Moscow to discuss SALT and Vietnam. Initially Nixon was hesitant, more concerned with the situation in Vietnam in the run up to his reelection. Nixon agreed on the

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[138] "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, July 13, 1970" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d95

[139] Cameron, James, *The Double Game: The Demise of America's First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 152-154; Garthoff, 1985: 242-243; Tal, 2017: 72.

[140] Garthoff, 1985: 250-254, 256-261

condition Vietnam was to be discussed before any other issues.[141] He was particularly incensed at the North Vietnamese Easter offensive in March 1972. Nixon returned to his old policies of linkage to hold the Soviets hostage for help on resolving Vietnam. He was adamant that Kissinger had to convey to the Soviets that their support of national liberation or communist movements was unacceptable and would affect bilateral relations. "So—now, one thing I want you to be extremely hard on is, they have a single standard. We can't have this crap in effect that they can support liberation in the non-Communist world but that we, the Brezhnev doctrine must apply in their world."[142] Nixon was determined to end what he saw as the Soviet ability to advance their interests regionally while gaining from détente at the same time.

Brezhnev wasted no time upon Kissinger's arrival to try and signal the importance the USSR held towards an agreement on principles of conduct. Additionally, the Soviets demonstrated their sincerity by largely ignoring the U.S. bombing of Haiphong harbor that damaged four Soviet ships in response to the North Vietnamese offensive.[143] As discussed previously, the Soviets were worried about nuclear escalation and wanted an agreement to limit the potential of either side to raise the risk of war. Brezhnev greeted Kissinger emphasizing the importance of the talks, "We must find principles on which to base our relationship in this regard…We attach immense importance to it. We believe it can be not only historic but epoch-making. We believe it is in the American interest and the Soviet interest, in the best interests of the Soviet and American peoples. We believe

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[141] Tal, 2017: 90-91.

[142] "Conversation Between Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) April 19, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d126

[143] Tal, 2017: 96.

both our sides can exert a beneficial influence on all world affairs."[144] Not only did

Brezhnev introduce the talks this way, he framed it as a mutually beneficial arrangement

where both sides managed global situations. Kissinger agreed to look it over and said to

FM Gromyko he "Accepts 95% of your formulations and adds one or two points."[145] He

also played for some time but downplayed the potential for complications by saying,

"The President may have some comments, but I know his views. They will not be

substantial because I know his views."[146] There was little sense that the U.S. had serious

concerns or that either side misunderstood each other. Before leaving Moscow, Brezhnev

made a point of noting their limited control over the North Vietnamese, and that it was in

fact outside forces set against Soviet-American détente.[147]

　　　　Yet almost right away it was clear U.S. policymakers were not interested in

whether or not the Soviets were sincere, and instead focused on structuring talks to

advance U.S. interests. Kissinger wrote to Nixon it could serve as a "a statement of how

relations between the two superpowers should be conducted that is solid and substantive

without suggesting political cooperation." Which is the exact opposite of how the Soviets

understood the agreement. In some respects, Kissinger saw it as a policy opening. He

continued, "It should serve as a significant finale to the summit and should discipline the

Chinese without alienating them. Moreover, we can say that it rejects the Brezhnev

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[144] "Memorandum of Conversation, Brezhnev and Kissinger, April 21, 1972." FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d134
[145] "Memorandum of Conversation Gromyko, Dobrynin and Kissinger, April 23, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d150
[146] "Memorandum of Conversation Brezhnev and Kissinger, April 22, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d139
[147] Tal, 2017: 91-92; Dobrynin, 1995: 246-249.

doctrine."[148] These statements make it clear Kissinger recognized the potential

importance of the signal, but was disinterested in understanding if it demonstrated a

change in Soviet intentions. Nevertheless, almost immediately after Kissinger's trip,

Vietnam again threatened to derail negotiations.[149] Nixon ordered a bombing campaign,

with the administration focused on the likelihood that the Soviets would cancel the

upcoming summit instead of the actual substance of the proposals.[150] To their surprise,

the Soviets remained calm and continued with the summit.

Once in Moscow, Nixon was greeted by Brezhnev who immediately made clear

what agreements and discussions the Soviets valued the most. He said he believed the

BPA was "the most important document" to be signed at the summit and "If it is treated

not as a formal piece of paper but as the basic document regulating the development of

our relations (and we conceive of no other approach) this document can become, as it

were, a foundation of a new era in relations between the USSR and the USA."[151]

Brezhnev also pushed for the need to coordinate and communicate going forward to

ensure there was no misunderstanding of each other's intentions. Especially "in the event

of some acute or crisis-like situation," regular contacts and communication were

essential.[152] The Soviets were trying to signal they wanted to manage the status quo

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[148] "Memorandum from the President Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon April 24, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d169
[149] Bundy, William P., *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998): 322-327.
[150] "Conversation Among President Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and White House Chief of Staff (Haldeman), May 1 1972." FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d182
[151] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Brezhnev and Nixon, May 22, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d257
[152] Ibid.

together, and believed American acceptance of the first principle meant the primary goal

of both countries was to not let regional crises escalate and affect the bilateral

relationship.[153] The Soviets went out of their way to signify much value they attached to

the BPA and the lengths they went to demonstrate benign, defensive intentions.

In contrast, Nixon and Kissinger remained focused on restraining Soviet actions

and support in the third world. Nixon was emphatic on the need for the Soviets to

pressure the North Vietnamese. Yet again determined to reach accommodation with the

U.S., Brezhnev not only continued with the summit but offered to send Soviet President

Nikolai Podgorny to Hanoi to pressure the Vietnamese to negotiate.[154] Nixon wanted

Kissinger to ensure that the Soviets understood the U.S. would never accept the

"Brezhnev Doctrine" or peaceful coexistence while allowing the Soviets to support

liberation movements across the world. Instead of understanding the Soviet position,

Kissinger and Nixon focused on writing the second principle of the BPA, calling on the

soviets to forgo "efforts to obtain unilateral advantage."[155] In part this was a result of

Nixon and Kissinger keeping almost total control BPA negotiations, even Secretary of

State Rogers had no idea it was under discussion until the summit (including Secretary

Laird who remained focused on the possibility of the Soviet military undercutting the

interim agreement). Even Brezhnev's speech and direct statements failed to impress upon

Nixon and Kissinger the lengths to which the Soviets were trying to signal intentions.

Kissinger wrote to Nixon during the summit, "The Soviet Union must assume a

responsibility, whenever they supply massive armaments, and they must be prepared to

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[153] George, 1988: 588-589; Grynaviski, 2014: 69.
[154] Garthoff, 1985: 258.
[155] George, 1988: 588.

deal with the consequences when they fail to exercise such a responsibility."[156] Thus, Nixon and Kissinger believed they gained Soviet acceptance on limiting aggressive actions globally.[157]

Despite Soviet efforts to signal intentions, the U.S. incorrectly assessed the BPA. More accurately, policymakers ignored the Soviet signal. The Soviets were willing to limit their freedom of action, adopt a more conciliatory posture, and Brezhnev was even willing to go against hardline domestic constituencies in order to sign the BPA. While the Soviets believed they had gained American recognition of political equality and a commitment to manage the status quo—especially from letting regional crises affect the bilateral relationship—Nixon and Kissinger believed the Soviets agreed to cease aggressive actions globally and from *causing* the regional crises that affected the bilateral relationship.[158] As a result, Nixon and Kissinger placed little importance and attention towards understanding Soviet signals over BPA.

5.3   HELSINKI/CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE: CORRECT ASSESSMENT

After SALT I and the BPA, détente was at a high point. The U.S. gained an advantageous strategic arms agreement that helped preserve some of America's

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[156] "Memorandum from Kissinger to President Nixon May 24, 1972" FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14/d270
[157] Dobrynin, 1995: 251-252; Shevchenko, 1985: 254, 274.
[158] For a detailed example of this variation in perception see Lebow and Stein's study of the superpower relationship during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Lebow, Richard Ned, and Janice Gross Stein. *We All Lost the Cold War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): specifically chapter ten.

qualitative advantages, including commitments to discuss further arms control, while the Soviets believed they had gained American acceptance of political and strategic parity. Brezhnev believed the diplomatic successes validated his approach to East-West relations and peaceful coexistence was now recognized by both sides.[159] Nevertheless, the Soviets were still concerned about the borders of Europe and preserving the status quo. The Soviets first proposed a conference on European security in 1954, but again raised the issue during the SALT discussions. Initially, the U.S. was disinterested and viewed talks on European security as a sideshow to the more important bilateral discussions between U.S. and the USSR. A conference, however, remained a central policy goal for the Soviets and continued to lobby for an agreement with Western Europe and the U.S. Eventually, Soviet signaling of defensive intentions—by engaging in negotiations and eventually conceding to Western proposals that could prove destabilizing to Soviet control over Eastern Europe—was correctly assessed by the U.S.

This case demonstrates the importance of policymakers devoting serious attention and effort when trying to understand an adversary's reducing risk signals. Initially, there was a high likelihood that the Helsinki talks would end in similar failure to that of the BPA. U.S. policymakers considered the negotiations a European issue and were concerned only insofar as they negatively affected SALT II discussions. However, Kissinger, and later Ford, became invested in the nature of negotiations and the implications not just for Europe but détente in general. The linkage of SALT II negotiations to the Helsinki Accords was a crucial factor in assessment outcome. As

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[159] "Pravda Report of Brezhnev's Speech," *New York Times*, April 30, 1973 https://www.nytimes.com/1973/04/30/archives/provda-report-of-brezhnevs-speech-european-parley-stressed-peaceful.html

SALT II discussions stagnated, policymakers believed Helsinki could help support and propel the arms control negotiations. The most crucial component, however, was a recognition the Soviet leadership was willing to risk its own domestic political stability to sign an agreement. Specifically, agreeing to new standards in human rights and political protections. In line with DPV, U.S. policymakers believed Soviet signals because they understood the Soviet leadership was risking its own position and reducing its control over domestic politics to sign the agreement.

The first section examines the context of the CSCE negotiations, including previous Soviet offers of a European security conference and the status of Soviet negotiations with Western Europe. Second, I describe Soviet intentions during the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (also known as CSCE or Helsinki Talks).[160] Similar to the BPA, the Soviets were interested in gaining legitimacy of their hold on Eastern Europe. Instead of bargaining for advantage, the Soviets were interested the West accepting the status quo that was largely stable since the end of WWII. The third section describes the key policymakers involved in negotiations (former President Richard Nixon, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and President Gerald Ford). The final section traces the effect of Soviet signals on U.S. policymakers and the eventual correct assessment of Soviet signals by the Ford administration that led to the signing of the Helsinki Accords.

Table 5.3 Helsinki Accords Outcomes

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[160] The preparatory talks were held in Helsinki from 1972-1973, with formal negotiations in Geneva from 1973-1975. The final signing ceremony was held in Helsinki in 1975. I use Helsinki talks and CSCE interchangeably to refer to the negotiations and ultimate agreement.

Hypotheses	Evidence if Correct	Support
Domestic Political Vulnerability	U.S. policymakers assess signal on whether or not created dissent and resulted in weakened position for Soviet leadership	Limited
Dispositional	Correctly assesses signal on whether or not it matches U.S. policymakers dispositional view of USSR	None
Face-to-Face	U.S. policymakers will correctly assess signal when there is direct contact between the leadership	Limited

5.3.1   Context and Background

SALT I and BPA set the foundation of détente and opened the possibility to further agreements. For U.S. policymakers, they believed they gained leverage to reign in Soviet activities and linked actions in the third world to détente. While the Soviets believed the U.S. recognized political and military parity, along with a willingness to cooperate in resolving crises. Just like the previous negotiations, the Nixon administration focused on concluding a permanent arms control treaty (SALT II), while the Soviets continued to push for political agreements. The most important of which was the Prevention of Nuclear War (PNW) agreement signed in 1973. The PNW and European security are crucial to understand the context of the negotiations and eventual Soviet concessions which led to the Helsinki Accords.

The Soviets first introduced the idea of an agreement precluding the use of nuclear weapons in the 1960's. The issue was revived during SALT, but rejected by the U.S. Undeterred, Brezhnev brought up the idea again with Nixon during his trip to Moscow in 1972, but Nixon and Kissinger were not interested in an agreement, preferring instead to focus on SALT II. Like the BPA negotiations, Nixon was almost totally uninterested in the details and left discussions to Kissinger. Kissinger played for time, hoping to avoid any commitment but finally agreed in the face of continued Soviet insistence and pressure.

While the Soviets viewed the agreement as a crucial continuation of the BPA, the U.S. saw it as "frosting on the cake."[161] Brezhnev hailed the agreement as one of "historic significance" and that its signing would propel further progress on SALT, stating "political détente is being backed up by military détente."[162] While Kissinger states in retrospect he "doubt[s] whether the result was worth the effort" due to the confused and secretive nature of negotiations and explanations to allies as too complicated.[163] Garthoff notes that for the U.S., signing was "owed more to Soviet persistence, coupled with the absence of any other really new initiative, than to any enthusiasm over the accord itself."[164] But like the BPA, each side focused on what they thought it meant for the other, while neglecting the implications for their own conduct.

In Europe, the potential of a conventional force reduction was as Kissinger described, "the only real issue" worth a conference.[165] The Soviets had long proposed

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[161] Garthoff, 1985: 334, 337-338.
[162] Quoted in Garthoff, 1985: 342, 349-350.
[163] Kissinger 1982: 285-286.
[164] Garthoff 1985: 343.
[165] Quoted in Morgan, 2018: 95.

conventional force reductions as part of the larger strategic and European security agreements, but NATO and the U.S. were unconvinced by Soviet overtures. For one thing, the large Soviet advantage in conventional forces negated any benefit of an equal reduction since NATO would have to rely even more heavily on nuclear weapons. Most European countries, such as the UK and France, were skeptical about reductions, but NATO's 1967 Harmel report opened the possibility of détente and countered Soviet offers with a proposal for asymmetric reductions. However, the Soviets rejected asymmetrical cuts out of hand.[166]

Nevertheless, conventional reductions were crucial to the issue of European security. And as momentum for a conference on European security gained traction, there was debate whether conventional force reductions would be included or conducted separately. At the same time, U.S. domestic pressure called for a reduction in the U.S. military presence in Europe. In 1971, Senator Mike Mansfield introduced a measure calling for a 50 percent reduction of U.S. forces in Europe.[167] The Nixon administration was staunchly against this measure as it would undercut American credibility with European allies, and achieve a Soviet policy objective in return for no concessions. Yet the Soviets were not interested in serious reductions either, as Brezhnev counted on the support of the military, who was vehemently opposed to reductions, and was more focused on strategic arms cuts. Brezhnev was keenly aware of how much Khrushchev's

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[166] Sayle, Timothy Andrews. *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019): 154-160; Haftendorn, Helga, *NATO and the Nuclear Revolution: A Crisis of Credibility, 1966–1967* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 319-321; Wegner, Andreas. "Crisis and Opportunity: NATO's Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004): 59-71.
[167] Blacker, Coit D. "The MBFR Experience," in Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin (eds). *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 124-125.

attempts to reduce the size of the military undercut his hold on power.[168] Nevertheless, Brezhnev undercut Mansfield's amendment with a speech in May 1971 announcing the USSR was ready for conventional disarmament talks.[169]

The confluence of American and Soviet interests in abstaining from a serious withdrawal of conventional troops shifted reduction discussions away from inclusion in the larger European security talks.[170] The U.S. did not want to reduce troop levels because it would undermine the U.S. commitment to European allies, and the Soviets were more interested in the Helsinki talks (as the previous section describes Soviet interests as centered around solidifying the Moscow Treaty with West Germany and the legitimacy of Soviet control over Eastern Europe). Ultimately, both sides agreed (over the objections of smaller Western states who wanted both negotiations to be conducted simultaneously) that MBFR and Helsinki would be conducted separately but parallel, and that the outcome or progress of one would not affect the other.[171]

5.3.2 Soviet Intentions

By 1972, Brezhnev's policy of détente and peaceful coexistence was producing results. SALT I and the BPA helped validate Brezhnev's Peace Program laid out at the 24th Party Congress in 1971. He used these successes to gradually push back against resistance from conservative and hardline members of the Politburo like Suslov and

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[168] Evangelista, 1999: 181-182.
[169] However, the full intent of this speech remains somewhat unclear. Most likely, it was a fear that removing too many troops would weaken Soviet control over the Warsaw Pact just as they were seeking to revitalize it. Morgan, 2018: 98; Dobrynin, 1995: 145-146, 169; Blacker, 1988: 129-131.
[170] Blacker, 1988: 123.
[171] Morgan, 2018: 99-100; Falkenrath, Richard A. *Shaping Europe's Military Order: The Origins and Consequences of the CFE Treaty*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995): 2-4.

Ponomarev who were opposed to negotiation with the United States. The Soviets

believed they had achieved two key objectives: U.S. recognition of strategic and political

parity. Most importantly, the Soviets believed the BPA represented a new era of relations

between the superpowers marked by political equality and cooperation. Further

solidifying his position and approach, the U.S. and Soviets signed the Agreement for the

Prevention of Nuclear War (PNW) in 1973. This agreement was important to the Soviets

and reinforced their belief both sides had reached mutual understanding.[172]

      After the BPA and PNW, the Soviets believed the U.S. was committed to jointly

managing the status quo.[173] However, two concerns remained. The first was the

legitimacy of Soviet control over the Warsaw Pact. The lack of an agreement regarding

the security situation and spheres of influence in Europe continued to undermine Soviet

hegemony in Eastern Europe. Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia

in 1968 sparked a crisis of confidence on the nature of Soviet leadership, which forced

the Soviets to search for ways to reinvigorate their hegemony over the Warsaw Pact

beyond the use of force.[174] Second, the Soviets realized that in order to maintain control

they needed to stimulate the economies of both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. By

coming to an agreement with Western Europe, Soviet leaders hoped to increase trade and

import much needed technology. To do so, and despite the risks, the Soviets would

decide to agree to almost all western positions regarding Basket III negotiations on

human rights.

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[172] Dobrynin, 1995: 277-278; Garthoff, 1985: 334, 337-338.
[173] Garthoff, 1985: 349-350.
[174] Morgan, Michael Cotey. *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018): 32, 36-38.

With détente showing success, Brezhnev sought to solidify the gains made and push for a "fundamental breakthrough in international affairs."[175] As Anatoly Chernyaev wrote in his diary, "Therefore, we [Soviets] have to have a universalist mission. Peace—that is our mission."[176] And with the U.S. seemingly agreeing to managing global relations, the Soviets intensified their efforts to solidify the borders of Europe.[177] The major source of Soviet insecurity was the unresolved status of Germany. West Germany's outreach and new policy of *Ostpolitik*, along with France's antagonism for independence within NATO, presented an opening for a European security conference the Soviets had been proposing since 1954.[178] This would achieve two Soviet objectives: strengthening Soviet control over Eastern Europe from Western pressure; and increase Soviet legitimacy to claims of leadership by defending the Warsaw Pact from the threat of NATO. By gaining Western acceptance of borders, the Soviets would be able to increase their control while at the same time reducing the importance of force.[179] Most importantly, it would largely resolve the status of Germany and to put to rest continued questions over the legitimacy of East Germany.[180]

The second priority for the Soviets was to increase the economic viability of Eastern European economies as well as importing much needed Western technology.[181]

[175] Wohlforth, William Curtis, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 185.

[176] Quoted in Morgan, 2018: 122-123.

[177] Morgan, 2018: 53-57.

[178] This included NATO's Harmel Report in 1967 which opened the possibility of cooperating on European security. Morgan, 2018: 67-72. Brezhnev also wanted to gain German ratification of the Moscow Treaty—in which West Germany accepted the legitimacy of East Germany and called for increased trade—within the Bundestag. Mueller, Wolfgang. "Recognition in Return for Détente? Brezhnev, the EEC, and the Moscow Treaty with West Germany, 1970–1973." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 4 (2011): 87-93.

[179] Morgan, 2018: 78.

[180] Maresca, John J. "Helsinki Accord, 1975," in Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin (eds). *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 107.

[181] Mueller, 2011: 94-95; Nelson, 1995.

During a meeting with Warsaw Pact leaders in 1975, Brezhnev spent considerable time speaking about economic issues and stated "In short, there are many problems. We have to think seriously about how to make our economy more profitable."[182] Increasing the economic growth of Eastern Europe was the second crucial pillar of reinforcing and legitimizing Soviet control. With greater economic growth and stability, the Soviets believed there would be less incentive to align towards Western Europe since countries would already be gaining the economic benefits and therefore resigned to remaining within the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets also hoped to increase their own importation of Western technology, furthering the economic benefits they hoped to achieve from détente.[183]

In each Basket, the Soviets sought to reinforce the status quo, not overturn it. They were not negotiating for advantage, or trying to upset the Western alliance but, like the BPA and PNW, codify the relationships and legitimacy of European order that had largely remained in place since the end of WWII. And while the Soviets were more concerned with security issues in Basket I, and to a lesser degree economic issues in Basket II, the Soviets conceded to Western demands for a greater recognition of human rights in Basket III and demonstrated their sincerity in gaining an agreement.[184] Moreover, Brezhnev publicly staked his leadership on signing the Helsinki Accords. He viewed it as the culmination of his policy of détente and the changed nature of the global

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[182] "Record of Conversation of Brezhnev with Leaders of Fraternal Parties of Socialist Countries," March 18, 1975, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitriĭ Antonovich Volkogonov papers, 1887-1995, mm97083838, Reel 16, Container 24. Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121171

[183] Wohlforth, 1993: 209-211.

[184] Morgan, 2018: 201.

balance of power. In 1976, Brezhnev made a speech at the 25th Party Congress that the

Helsinki Accords fulfilled the promises of his Peace Program announced in 1971.[185]

The Soviet interest in solidifying the status quo in Europe was so great that

Michael Morgan noted in his study of the Helsinki Accords, "Soviets' desire for progress

outweighed their attachment to their bargaining position."[186] Thus, even when the

Europeans, and eventually U.S., refused to concede, it was the USSR who gave in. This

included Western demands in Basket III focusing on human rights and the free movement

of people and ideas. This argument, however, goes against some of the conventional

wisdom that the Soviets believed they would be able to control the direction and

implementation of Basket III.[187] If the Soviets believed they did not have to fully

implement Basket III, then it's possible to view the Soviet acceptance of Basket III and

signing the CSCE as a cheap ploy instead of a costly signal. As I argue below, however,

the Soviets debated the risks posed by Basket III and believed they were making a costly

concession to sign the agreement. I argue the Soviets wagered the benefits outweighed

the risks.

The Soviets were aware of the potential risks posed by Basket III, and sought

Kissinger's help to press the Europeans to drop their demands.[188] This was a danger the

Soviet leadership was aware of, as declassified Soviet documents demonstrate.

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[185] Morgan, 2018: 226.
[186] Morgan, 2018: 136.
[187] "They [Soviet leadership] put their faith in the supremacy of sovereignty and believed that they alone would decide which of the Final Act's provisions to implement." Morgan, 2018: 204; Rey, Marie-Pierre, "The USSR and the Helsinki Process, 1969-75," in Andreas Wenger Vojtech Mastny, and Christian Neunlist (eds.), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75*, (New York: Routledge, 2008): 65-82; Thomas, Daniel, "The Helsinki Accords and Political Change in Eastern Europe," in Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 205-233.
[188] Davy, Richard, "Helsinki Myths: Setting the Record Straight on the Final Act of the CSCE, 197," *Cold War History*, 9, no. 1 (2009): 1-22.

Specifically, the KGB was vehemently against any concession on Basket III or loosening any other restrictions on free speech. On December 29, 1975, KGB Chairman Andropov sent a memo to the Central Committee detailing the need to maintain strict control over dissidents and a rejection of calls for greater "rights and freedoms" of the population. "From the discussion above, it is clear that refraining from active counteraction against the politically harmful actions of the 'dissidents' and other hostile elements, as the French and Italian comrades would want us to do, could lead to the most serious negative consequences. It seems to us that one cannot make principal concessions in this issue, because they would inevitably lead to additional demands unacceptable to us."[189] A potential criticism is that even though concessions on Basket III eventually became costly, and arguably lethal for the USSR, it was not so at the time and making it a costless signal. However, there was significant debate within the leadership on whether or not to agree to Basket III concessions. Indeed, Zubok notes that one of the negotiators at Helsinki had to convince Foreign Minister Gromyko to accept Basket III otherwise the negotiations would fail.[190] The fact there was debate within the Soviet leadership over the issue, and that the leadership then had to exert pressure over the KGB and security services demonstrates how politically contentious the decision was.[191] The Soviets merely wagered they would be able to control and direct any of the changes unleashed by the agreement, which they recognized was a risky course. That the Soviets wagered

[189] National Security Archive. "Yuri Andropov, Chairman of the KGB, Memorandum to the Politburo, 29 December, 1975." U.S. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitrii A. Volkogonov Papers, Reel 18, Container 28
https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB482/docs/1975.12.29%20Andropovs%20Memo%20to%20Politburo.pdf
[190] Zubok, 2009: 237-238.
[191] Morgan, 2018: 204-205.

incorrectly does not negate the costs of the signal, merely that the Soviet leadership believed the potential benefits were greater.

By engaging in the Helsinki talks to solidify the borders of Europe, as well as standardizing the security and economic relationship between Western and Eastern Europe, the Soviets were demonstrating their defensive orientations and that they had no aggressive intentions as CST predicts. Furthermore, by accepting Western demands on Basket III, which held the potential to undermine the Soviet leadership's control over domestic politics, the Soviets were signaling the extent to which they supported the agreement.

5.3.3 American Policymaker Views

By the early 1970's, the success of détente, combined with a growing European call for a conference on European security, propelled the U.S. into negotiations. For the U.S., most of the negotiations would be conducted in the same back-channel and direct way with Kissinger during SALT and the BPA. The three key policymakers during the Helsinki negotiations were President Nixon (initially), President Ford (after Nixon's resignation), and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Despite the successful outcome of SALT I, President Nixon was focused on ending the war in Vietnam. Furthermore, he was increasingly consumed with the spiraling Watergate scandal and delegated much of the control over negotiations to Kissinger. As Chapter Three demonstrated, Nixon almost immediately face domestic pressure to be firmer on SALT II. Instead, he displayed a relative apathy towards the Soviets as domestic issues took an increasing toll on his time and attention. However, he

remained convinced that the Soviets were largely practical and willing to compromise, but that the main issues remained strategic and conventional arms control, not broader political treaties.[192]

After Nixon's resignation, President Ford stepped in with relatively little foreign policy experience (partly due to Nixon and Kissinger tight control over foreign policy). Nevertheless, Ford was committed to continuing détente.[193] He kept Kissinger on as his Secretary of State and directed him to continue to lead negotiations—towards both SALT II and Helsinki.[194] Ford himself had largely changed his dispositional views regarding the Soviets from his time in Congress as a hawk. He went out of his way to convey this to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin upon taking over from Nixon and said in his memoirs, "I changed my views."[195] But he was constantly challenged by hawkish members of his cabinet, most prominently Defense Secretary Schlesinger, who continually advocated for an offensive/revisionist dispositional view of the Soviets.

In part to Kissinger's numerous personal interactions and consistent negotiation with the Soviets, he maintained a very practical understanding of the Soviet leadership. His belief that realpolitik guided Soviet Union were reinforced. His views on the largely realist nature of the world also remained unchanged despite the signing of such agreements as the BPA and PNW which were intended to decrease unnecessary friction.

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[192] Morgan, 2018: 10; Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 638-639; Romano, Angela. "Détente, Entente, or Linkage? The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in U.S.-Relations with the Soviet Union." *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 709.
[193] Bundy, 1998: 476.
[194] Tal, David, *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiation and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-1979* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 164-165.
[195] Ford, Gerald R., *A Time to Heal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979): 128; Dobrynin, 1995: 319-323.

5.3.4 U.S. Assessment of Soviet Signals

The successful outcome of the Helsinki talks is all the more surprising given the poor track record of the Austrian State Treaty and BPA. Nevertheless, U.S. policymakers believed Soviets signals were sincere and signed the Helsinki Accords after years of negotiations. Policymakers came to recognize that over the long term, an agreement would benefit the U.S. balance of power and undermine Soviet control over Eastern Europe.[196] The Soviets sent signals of their defensive intent by not only engaging in talks to support the status quo, but by conceding to all western demands, especially regarding Basket III. Due to the Soviet leadership risking their own domestic political control to reach an agreement, U.S. policymakers became convinced of Soviet sincerity, despite their initial hesitation towards negotiations. This case provides significant support for the domestic political vulnerability theory.

The Nixon administration was concerned about increasing European pressure for diplomacy with the USSR. Nixon and Kissinger were not interested in a European security conference, fearing a conference would take away from the more important— and bilateral—strategic arms control talks, and believed they could link negotiations to Soviet concessions on SALT.[197] However, the Harmel report and the Moscow Treaty unleashed European hope an agreement on European security could be finally reached since Molotov first proposed a conference in 1954. As Michael Morgan notes regarding the Nixon administration's position, "Although the Nixon administration regarded the conference as a meaningless—perhaps even dangerous—exercise, it deferred to the

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[196] Maresca, 1988: 107-108.
[197] Kissinger, 1999: 635-663; Romano, 2009: 708-709.

Western Europeans' enthusiasm."[198] In 1974 Kissinger remarked, "they can write it in

Swahili for all I care."[199] To balance the dual goals of supporting western solidarity and

avoiding jeopardizing détente with the Soviets, Nixon and Kissinger decided to neither

hinder nor help negotiations.[200]

With the Soviets focused on stabilizing the territorial and political status of

Europe, the Western allies prioritized increasing the free flow of information and people

that would hopefully lead to a weakening of Soviet control over Eastern Europe.[201] The

goal was to push for changes which would help instigate demands within those countries

for democratic representation and economic revival. Negotiations soon became so

complex and confusing that even Kissinger admitted many of the details escaped his

comprehension.[202] But both the Nixon administration and the European allies were aware

of the Soviet interest to legitimize their control over Eastern Europe and limit discussions

to solely security issues, which dampened the importance of the de-escalation signal of

engaging in negotiations. Despite later denying ever recognizing Soviet control, Nixon

and Kissinger did in fact recognize Soviet "special interests" in Eastern Europe and the

de factor reality of Soviet hegemony, although they never went so far as to recognize the

Brezhnev doctrine.[203] In fact, they believed that reinforcing the idea of sovereignty could,

over the long term, foster Eastern European autonomy and economic independence from

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[198] Morgan, 2018: 10, 91, 131.
[199] Hanhimaki, Jussi M. "They Can Write It In Swahili: Kissinger, The Soviets, and the Helsinki Accords, 1973-75" *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 37.
[200] Kissinger, 1999: 640. "At first, the American strategy was to create no obstacles to progress but to do little to accelerate it either."
[201] Morgan, 2018: 110-111, 124, 135.
[202] Kissinger, 1999: 641.
[203] Selvage, Douglas E. "Transforming the Soviet Sphere of Influence? U.S.-Soviet Détente and Eastern Europe, 1969-1976." *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 671-673, 676.

Moscow.[204] But they rejected the European belief of instigating dramatic, revolutionary

change through freedom of movement and information.[205]

In June 1973, all parties finally came to an agreement on the agenda that would

occupy negotiations for the next two years.[206] Issues would be grouped into three

categories of issues, or Baskets. Basket I focused on principles of interstate behavior,

such as respect for sovereignty and more security focused issues. Basket II focused on

principles of economic cooperation and commercial relations. Basket III emphasized

human rights and the freedom of movement of information and people. In the end the

Soviets agreed to far more wide-ranging discussions than the pure security interests of

Basket I, and further signaled their defensive intentions by including issues which held

direct risks for the Soviet leadership, such as those in Basket III. As discussed above, the

Soviets had no interest in discussing the issues in Basket III, and were keenly aware of

the risks they held. Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership decided it was worth the risk to

include them in negotiations to demonstrate sincerity.[207]

With American enthusiasm for the talks already low, the Watergate scandal

complicated talks even further. And while Ford was committed to continuing détente, he

was no more inclined than Nixon to substantively engage in the talks.[208] During Foreign

Minister Gromyko's first meeting with Ford he conveyed that Brezhnev personally

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[204] Selvage, 2009: 671, 674, 682.
[205] Selvage, 2009: 674.
[206] They were known as the Final Recommendations of the Helsinki Consultations and approved on June 8, 1973.
[207] As noted above during the discussion of Soviet intentions, the KGB were sincerely concerned over the potential for domestic instability if the USSR agreed to Basket III, while the political leadership calculated the benefits were worth the risk. Morgan, Michael Cotey. "The United States and the Making of the Helsinki Final Act," Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations 1969–1977, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford University Press, 2008): 110.
[208] Romano, 2009: 716.

"attach great importance to finishing the work of the conference" and wanted U.S. help in moving the stalled CSCE talks forward. Demonstrating how little attention the U.S. had towards the talks, Ford remarked that he was not aware of what the Foreign Minister was speaking of, and Kissinger had to explain the slow progress was due to the European allies.[209] Instead, U.S. attention remained focused on SALT II and the upcoming Vladivostok negotiations just as in the Nixon administration, ignoring Soviet signals on Helsinki.

Despite U.S. disinterest, Western Europe continued to demonstrate remarkable solidarity in their demands for Basket III and a refusal to focus solely on Basket I. However, by 1974, U.S. and Soviet views began to converge over the slow pace of negotiations. Kissinger in particular saw much of his time consumed with negotiations with the Soviets increasingly focused on Helsinki, and was worried that stalled negotiations, along with increasing domestic opposition to détente, would undermine SALT II. Moreover, Kissinger believed European intransigence was slowing negotiations by emphasizing Basket III and arguing for concessions he believed the Soviets were unlikely to agree to.[210] He even tried to get the Europeans to recognize, "limitations on Soviet flexibility in these matters" and the low probability the Soviet leadership would agree to conditions that could potentially undermine their rule.[211] During one of Kissinger's trips to Moscow in 1974, Brezhnev was pointed in his criticism that if "the

[209] GFL, "President Ford Meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko, September 20, 1974" NSA Temporary Parallel File Box A1- Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office File: USSR-Gromyko File (19)
[210] Romano, Angela. "Détente, Entente, or Linkage? The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in U.S.-Relations with the Soviet Union." *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (2009): 716.
[211] Hanhimaki, Jussi M. "They Can Write It In Swahili: Kissinger, The Soviets, and the Helsinki Accords, 1973-75" *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 52.

President wanted to act, agreement would be achieved rapidly."[212] Kissinger soon

realized that the Soviet commitment to Helsinki and their desire for an agreement could

potentially affect strategic limitation negotiations.

Through the rest of 1974 and into 1975, Kissinger's interest in Helsinki increased,

a result from his Moscow visit and the direct statements by Brezhnev and the Soviet

leadership. While MBFR discussions advanced little, he saw an opportunity to push some

of the goals of the MBFR by reducing the aggressive posture of each sides' conventional

forces. He advocated for Confidence Building Measures (CBM's) which relaxed tensions

by improving transparency, trust, and cooperation.[213] He also realized, and convinced

Ford, of just how much the Soviets, and Brezhnev in particular, wanted the agreement.

With SALT II negotiations stalling and domestic resistance to an agreement increasing,

Kissinger realized the Helsinki negotiations were an opportunity to help maintain the

momentum for détente. He wanted to press for progress on the CSCE for leverage on

SALT II.[214] Foreign Minister Gromyko and Ambassador Dobrynin met with Kissinger

repeatedly to advocate for the U.S. to soften European demands for Basket III. However,

Kissinger realized the firm stance of the Europeans and Brezhnev's personal interest in

an agreement provided an opportunity to advance U.S. interests and correctly assessed

[212] GFL, "Kissinger/Brezhnev Talks in Moscow October 24-27, 1974" Kissinger Reports on USSR, China, and Middle East Discussions Box 1 Oct 24-27, 1974 – Kissinger/Brezhnev Talks in Moscow (1)
[213] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Gromyko and Kissinger, February 17, 1975" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d130; Morgan, Michael Cotey. "The United States and the Making of the Helsinki Final Act," Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations 1969–1977, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford University Press, 2008): 173; Morgan, 2018: 189-195.
[214] Morgan, 2008: 167.

the Soviet interest in legitimizing their de facto control over Eastern.[215] Absent from his assessment was any dispositional biases, instead dealing with the Soviets as serious and practical negotiators. The sustained pressure from the Soviets demonstrated to Kissinger that they were interested in stabilizing the status quo in Europe, and by extension, renouncing any expansionist designs on the rest of Europe. Kissinger's initial belief that agreeing to Basket I would support Eastern European autonomy and drive a wedge between Soviet control was strengthened, and he became impressed with the level of allied solidarity over Basket III. Most importantly, the Soviet acceptance of Basket III provisions convinced Kissinger the Soviets were sincere (even if he did believe the demands went too far). Basket III directly threatened Soviet control not just over the Warsaw Pact, but domestically as well. The demands directly threatened the ability of the Soviet political leadership to control domestic political processes. Moreover, Basket III was not some agreement that could be dismissed. The discussions involved tangible actions and codes of conduct for all sides.

With Kissinger motivated to support West Europe, combined with the Soviet desire to sign an agreement at a heads of state conference, the Soviets agreed to almost all Western demands. Most crucially, by May 1975 they accepted Western provisions for Basket III.[216] This was a huge concession and clearly demonstrated defensive Soviet intentions. By accepting Basket III, which directly imposed costs on the Soviet leadership and not the population or state, the Soviets demonstrated how important they viewed settling the issue of European security. Soviet leaders recognized the dangers of Basket

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[215] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Gromyko and Kissinger, February 16, 1975" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d128
[216] Hanhimaki, 2003: 53-54; Morgan, 2018: 187-189.

III, but believed the risks were necessary to gain legitimacy and standardize the relationship between East and West—thus demonstrating defensive intentions. There are indications that even before May, the U.S. believed Soviet signals as genuine, as a memo to Kissinger from his advisers Sonnenfeldt and Hyland illustrates, "They have a clear self-interest in preserving an element of détente in Europe and in pursuing SALT and in registering gains for Brezhnev's peace program at 25th Party Congress."[217] The Soviets had clearly demonstrated they held defensive intentions, and were willing to forego any claims to expanding their control over western Europe, a key Western fear since WWII.

Nevertheless, despite Soviet concessions, Ford faced a domestic backlash. Republicans in particular were vocal over their dissatisfaction with negotiations and détente more broadly, accusing of Ford and Kissinger capitulating to Soviet control over Eastern Europe.[218] Even Defense Secretary Schlesinger was vocal in his opposition to the threat of the Soviets and détente.[219] In particular, Ford refused to meet noted Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn for fear of upending negotiations and resulted in an uproar from Republican opponents of détente.[220] Yet, despite Helsinki entailing no legal commitments or negatively affecting U.S. interests, Ford failed to counter the growing Republican opposition to the agreement.[221] His failure to adequately defend CSCE

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[217] "Telegram from the Department of State to Secretary of State Kissinger in Aswan, March 13, 1975: Subject: Analysis of Recent Soviet Behavior from Sonnenfeldt and Hyland." *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d134

[218] Further evidence of Kissinger's acceptance of de facto Soviet control over Eastern Europe is his statements in response to domestic criticism. In a conversation with President Ford and Brent Scowcroft he argued, "All those guys talking about Helsinki; what frontiers have been recognized? All the frontiers but the German one were signed in '47–'48—with participation by a Democratic administration. West Germany agreed to the German one." "Memorandum of Conversation Between Ford, Kissinger and Scowcroft, May 26, 1975" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976 https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d153

[219] Morgan, 2008: 175.

[220] Kissinger, 1999: 648-652.

[221] Morgan, 2018: 200.

emboldened opponents of détente and would later become a liability in the upcoming

1976 Presidential election.[222]

Even with withering criticism, Ford and Kissinger correctly assessed Soviet

signals and the importance Brezhnev personally attached to the successful conclusion of

the CSCE. In a memo to Ford shortly before the Summit, Kissinger succinctly summed

up the Soviet position.

> The issue here is not so much the wording of documents or who won or lost, but what
> happens in the future: the Soviets no doubt have a different appreciation of CSCE and a
> different assessment of it than we do. For them it is, in fact, a general postwar settlement
> recodifying the status quo politically and territorially. We can expect Brezhnev to make
> these points, however subtly, in his address to the conference though no doubt he will
> clothe his remarks in high-sounding phrases about peace and progress.[223]

Soviet willingness to serious engage in negotiations, include Basket III provisions, and

then concede to almost all Western demands signaled to the U.S. that the Soviets were

sincere and held defensive intentions.

Kissinger correctly perceived how important CSCE was to Brezhnev, "CSCE in

his eyes must seem a successful achievement denied all his more illustrious

predecessors," and recognized that this gave Ford a "Strong bargaining position" on

issues like SALT. Again, the linkage to SALT II was a crucial factor that contributed to

the assessment outcome by increasing U.S. attention and interest. Perhaps most

presciently, he cautioned Ford that this did not mean that Brezhnev would agree to

wholesale concessions, and still had to "face his colleagues."[224] This supports the

domestic political vulnerability theory's assertion that target policymakers pay attention

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[222] Snyder, Sarah B. "Through the Looking Glass: The Helsinki Final Act and the 1976 Election for President." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21, no. 1 (2010): 88-89.
[223] "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford, July 29, 1975" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XXXIX, European Security
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v39/d327
[224] Ibid.

to the domestic situation of the sender and recognize the political context in which signals are sent. Kissinger recognized Brezhnev was risking his position to agree to Basket III and he had to face domestic constituencies who were opposed to an agreement. Ford subsequently strove to communicate to Brezhnev that he was as committed to continuing détente, "I can assure you, in full frankness, that I am absolutely prepared to dedicate all my efforts precisely to ensuring that relations between our countries develop steadily, and that détente becomes irreversible."[225] Brezhnev personally staked his political position on continuing détente.

The immediate political repercussions could not have been different for each leader. For Brezhnev, signing the Helsinki Accords was vindication of his Peace Program, and he announced at the 25th Party Congress in 1976 he had fulfilled those goals. Although this success was short lived, relations with the U.S. deteriorated almost as rapidly as his health. While for Ford the agreement was nothing short of a disaster for his reelection. It opened up the door for a primary challenge from Ronald Reagan who accused Ford of being too dovish towards the Soviets.[226]

This case demonstrates how difficult it is for de-escalation signaling. Initially, U.S. policymakers viewed the CSCE talks as a distraction to the more important SALT II talks. Only after time was CSCE seen as a tool to give the U.S. leverage in negotiations and eventually propel the waning SALT II negotiations. Gradually, by including human rights and Basket III into the negotiations, the Soviets successfully signaled their sincere intent in negotiating the CSCE by accepting a lower level of control over domestic

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[225] "Memorandum of Conversation Between Brezhnev and Ford, July 30, 1975" *FRUS*, 1969-1976, Vol XVI, Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v16/d172

[226] Snyder, 2010: 90-93.

politics. For U.S. policymakers to believe the Soviet leadership was sincere, the Soviet leadership had to demonstrate they risking their own position in order to sign an agreement.

5.4   CONCLUSION

The trend across administrations was to largely dismiss de-escalation, instead preferring to focus on military and strategic agreements. De-escalation signals were also almost always linked to other issues or negotiations in the wider bipolar relationship. In large part, signals were assessed on the basis of Soviet concessions and connections to arms control talks. During the Helsinki accords, the initial response of the Nixon administration was one of apathy, instead preferring to focus on military negotiations— such as the MBFR or SALT II. After continual Soviet pressure and demonstrating the leaderships willingness to bear costs to reach an agreement, U.S. policymakers believed Soviet reassurance signals in Helsinki.

6.0   CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I argue CST has not been able to fully explain variation in signaling outcome. In response, I advance the domestic political vulnerability theory which identifies a previously overlooked conception of cost, and incorporates both the sender and target into the signaling process. Instead of just focusing on the costs of signals, scholars and practitioners need to be aware of the subjective context in which signals are assessed. Specifically, who the target perceives will ultimately bear the costs of the signal. The preceding chapters demonstrated policymaker concern that an adversary's leadership will avoid costs and push any penalty on the state or population, thus undermining a signal's credibility. Instead, policymakers look for signs the sending leadership is directly vested in the successful outcome of the signal. Specifically, that the leadership is willing to risk its own political position to ensure that the target correctly assesses the signal. Without such guarantees, the target is unsure if the sender is genuine or attempting a bargaining maneuver.

The preceding empirical chapters demonstrated CST's inability to fully explain variation in U.S. policymaker beliefs on whether or not Soviet reassurance signals were genuine and sincere. Often, despite the Soviets sending the types of costly reassurance signals CST argues should lead to successful signaling, U.S. policymakers did not believe Soviet reassurance signals were genuine. For U.S. policymakers to believe Soviet reassurance signals were genuine, they had to perceive the Soviet leadership risked domestic political vulnerability to send the signal. In those cases, and in support of the DPV, U.S. policymakers correctly assessed Soviet signals. Thus, DPV helps explain

many of the previous limitations of CST and provides a more complete picture of the signaling process.

Additionally, the chapters demonstrated the necessity of using qualitative research to investigate the causal mechanisms of signaling and help validate many of the insights of CST. Without qualitative research, CST is left with an incomplete understanding of the signaling process and cannot explain variation in signaling outcome. In the empirical chapters, in-depth archival research was crucial to understanding both Soviet intentions in sending a reassurance signal, and the assessment of U.S. policymakers. Without closely studying the assessment process for multiple types of reassurance signals, this dissertation would not be able to identify why some signals succeeded and other failed.

6.1   KEY FINDINGS

The dissertation's first finding is that signaling is an integral and hugely important aspect of world politics. The empirical chapters demonstrate that even skeptics of signaling's effectiveness must concede its importance as a fact of world politics. As such, continuing to understand the mechanisms, conditions, and variation in signaling is important not only for IR theory but policy.

The empirical chapters demonstrated the importance of domestic political vulnerability theory in explaining U.S. policymakers correctly assessing Soviet reassurance signals. As the cases highlighted, attaching costs was often insufficient for U.S. policymakers to believe the Soviets were sending genuine reassurance signals. Often, U.S. policymakers looked beyond cost for evidence that the Soviet leadership was

302

invested in the successful outcome of the signal. DPV highlights that in addition to assessing costs, target policymakers also seek to identify who will bear the signal's costs. Thus, an important factor in signaling outcome was U.S. policymaker *perception* of Soviet leadership domestic vulnerability. To demonstrate vulnerability, the Soviet leadership had to credibly demonstrate it was reducing its control over domestic political processes by sending a reassurance signal. The Soviet leadership did this by sending signals which went against at least a section of the multiple important domestic constituencies it relied upon for support, such as the military, security agencies, or other members of the leadership. If not, U.S. policymakers often believed that the costs of any signal would be pushed off onto the state or population, leaving the Soviet leadership immune from any punishment or pain for failing to follow through on its signals. But since no political leader, much less an autocrat, would purposely risk exposing themselves to domestic instability and the potential it to spiral out of control—which makes manipulating the perception of domestic vulnerability an extremely risky and therefore unlikely strategy—is seen as a credible and costly commitment. This is a much more subjective cost assessment, however, because U.S. policymakers varied the extent to which they believed the Soviets credibly risked such vulnerability.

Importantly, the Soviet leadership could not be seen as reducing its control too much, otherwise U.S. policymakers believed there was a chance the Soviet leadership would be overthrown and any policies reversed. In those situations, demonstrating too much domestic vulnerability actually undermined the credibility of the signal by reducing the target's belief that the sender will be in power long enough to follow through on their signal. For example, the 1988 troop reduction case demonstrated how U.S. policymakers

believed Gorbachev, while sending a genuine reassurance signal, had overextended his position and risked overthrow from the military and hardline members of the Soviet leadership. While policymakers recognized Gorbachev's sincerity, they discounted any long-term change in Soviet intentions due to the likelihood of Gorbachev being overthrown and the USSR returning to its aggressive policies of confrontation. The Soviet leadership also could not be perceived as being *forced* into sending reassurance signals due to an already weakened domestic political situation. As many of the cases in the Eisenhower administration demonstrated, Secretary of State Dulles often discounted Soviet signals because he believed a weakened position forced the Soviets into sending reassurance signals. If the sender is only trying to signal reassurance because they have no other option or are backed in a corner, then by definition the sender is not risking anything and the signal cannot be believed as anything than a last resort.

Despite the evidence in support of the domestic political vulnerability thesis, it did not perform perfectly in all cases. In the case of the BPA, the Nixon administration almost completely discounted the signal despite Soviet efforts to demonstrate the leadership was risking domestic political vulnerability. In other cases, there was some support for the alternative dispositional and face-to-face hypotheses. Disposition often played an important role in whether or not U.S. policymaker believed Soviet signals, although disposition was largely limited to negative conditions of dismissing and ignoring Soviet signals since they conflicted with pre-existing dispositional assessments. Although not as strong, there was some evidence that face-to-face interactions between leaders contributed to a greater willingness to believe the other was genuine, and that the signal was sincere. But perhaps most importantly, the evidence from multiple cases

showed U.S. policymaker belief in the sincerity of signals did not automatically lead to an updating of intentions. For example, in 1960, U.S. policymakers believed Khrushchev's large troop reduction signal as genuine, but remained wary of Soviet intentions. Therefore, there is some evidence to support the signaling skeptics arguments that states are more hesitant about trusting an adversary's intentions.

6.2   SCOPE OF THEORY AND LIMITATIONS

As described in the theory chapter, there are several scope conditions and limitations that restrict its generalizability.[1] First, the cases only deal with democratic policymaker interpretation of an autocratic regime, and one dyad from one time period. While there was slight variation in the nature of the autocratic regime, due to the different ruling styles of each Soviet leader, the cases only dealt with how democratic policymakers understood autocratic signals. Therefore, the conclusions from the empirical study cannot state whether or not the same findings are applicable to autocratic assessment of democracies. Simply stated, the conclusions from this dissertation only apply to democratic policymaker assessment of autocratic signals.

Second, while methodologically it made sense to limit the universe of cases to the Cold War and between the superpowers (see Chapter One), the ability of the findings to translate into other time periods or cases is circumscribed. Additionally, since all signaling cases occurred between two states in a bipolar system, it is unclear how well the

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[1] This tradeoff was described in the methodology section. In order to gain a better understanding of the causal mechanisms and the conditions of signaling, generalizability was sacrificed to allow for greater study of the specific conditions and variables of interest.

findings translate into other systemic conditions. This is true for the post-Cold War era as well, since the dissertation cannot conclusively state whether or not the domestic political vulnerability theory is relevant to signaling between great and lesser powers.

Third, this dissertation only examined reassurance signals during peacetime. As such, more research is required to validate the findings of the domestic political vulnerability theory to crisis signaling. One of the main reasons is speed. Reassurance signals during peacetime are generally conducted without the added pressures of a shortened timeline. They are meant to signal longer term intentions instead of resolve on an immediate issue with a high potential for escalation. Due to this, reassurance signals often have the added benefit of allowing each side to interact and follow up on the signal, such as diplomatic exchanges to reinforce the intended message. In the same way, policymakers are granted more time to analyze, debate, and ultimately assess the sender's signal. Whereas in crises policymakers are forced to make quick decisions with less time to analyze or debate.

6.3   IMPLICATIONS FOR CST AND IR THEORY

This dissertation has several implications and findings for CST and IR theory more broadly. As described before, one of the biggest findings is the importance of studying both the sender and target. As the empirical chapters demonstrated, policymakers subjectively view costs. Additionally, these costs are not viewed in isolation and influenced by other factors beyond what CST argues. As a result, scholars cannot understand why similar signals work in some situations and not others without

studying target policymakers and the possible subjective context of assessments. This means scholars have to be more willing to look inside the state for the sources of signaling success or failure. As the domestic political vulnerability theory argues, this includes inside the sending state as well.

In order to achieve these various prescriptions, CST needs to be willing to incorporate a greater use of qualitative methodologies to focus attention and research on the causal mechanisms and actual operation of signaling. As described previously, scholarship has primarily relied on quantitative methodologies, which while important, cannot give the nuance and detail required to understand how signaling works in practice. In order to dive into the black box of the state and uncover how signaling operates, CST should utilize qualitative methodology, archival research, and in-depth case studies to complement and validate many of the insights CST already provides.

The empirical chapters also demonstrated that not all reassurance signaling strategies are equally effective, separate from the findings of the domestic political vulnerability theory. The most effective reassurance signals were tying hands signals of strategic arms control negotiations. Strategic arms control negotiations were the most important and significant signals to U.S. policymakers. However, even significant concessions, such as the May 10th proposal, did not always lead to correct assessment. SALT II negotiations also demonstrated how a change of administration or policymakers could influence the assessment of Soviet signals. The Carter administration came into office convinced further concessions could be gained and ignored how extensive and significant Soviet concessions under the Nixon and Ford administrations had already

been. Nevertheless, when tying hands signals were correctly assessed, they had the largest and most lasting impact on relations.

Sinking cost signals through troop reductions were successfully assessed a majority of the time. U.S. policymakers, however, were less likely to believe that reductions signaled a significant demonstration or change in Soviet intentions. In most cases, the presence of nuclear weapons influenced how U.S. policymakers believed Soviet signals and, in many cases, thought the reductions actually made the Soviet military more effective on a nuclear battlefield. This was a somewhat counterintuitive finding. First, CST argues such large and visible signals should be correctly assessed and lead to an updating of Soviet intentions. Additionally, U.S. policymakers often explicitly stated they would view Soviet troop reductions as a credible reassurance signal (especially because it was the USSR's largest military advantage).

Finally, de-escalating risk agreements were the least successful. Not only were U.S. policymakers more likely to not believe Soviet signals using this strategy, even successful assessments were influenced by U.S. policymaker perception of what they wanted out of the agreements without spending sufficient time or attention on what the agreements actually meant to each side. The agreements were often viewed as of secondary importance (such as in the case of the BPA which escaped most of the administration's attention until the signing in Moscow), or only until U.S. policymakers believed they could gain significant concessions or as leverage on other issues (such as the successful case of the Helsinki Accords which initially held little interest for Kissinger and Ford).

This dissertation also has a number of implications for IR theory more broadly. First, the empirical chapters showed how difficult it is to demonstrate benign intentions to an adversary. This provides some support to signaling skeptics arguments on the difficulty of signaling intentions. That is not to say signaling intentions is impossible, many of the cases showed there was a connection between assessment and an updating of Soviet intentions (such as SALT II), but that it may be more difficult than CST scholars has previously accepted. Indeed, the empirical chapters demonstrate great powers can and do signal intentions to one another. But it is often circumscribed and short lived, with global events and domestic changes—such as the change in policymakers—influencing the long-term understanding of an adversary's intentions.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The dissertation has several implications for policy and policymakers. Policymakers should be aware of the context and subjective nature in which they are assessing an adversary's reassurance signals. As a target policymaker, it is important to consider the possibility the sender believes it is sending a costly signal, but may not appear costly to the target due to differences in political or security contexts. That is, is the cost of the signal genuinely costly from the sender's point of view? What is costly to a leader in a democracy, and therefore more recognizable to a democratic politician, is not necessarily the same to an autocratic leader. As Joshua Kertzer, Brian Rathbun and Nina Rathbun argue, "Successful signaling therefore requires knowing something about

the orientations of the signal's recipient."[2] The same goes for the target understanding the orientations of the sender. Therefore, policymakers should be aware of the political environment autocratic leaders operate in, and the particular political constituencies they rely on for support.

Additionally, policymakers should be careful to focus on the issue of the signal, and not peripheral issues or concerns. A significant finding of the dissertation was how often U.S. policymakers linked issue areas together. Most notably Nixon and Kissinger's strategy of "linkage," hoping for leverage in one area to force concessions in another. However, when the USSR attempted to link multiple issues together, the U.S. rejected any attempt to combine issues or discussions. Linking issues together can often create resentment from the target and an unwillingness to follow through on its reassurance signal since linkage can be understood as the target not treating the signal as a serious issue. Or, perhaps more damaging, the sender will view the target as an aggressive state attempting to gain bargaining advantage. This could undermine the target's willingness to continue sending reassurance signals or establishing a more cooperative relationship. Therefore, policymakers need to be measured in their expectations of what they can credibly hope to gain and what can be offered through reassurance signals. As this dissertation demonstrates, too large of a reassurance signal can weaken the sender and make them a victim of their own domestic constituencies.

The empirical chapters also demonstrate great powers are less interested in agreements on general guidelines of acceptable conduct or standards of behavior, such as

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[2] Kertzer, Joshua D., Brian C. Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun. "The Price of Peace: Motivated Reasoning and Costly Signaling in International Relations." *International Organization*, 74, no. 1 (2020): 95.

the BPA and to a lesser extent the Helsinki Accords. Instead, U.S. policymakers at least, were more interested in agreements with clear standards, limits, and quantifiable guidelines, such as strategic arms control. When it came to discussions on broader agreements of conduct, each side tended to focus or emphasize the section which best suited their interested and preferred understanding. For example, U.S. policymakers only became interested in the BPA and Helsinki Accords because they believed it would help achieve other policy objectives.

6.5   FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several avenues where future scholarship can build off the insights of this dissertation. One obvious next step is to investigate whether or not the domestic political vulnerability theory applies to crisis situations. A significant amount of recent research has focused on the issue of credibility, reputation, and specific leader attributes in crises.[3] In the future, scholars should look to see whether or not demonstrations of domestic political vulnerability also can signal resolve. Another avenue is studying reassurance signals in a crisis. Since this dissertation studied reassurance signals during peacetime, the next step is to investigate whether or not the findings are applicable to efforts of senders to de-escalate and signal reassurance during a conflict.

Another area which can benefit from further research is signaling strategy. This dissertation demonstrated variation across signaling strategies, and that some were more

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[3] Robert Jervis, Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Don Casler, "Redefining the Debate Over Reputation and Credibility in International Security," *World Politics* 73, no. 1 (2021): 167-203.

or less successful. Some recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of signaling strategy, including identifying potential new methods.[4] There is still much unknown, however, about the efficacy of strategies depending on situations and conditions. This means there is the potential to understand what strategies work better in reassurance situations versus crisis conditions.

As noted previously, much is left unknown regarding the relationship of signaling between great and weaker powers. Subsequent research can examine a number of questions on how effective reassurance signaling is between two vastly different powers. For example, can weaker powers signal benign intentions to a greater power? Scholars have investigated how smaller states are victorious over stronger powers, but there is less attention to how a smaller state could signal a willingness to reduce tensions and enter into a more cooperative relationship. Or conversely, can a great power signal reassurance to a weaker power?

Emerging technologies also provide multiple potential research opportunities for scholars, with clear and relevant policy implications. Many scholars and practitioners are rightly concerned with how emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, will affect a host of issues like combat, offering opportunities for research into how these technologies will affect signaling.[5] For example, will the ability of private actors to erode government secrecy affect the capabilities or willingness of states to reveal private

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[4] Keren Yarhi-Milo, Joshua D. Kertzer, and Jonathan Renshon, "Tying Hands, Sinking Costs, and Leader Attributes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 10 (2018): 2150-2179; Kay Quek, "Four Costly Signaling Mechanisms," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021): 537-549.

[5] Horowitz, Michael C. "Do Emerging Military Technologies Matter for International Politics?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (2020): 393.

information as costly signal?[6] What are the implications of artificial intelligence

identifying and assessing an adversaries signals? Will it increase successful signaling

outcomes by correctly recognizing costs, or will it ignore the nuances and context which

is so crucial to correctly understanding an adversary's attempts at communication?

      Cyber issues continue to be one of the largest growth areas in IR research.

Scholars are beginning to look into the implications of cyber on signaling, and whether

the attribution issues are so insurmountable that successful signaling is possible. Some

scholars recognize the limitations, but believe it is possible for states to send signals in

cyberspace.[7] Others, are more skeptical. There are simply too many issues related to

attribution, they argue, and the target can never be sure who is sending the signal.[8]

Regardless of effectiveness, states continue to interact, communicate, and signal through

cyberspace. There are plenty of pages yet to be written.

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[6] Lin-Greenberg, Theor Milonopoulos, "Private Eyes in the Sky: Emerging Technology and the Political Consequences of Eroding Government Secrecy," *Journal of Conflict Resolutio*n 65, no 6 (2021): 1067-1097.
[7] Borghard, Erica D. "The 'Known Unknowns' of Russian Cyber Signaling," *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 2, 2018.Welburn, Jonatha, Justin Grana, and Karen Schwindt, "Cyber Deterrence or: How We Learned To Stop Worrying and Love the Signal," *RAND* (July 2019) Rovner, Joshua, "Cyberwar as an Intelligence Contest," *War on the Rocks*, September 16, 2019.
[8] Jensen, Benjamin. "What a U.S. Operation Shows About the Limits of Coercion in Cyberspace," *War on the Rocks*, June 20, 2019; Buchannan, Ben. *The Hacker and the State: Cyber Attacks and the New Normal of Geopolitics*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

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8.0   APPENDIX A: UNIVERSE OF CASES

CASE	YEAR	INTERPRETATION	SITUATION
Malenkov Statement and Stalin's Death	1953	Successful	Reassurance
End of Korean War	1953	Successful	Reassurance
Austrian State Treaty	1955	Successful	Reassurance
Unilateral Troop Cuts	1955	Failed	Reassurance
Unilateral Troop Cuts	1956	Failed	Reassurance
Unilateral Troop Cuts	1958	Failed	Reassurance
Unilateral Troop Cuts	1960	Failed	Reassurance
Laos Neutrality Agreement	1962	Successful	Reassurance
Limited Test Ban Treaty	1963	Successful	Reassurance
Ousting of Khrushchev	1964	Successful	Reassurance
Glassboro Summit	1967	Successful	Reassurance
Non-Proliferation Treaty	1968	Successful	Reassurance
Four Powers Agreement on Berlin	1971	Successful	Reassurance
SALT I (Interim Agreement and ABM)	1972	Successful	Reassurance
Basic Principals Agreement	1972	Failed	Reassurance
Agreement on Prevention of Nuclear War	1973	Failed	Reassurance
Vladivostok Talks	1974	Successful	Reassurance
Helsinki Act	1975	Successful	Reassurance
MBFR Talks	1976, 78 Proposals	Failed	Reassurance
SALT II	1979	Failed	Reassurance
Withdraw from INF Negotiations	1983	Failed	Reassurance
Withdraw from START Negotiations	1983	Failed	Reassurance
Reykjavík Summit	1986	Successful	Reassurance
INF Treaty	1987	Successful	Reassurance
Domestic Soviet Reforms	1987-1988	Successful	Reassurance

370

CASE	YEAR	INTERPRETATION	SITUATION
Withdrawal from Afghanistan	1988	Successful	Reassurance
Unilateral Troop Reductions	1988	Successful	Reassurance
Cease Nuclear Testing	1988	Successful	Reassurance
Renounce Brezhnev Doctrine	1989	Successful	Reassurance