

The Rise and Fall of Detente

The Question: What caused the rise and the fall of détente?

The Background: Détente was a period in the early 1970s when the United States and the Soviet Union emphasized negotiation over confrontation and sought to find a way to manage the competition without unnecessary confrontation.

One Secondary Source: Vladislav Zubok that Leonid Brezhnev was crucial to the onset of détente, that he highly valued peace, that he was willing to make substantial concessions to gain peace and that he had the political skill as a mediator within the Soviet leadership to make it happen. Zubok later says that détente fell because of ideology and domestic politics, that neither side was willing to give up the “bargaining from a position of strength” necessary to make it work

MY ARGUMENT

I believe a balance of power theory offers a better explanation for the rise of détente. Once both sides had an assured retaliatory capability and the fundamental sites of tension between the two sides had been rendered less critical, it was in the interests of both sides to look to other to stabilize the status quo and minimize the costs and risks of the competition. The two sides were able to solve some of the remaining issues separating the two, but the competition remained. Meanwhile, domestic interests on both sides of the cold war interested in maintaining a strategy of “peace through strength” used the remaining differences between the two powers in order to undermine détente,

Review: The Soviets in 1968



The Soviets build up nuclear weapons to have an assured retaliatory strike, and pursuing an expensive strategy to fight war in Europe

Brezhnev had been worried NATO would intervene in Czechoslovakia

Becomes more confident both in own abilities and in firmness of spheres of influence

Soviet concerns about the revolutionary policies of China that might destabilize the system

Soviet concerns about the economy, about the cost of the arms race and about the possibilities of trade with West

Soviets want recognition of East Germany and the implied recognition of equality as a great power

Review: The United States in 1968



Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger pride themselves on realist vision

The US recognizes the Soviet Union has an assured retaliatory capability, and is pushing an expensive strategy to be able to fight a war in Europe

The US accepts Soviet domination of Eastern Europe as, for the moment, irreversible, but not ready to declare this publicly because of German allies

The US is bogged down in an unwinnable war in Vietnam

The breakdown of the US popular consensus for containment reduces US ability to respond to crises elsewhere

US concerned that revolutionary politics in China might destabilize the system

LINKAGE POLITICS <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAhDQxPHvP0>



West Germany helps make it possible

Willy Brandt—former Mayor of Berlin

Understands a position of strength won't bring Germans together

Hopes to do it through negotiation

Willing to make concessions

Accepts Polish boundaries to German

Accepts that West Berlin not a part of West Germany

This opens the way for both Soviet Union and the US to move further



China: Nixon's Strategic Triangle

Mao begins the Cultural Revolution-1966

An attack on Chinese party and state institutions

Chinese Soviet relations deteriorate

Ideological: Hyperrevolution vrs. Mature Stalinism

Debates about "illegal treaties" and territorial disputes

Huge Soviet build-up of conventional forces on the border

Skirmishes on an island in the Amur -1969

Both China and the Soviet Union seek assurances from the United States

Nixon-Surprise visit to China in 1972

Nixon also asks China on help to Vietnam

Vietnam under Nixon

Wants a "Decent Interval" to assure credibility

"Vietnamization": troops down to 39,000 by 1973

Increases pressure: heavy bombing, invasion of Cambodia

Soviets agree to help, though not clear how much influence they had

1973: US withdraws

1975: North Vietnam overruns South Vietnam

The Fruits of Detente

ARMS CONTROL

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) 1968 (Johnson)

Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT I). 1972

Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) 1972

TRADE

US increases sales of technology, grain to USSR

SYMBOLIC BENEFITS: The Basic Principles

Nixon and Kissinger tell the Soviets that they have no interest in changing the Soviet system, and support Brandt in recognizing East Germany.

Linkage?

Soviet Union avoids conflicts that might disrupt détente

1972: US bombs Vietnam just before Nixon visit to Moscow

1973: Soviets hint to United States that Egypt will attack Israel

US capitalizes on Yom Kippur War to isolate USSR from Egypt

Détente continues anyway

Human Rights

Soviets quietly increase number of Jews allowed to leave

Soviets send famous dissidents to the West rather than prison or psychiatric wards

The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki, 1974

FIRST BASKET: Security arrangements:

Renunciation of any change in boundaries by force.

This is the recognition that Soviets wanted and worked hard to attain.

SECOND BASKET: Trade arrangements

THIRD BASKET: Human Rights

Agree to Freedom of Speech, Association, Movement

Soviets assumed they could ignore this part

But local dissidents use it: Polish Letter of 69, Charter 77, Helsinki Monitoring Group

The Competition Continues

Nixon and Brandt leave office

Two different conceptions of Détente

US: A means to moderate Soviet actions in the Third World

Expected moderation

USSR: A reflection of Soviet strength

Expected expansion, esp. in Africa

Arms race continues despite agreements

Soviet military want to continue build-up

US hardliners in Congress want to continue build-up

US Domestic Politics and the Role of Human Rights

Nixon and Kissinger are realists: More interested in détente than human rights

Still, they get some quiet deals improving human rights

Opponents of détente use human rights to discredit détente

Why human rights a political winner: Brings liberals, conservatives in

Conservatives: Don't like communism, want to portray it as bad as possible

Liberals: Like human rights

Jackson-Vanik Amendment: Henry Jackson looking for way to destroy detente

Limits trade with USSR unless publicly allows Jews to emigrate

Soviet Union says no

Negative response to Helsinki Third Act: Arguments that Soviets not following it

Third World Struggles

- ▶ USSR and Cubans—
 - ▶ Angola
 - ▶ Somalia and Ethiopia
- ▶ Different perceptions
 - ▶ USSR—strength moves competition outside the center
 - ▶ US—détente was supposed to stop such competition

The Carter Administration

- ▶ In the 1976 election, détente is a dirty word
- ▶ The Carter administration says it wants to reduce nuclear weapons
 - ▶ Tears up a proposal for SALT II, offers a new proposal that reduces weapons, but mostly Soviet weapons, and Soviets reject it angrily
- ▶ The Carter Administration says it wants to pursue human rights
 - ▶ But its record is ambivalent: very good in Latin America; poor in Iran
- ▶ Carter and Afghanistan