

**Gerald R. Ford and Vladivostok: A Study in Foreign Policy  
Formation**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

March 31, 2017

Advised by Professor John Carson

*For my parents, Todd and Laurie.  
Without their support, none of this would have been possible.*

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## Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank my advisor, Professor John Carson. Without his gentle encouragement, insight to my different arguments and ever-developing ideas, and constant support, I could not have produced this thesis. John's role as an advisor and a mentor impacted my development as a student of history and the development of my thesis from the first day of this project until the last.

I would like to thank Archivist Stacy Davis and the staff at the Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, MI for their consistent and in depth explanations of President Ford and their efforts to help with my research throughout my project's development. I would like to the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland for their professional courtesy and help managing their archival systems. Special thanks go out to Dr. Mary Curry with the National Security Archive at George Washington University for her earnest support of my research before, during, and after my visit there.

To the other History thesis writers and my formal and informal writing groups, thank you for the feedback and the commiseration throughout this process.

Without the unwavering support of my parents, Laurie and Todd Stone, and the guidance of my brother, Andy Stone, I would have lost my way long ago.

To my wonderful friends, especially Courtney Shier and Graham Steffens, thank you for putting up with me through the ups and downs this 14 month-long project. Your support kept me motivated during the tough days and you pushed me forward whenever I needed to keep going.

## Introduction

“Military strength alone is not sufficient. Effective diplomacy is also essential in preventing conflict, in building world understanding.”<sup>1</sup> President Gerald R. Ford’s goal at his first State of the Union (SOTU) address on January 15<sup>th</sup> 1975 was to facilitate a new understanding of what his foreign policy would be in the following two years. This quote helps give insight into how he approached the previous five months of foreign policy relations and how he saw the path forward unfolding. Expressing a desire for internationalism and inter-state cooperation while the international economic environment worsened and the deep-lying tensions of the Cold War remained, Ford’s stated goals were an honest representation of his attempts to craft a foreign policy platform as president. By expressly declaring his desires for international cooperation in his State of the Union speech, Ford directed viewers to the idea that he would continue his predecessor’s policy concerning much of the international geopolitical theatre, especially his policy of détente with the Soviet Union (USSR). Ford’s approach to international relations did not begin with the State of the Union speech, and these foreign policy directives were not created and implemented over the long span of time that Ford had graced public office, but rather during the five months since he had taken office. The Vladivostok summit—concerning the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks Two (SALT II) with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev—that took place in November 1974, was key in the formation and implementation of Ford’s foreign policy and is the subject of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *State of the Union Address, January 15, 1975*. Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library. <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/750028.htm>.

After spending 24 years in Congress as a Representative from the Fifth District of Michigan, Gerald Ford entered the office of the President of the United States on August 9, 1974. He immediately took on the responsibilities of his predecessor in an unprecedented situation. Not only was President Ford the only President not popularly elected to the presidency or vice presidency before his assumption of the Oval Office, but he also had to deal with the legacies, both positive and negative alike, left behind by President Nixon. As Ford discusses in his memoir, *A Time To Heal*, he perceived that the nation desperately needed to recover when he became president. Rocked by the resignation of the Vice President and the President within a calendar year and the highly publicized Watergate Scandal, the office of the Presidency and the executive branch of the government were in the midst of a crisis unlike any that came before. Similarly, President Lyndon B. Johnson's policies concerning expansion of both social welfare and military spending, largely unchanged by Nixon, brought issues of Stagflation and an oil crisis to America, leading to a strong economic downturn. Amidst issues of economic recovery and reformation of the presidential image, Ford also had to deal with the massive wake left behind by Nixon's foreign policy. NATO alliances, relations with the Soviet Union, Middle Eastern nation-states, oil concerns, Chinese-American relations, and the Vietnam conflict were all weighty issues facing a President who was more known for his role as a Representative from Michigan's Fifth District rather than his time as Vice President. As observed from his trips to Asia and the Soviet Union in the winter of 1974, American relations with China, Japan, and especially the Soviet Union were prominent in Ford's initial forays into foreign policy. Dealing with the foreign policy projects of his predecessor was a tall task even for an experienced politician such as Ford.

Ford was unprepared for the extensive policy issues facing him on an international front despite his two decades of experience in Congress because during his time as a U.S. Representative, Ford largely dealt with domestic issues, not foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Ford concerned himself with the issues relevant to his hometown district in western Michigan and stayed well within Republican Party lines on issues of international policy while remaining broadly invested in an internationalist understanding of world politics. Similarly, as Vice President, he supported Nixon's policy initiatives without crafting his own ideas on foreign policy, to better maintain the appearances of a cohesive executive branch. Not until he entered the presidency himself did he have to truly expand his focus on foreign policy and craft his own understandings of the geopolitical role of the United States.

Although he had to craft his first foreign policy initiatives while in office, Ford's understandings of geopolitics before he entered the executive branch of government were strongly shaped by the events of World War Two, from which he "...came back a converted internationalist."<sup>3</sup> Ford's experiences in the Pacific Theater, serving on the USS Monterey from 1943 to 1945, helped craft his understandings of the necessity of cooperation in foreign affairs that would follow him throughout his time in Congress and as President. Another organization that may have had an influence on Ford's internationalist tendencies was the Freemasons. Ford became a Mason in 1949 and was elected to the position "Honorary Grand Master of the International Supreme Council" in 1975 while he was President. It is unclear how influential the Masons were on Ford's

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford* (New York: Times Books. 2007). Pp. 14-30.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Kunhardt Jr., "Gerald R. Ford: Healing the Nation," in *The American Presidency* by Philip Kunhardt Jr., (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), pp. 79.

worldview, but their views on cooperation and mutual support of one another likely reinforced Ford's own views on the collective necessity to strive for peace and cooperation internationally.

Ford's focus on domestic issues during his Congressional career left him at a massive disadvantage when compared to his predecessor at the start of his term; Nixon was a Cold War-Warrior who grew in Congress and the Vice Presidency under Eisenhower through forays into foreign policy. Experiences in both the Legislature and the Executive before he became President prepared Nixon for his extensive foreign policy directives while he was in office, and he was undoubtedly more prepared for the role than Ford was in August 1974. Relations with the Soviet Union alone were a series of extremely complicated issues that informed one another. Ford needed to learn the complexities of trade policy, defense, nuclear armament, issues with Soviet Jewry, and how the Soviets understood their role on an international scale. While focusing on Soviet understandings of these issues, Ford also needed to understand the diverse set of influential positions in American politics concerning the same issues. While he may have had an idea of the general climate of Soviet-U.S. foreign relations, Ford's training in foreign politics was minimal before his entrance into the West Wing. Even after his ascension to the Vice Presidency, he likely did not have much interaction with defense programs or the SALT II talks undertaken by Nixon and his staff in early summer 1974. Subsequently, Ford relied heavily on a staff that was carried over from the Nixon administration to understand the technical issues surrounding policy negotiations, current foreign developments, and to shape his international policy.



Ford had many choices when it came to the paths that his predecessor started down in terms of foreign policy, from relations with China to the Vietnam Conflict to the Arab-Israeli Conflict to relations with the Soviet Union. His letter to General Secretary Brezhnev on the day of his inauguration signaled his intention to continue relations with the Soviet Union in a manner similar to President Nixon before him. While this initial letter could have acted as political window dressing, Ford backed up his words with action. Ford chose to focus on strengthening détente with the Soviet Union as his first significant foreign policy initiative likely due to the inertia present in the Soviet-American relations as he took office and because of his own political understandings. Nixon signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) in 1972 and was beginning negotiations for a follow-up treaty before he resigned in the summer of 1974, and his other interactions with the USSR fostered hope for a relaxation of tensions between the two nations. Ford's assumption of the idea of détente and the process of reduction of nuclear arms followed his own predilection for cooperation and his internationalist views on America's role in the world.<sup>4</sup> The main attempts to further détente were consistent with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Nixon's prior attempts to deal with the USSR, but with Ford leading the American delegation rather than Nixon. This shift in personalities would prove influential before, during, and after the negotiations occurred at Vladivostok; Ford greatly influenced the discussions of SALT II and Soviet-American relations as a whole during his presidency.

The summit in Vladivostok, USSR contained multiple moments where Ford demonstrated his lack of diplomatic experience and his business-like demeanor hindered

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Kunhardt Jr., *The American Presidency: Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 79–85.

progress in the talks. Effectively led by General Secretary Brezhnev and Secretary Kissinger, the delegations' approach to the summit was one of compromise and cooperation in favor of increasing peace in the world. Ford's personality allowed him to quickly establish a cordial, working relationship with Brezhnev, but his tendency to approach issues directly conflicted with the often slow, compromise based approach to international diplomacy. While his understanding of international politics progressed during the summit, his most noteworthy addition to the SALT II negotiations was his explicit declaration in favor of strengthening the policy of détente with the Soviet Union that his predecessor began.

The discussions at Vladivostok led to a series of provisional agreements that the two delegations hoped would lead to a permanent SALT II treaty. The two sides agreed to place a limit on the number of ICBMs, submarine launched missiles, and heavy bombers and the number of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), over the period from 1975-1985. The United States and the Soviet Union both made concessions to come to this agreement, but the Soviets took the largest steps towards an agreement at Vladivostok. Partially because of Kissinger's shrewd negotiating skills and partially because of Ford's ability to foster faith in the process of strengthening détente, the U.S. delegation left Vladivostok hopeful that they had the foundations of an agreement that would foster a relaxation of the arms-race buildup and be passed in the Democrat-controlled Senate.

While Ford's decision to continue down the path of détente followed logic present in his administration and in his political views, he did little to prepare the American public for his actions. Ford had a tremendous amount of responsibility to a

constituency roughly 1,000 times larger than the Fifth District of Michigan, and he did not explain his actions or their motivating forces clearly enough to help quell the concerns that his constituents had.<sup>5</sup> Ford articulated what he was trying to accomplish at Vladivostok to the American people only after the delegation left and returned from the summit and after the provisional agreements were made. Without truly explaining the motivating factors behind the administration's actions and the effects of the provisional agreement, Ford's administration allowed for confusion and debate in Congress, the media, and the American people to surround the agreements at Vladivostok. The debate surrounding SALT II in America and a shift in the Soviet negotiating position, created difficult circumstances for negotiations and hindered their progress until negotiations with the Soviet Union became an untenable political situation for Ford during the 1976 election season. Ultimately, the negotiations were not finished while Ford was in office, leaving SALT II's completion to his successor, Jimmy Carter.

The debate surrounding President Ford and his foreign policy is one largely concerned with his ineffectiveness and inability to complete policy directives or enact effective measures concerning America's international presence. Books that focus on Ford's presidency and his foreign policy have a general understanding that other than the Helsinki Accords of 1975 and the end of the war in Vietnam, his foreign policy initiatives found limited success. One influential biography of President Ford by Douglas Brinkley discusses Ford's development throughout his life and especially during his time as President. Brinkley's evaluation of Ford largely remains positive in his biography – likely

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<sup>5</sup> According to U.S. Census data, the Fifth District in Michigan contained roughly 200,000 people in 1970, while America had over 205 million citizens. Further census data can be found at: <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>

because of his personal connections to Ford.<sup>6</sup> Brinkley discusses the major accomplishments and difficulties of Ford's Vice Presidency and Presidency and gives valuable insight to any study of Ford through a series of interviews with him before his death. Brinkley's inclusion of these interviews in his biography allows the reader to gain an understanding of Ford's perception of his presidency through the lens of time. While many of his initiatives did not have direct effects on the geopolitical theatre, Ford plays a role in a larger story of the diplomatic history of the United States, especially concerning his desires to continue détente and foster worldwide political and economic openness.<sup>7</sup>

Mixed understandings of Ford and his foreign policy point to the mixed legacy that his foreign endeavors left behind after his presidency. While a majority of opinions recognize the immediate failures of Ford's attempts to craft foreign policy in regards to the Soviet Union, historians are conflicted over the long-term effects of those policy initiatives. Often books covering the period of time when the policy of détente began under Nixon to its erosion under Carter and Reagan largely skip over the time that Ford spent in office and most of his foreign policy initiatives. When they do focus on Ford, his interactions with the Soviet Union take center stage. While his contemporaries often skewered Ford for his negotiations with the Soviet Union on a number of issues, pieces

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<sup>6</sup> Brinkley held extensive interviews with an aging President Ford in March of 2003 for his biography, during which time he developed a personal bond to the President (Brinkley had also previously interviewed President Ford in 1998 and 2000) Brinkley's work was also reviewed and approved by the authorized biographer of President Ford, James Cannon. The personal interviews and support of the authorized biographer indicate a writing process that was strongly shaped by President Ford, including influences that could have clouded Brinkley's ability to produce a more objective evaluation of President Ford.

<sup>7</sup> For an economically focused history of the United States and its diplomacy, see: William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: Verso Books, 2011).

Williams focuses on the development of three eras in American history to tell the story of America and its development: Mercantilism, Laissez nous Faire, and Corporation Capitalism. It is the third of these eras that Ford falls into, but William's book was originally written in 1961 so there is no mention of the 38<sup>th</sup> President in his book, rather growth of the individualistic, capitalist economic system of which Ford and other conservatives of the 1960s and 70s were ardent supporters.

written since the fall of the Soviet Union have often viewed Ford in a softer light. As Dick Cheney noted in 1993: “At Vladivostok... President Ford and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev engaged in very tough negotiations. ...Although the agreement was never ratified, it has provided the basis for a stable, nuclear balance for the world for the past fifteen years.”<sup>8</sup>

Many accounts like Cheney’s, including John Robert Greene who said the agreements at Vladivostok should have satisfied many critics of the arms negotiations and David Gergen who said “Ford, however, deserves more credit...” for his foreign policy than many give him, express positive sentiments about Ford’s foreign policy. While focusing on the long lasting effects of Ford’s actions, they leave much of the discussion of Ford’s overall internationalist agenda and its implementation while he was in office out of their evaluations.<sup>9</sup> Biographers like Douglas Brinkley and James Cannon take even more sympathetic views when evaluating Ford’s legacy, but offer valuable insight into the personal character of Gerald Ford—important for grounding the story of Ford and Brezhnev’s personal relationship. Critics of Ford like Jussi Hanhimäki often cite Kissinger’s overriding influence on Ford’s foreign policy platform and the administration’s inability to produce much of tangible policy with the USSR as the main failings of the Ford presidency.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Dick Cheney, “The Ford Presidency in Perspective”, in *Gerald R. Ford and the Politics of Post-Watergate America*, vol. 1, Edited by Bernard J. Firestone and Alexej Ugruinsky, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp. 5.

<sup>9</sup> John Robert Green, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1995).

David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership Nixon to Clinton*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 125.

<sup>10</sup> For pieces by Hanhimäki, see: Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013) and Jussi M.

This study, however, attempts to capture Ford's internationalist tendencies, relationship with Brezhnev and the USSR, the difficult domestic political environment, Ford's mishandling of SALT II at home, as well as Ford's foreign policy legacy by discussing the events surrounding Vladivostok in detail. By taking a comprehensive look at Ford's first major foreign policy endeavor, one can see both his inexperience in diplomacy and his genuine desire to further détente with the USSR, as well as the long term effects of his relationship with the Soviet Union while president.

Throughout his first five months in office, Ford practiced, and publicly expressed a desire to practice, a foreign agenda with a focus on cooperation, which he understood to be "...a vital factor of our lives today."<sup>11</sup> Ford operated under the assumption that diplomacy was a fundamental part of creating understanding and fostering peace in the world, and it formed the basis of his foreign policy platform. His understandings of the geopolitical climate were publicly expressed two months after the Vladivostok summit and they represented Ford's foreign policy initiatives. Because of his dearth of experience on a global scale, he formed his understandings of foreign policy largely through preparing for and executing the Vladivostok summit.

By studying the events surrounding Vladivostok, one can gain insight into the many factors that play into international diplomacy and gain a greater appreciation for the political climate Ford found himself in as president and how he attempted to maneuver in it. From Ford's initial attempts to understand the issues surrounding a SALT II agreement—from Brezhnev's sometimes abrasive personality to technical details on

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Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *State Of The Union*, 1975.

different nuclear launchers and warheads—the magnitude of the SALT II project is clear, and Ford had little time to prepare for it. He also had to deal with an unruly domestic political situation in which he faced resistance on his domestic and foreign policy initiatives. The summit focused on creating the provisions for a difficult nuclear arms agreement, rather than operating as a meet-and-greet, meaning that Ford and Brezhnev needed to simultaneously create a base from which they could work and tackle difficult issues surrounding a nuclear arms agreement. Finally, the contentious political environment that Ford left to negotiate with the Soviets greeted him and his provisional agreements with criticism, debate, and confusion upon his return from Vladivostok. Ford's response to the criticism surrounding the provisional agreements that he hoped would become the basis for SALT II did not do enough to quell the concerns of many. Combined with a shifting political environment in the USSR, pushback in domestic American politics created a situation in which SALT II became a less vital issue for Ford, an issue he was willing to let pass until he when he thought he could handle it—during his second term. As previously mentioned, his defeat in the 1976 election passed along the SALT II issue to Carter, who also had issues when attempting to bring an agreement back to the American people.

Though Ford entered office under particularly unfavorable circumstances, he handled them with varying degrees of success. His handling of domestic issues and maneuvering in the domestic political environment in America was often quite poor, but his foreign policy initiatives ended with both positive and negative outcomes. The discussions over SALT II at Vladivostok and the events surrounding them are one example of those mixed results. While Ford prepared over a span of four months for the

negotiations, the summit itself was not an easy series of events. Though agreeing on a limit of 2,400 launchers and 1,320 MIRV launchers fulfilled Ford's goals for the results of the summit and he created a personal working relationship with Brezhnev, he often allowed proceedings at the summit to continue without, or even in spite of, his input. After the Vladivostok summit, Ford bungled the declaration of the provisional agreements, failing to mobilize a Congress that, though predisposed against him, may have supported an arms reduction agreement with the Soviets nonetheless. Although Ford's initiatives at Vladivostok were not completed, his work at the summit nevertheless had a positive impact on his personal and working relationship with Brezhnev and Soviet-American relations overall in the 1970s.

Utilizing sources from the National Security Council, the United States State Department, White House records, and the public media, this thesis will explore the events at Vladivostok with Ford's foreign policy outlook as a framework for discussion. These sources come from study at the Ford Presidential Library in Ann Arbor, MI, the University of Michigan Libraries, and several government depositories in Washington, D.C. I will attempt to use multiple perspectives to tell the story of the Vladivostok Accords in the larger context of the Ford presidency and his foreign policy. My thesis will discuss the development of issues surrounding Vladivostok over three chapters: the Ford administration's preparation for the summit, the events at Vladivostok from the American delegation's perspective, and Ford's ability to finalize the provisional agreements from Vladivostok in further talks with the Soviets and make the case for those provisional agreements to America.



Exploring internal administration politics along with outside perspectives, the first chapter follows President Ford and his staff's preparation for Vladivostok through meetings with the Soviet delegation, internal discussions to determine specific policy points that come up during the summit, and meetings designed to prepare President Ford for his first foray in international diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> Concluding that President Ford followed much of his predecessor's platform in foreign policy by using two of his main foreign policy advisors (Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft) while pushing his agenda focused on international cooperation, the first chapter leads into the second chapter, which covers the events at Vladivostok in detail.

Utilizing close readings of the memoranda of conversation at the summit, the second chapter will outline Ford's approach to the talks and how his ability to connect with Brezhnev and handle the technical aspects of negotiations changed as the summit wore on. While acknowledging Ford's flaws throughout the proceedings, the second chapter concludes that his ability to articulate a working foreign policy and to cultivate a sense of understanding with Brezhnev was an important step in creating his international presence.

The third chapter discusses Ford's inability to maneuver between the American political environment and the constraints that shaped the SALT II negotiations with the Soviets during his term. It then highlights the intent and impact of Ford's foreign agenda in a broader context, concluding that the understanding fostered with Brezhnev at

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<sup>12</sup> Many of these documents come from the Ford Presidential Library. Another resource available to the public, but especially important for researchers of foreign policy is the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series collected and created by the U.S. State Department. FRUS collects declassified documents from all bodies interacting with foreign policy in some manner and organizes them into volumes that are readily accessible at most university libraries.

Vladivostok was influential in the development of Soviet-American relations thereafter, despite the failure of SALT II negotiations.<sup>13</sup> In conclusion, my thesis will argue that in both the American domestic and international arenas in which it was necessary for Ford to craft an acceptable policy, he and his administration were not able to do so in the short term. Regardless of the failure of the SALT II negotiations, Ford's contribution to the story of United States foreign policy occurred under complicated circumstances but remains nonetheless impactful in long-term evaluations of Soviet-American relations and contributes to the mixed understandings of his legacy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Phillip Kunhardt Jr., *The American Presidency: Gerald R. Ford*. pp. 79–85.

<sup>14</sup> Gerald R. Ford, "The Vladivostok Negotiation and Other Events," Paper presented at University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, San Diego, California, February 4, 1986.

## Chapter One: Preparations for Vladivostok

### Introduction

As President Ford entered office on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1974, he was assailed by the flurry of foreign and domestic policies that former President Richard Nixon left behind. Quickly, Ford needed to decide what policies to continue, alter, or remove completely from his agenda, while settling into the role of president. President Ford spent little time concerned with in-depth foreign policy while in Congress, but his early decision to focus on foreign policy, especially concerning the Soviet Union and arms control helps to outline his understanding of the global role of the United States and the president in 1974.<sup>1</sup> Ford saw the issue of arms control as vital to the relationship between the USSR and the United States and a relaxation of tensions between the two nations. Most easily expressed by his continuation of the planning for an agreement on the SALT II, which Nixon began throughout the summer of 1974, Ford focused on the issue of arms control as a major policy that he wanted to enact during his time as president.<sup>2</sup>

Following a chronology of meetings, memoranda, and events occurring during the first four months of the new administration, one can understand how Ford prepared for the arms control issue with a focus on dealing with the Soviet delegation at Vladivostok, in both technical policy deliberations and broad diplomatic relations. While Ford and his team focused heavily on preparing for the summit and for the technical discussions on provisions of the SALT II agreement, they did little to sell the talks to the American people. By thinking through the massive task in front of the administration as it travelled

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, (New York: Times Books, 2007). pp. 147-149.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Memoranda of Conversations - Nixon Administration, 1973-74. Box 4, June 28 - July 3, 1974 - Moscow Summit Private and Plenary Sessions (for some meetings there are only handwritten notes).

to Vladivostok from the Soviet angle, and not from the American angle, the administration failed to recognize a key component of any foreign policy—its reception on the domestic front.

Both the legislature and media's support was necessary to confirm the importance of the talks to the public and help reaffirm the office of the presidency's role in foreign diplomatic matters and affirm Ford's ability as president. While their role in the evaluation of foreign policy would be vital to the American reaction to SALT II, the administration paid relatively little attention to preparing to deal with the issues that Congress and the media presented. The role of Congress and the media in the creation of foreign policy became more and more visible as events surrounding Vladivostok unfolded. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson and a group of senators opposed to working with the USSR spearheaded legislative pushback on the SALT II issues as Ford's administration prepared for the Vladivostok summit. Two other groups, various Cold War 'hawks' and doves' also had concerns when the administration was involved in agreements on nuclear arms. Media coverage of the events preceding the summit varied in their reception across major newspapers and television news outlets. Ford and his administration faced a number of challenges at the outset of their time in office and their preparation for the SALT II talks, both domestic and international in focus.<sup>3</sup> This chapter discusses how Ford prepared for Vladivostok under such circumstances on two fronts—a diplomatic, international front and a domestic, political front.

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<sup>3</sup> Concerns about Ford's political position included domestic concerns about the office of the presidency itself, Ford's ability to lead under the supposed power of his greatest adviser Kissinger, Ford's path to the presidency, considering his pardon of Nixon in October 1974. Likewise, international turmoil surrounding the still-ongoing war in Vietnam, and relations with the Soviet Union were influential in his difficult position globally.

Ford's approach to learning about the geopolitical theater of U.S.—Soviet relations and arms control was hands-on and direct, much as his demeanor was as a congressman.<sup>4</sup> This somewhat blunt, although always honest, approach followed Ford to the Vladivostok summit and beyond during his term as president.<sup>5</sup> Often quiet and reserved during meetings with his top aides and accepting much of what memoranda delivered to him averred about his Soviet counterparts, Ford nonetheless developed his internationalist tendencies into a policy plan that centered around cooperation, understanding, and a reduction of arms—the central pieces of his understanding of détente.

This chapter takes an in-depth look at the different understandings of SALT II that were taken on by the Ford administration, members of Congress and the national news media as Ford entered office and prepared for the Vladivostok summit. One can see that while Ford's crash course in foreign policy was a formative experience for him, he did little to ready Congress and the American people for the potential outcomes of the summit. While pushing an idea to follow Nixon's progress in achieving détente with the USSR, Ford attempted to embrace internationalism without preparing Congress and the rest of America. While there are multiple sides in the debate on Ford's foreign policy origins, my perspective falls somewhat between them. On one side, Jussi M. Hanhimäki and John Robert Greene argue that Secretary of State Kissinger was the chief architect of Ford's foreign policy and see Ford's inability to corral Congress as a great failure of his

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<sup>4</sup> The understanding of Ford as a direct, honest, and hands-on legislator is found throughout Brinkley's depiction of him in *Gerald R. Ford*.

<sup>5</sup> Department of State, United States of America. Eds. David C. Geyer, Edward C. Keefer. *Foreign Relations of the United States, (FRUS) 1969-1976. Soviet Union August 1974-December 1976*. Vol. XVI. Documents 39, 40, 91, and 92. Ford often addresses topics directly and in a business-like manner, at times to the chagrin of his colleagues and eventually General Secretary Brezhnev.

domestic implementation of his foreign policy initiatives. On the other side, Douglas Brinkley commends Ford's adaptation to his presidential role of arbiter in global politics, largely ignoring the massive pushbacks that Ford faced at home.<sup>6</sup> I argue that Ford crafted his own policy concerning the Soviet Union focusing on cooperation and coordination, but while doing so he understood his goals of cooperation to be representative of general American understandings when, in reality, they were not.

### **Soviet Relations: Broadly Diplomatic**

While Ford had relatively limited exposure to foreign policy during his time before the executive branch, he undoubtedly understood the vital relationship that the U.S. and USSR held.<sup>7</sup> Given this basic understanding of the importance of the relationship of the two nations, he decided his basic goals in foreign policy based on both his experiences in the world and what Republican mainline policy at the time lead him to believe.<sup>8</sup> One of these goals, as stated in his first correspondence with General Secretary Brezhnev—sent on the day of his inauguration—was a continuation of “...the course of Soviet-American relations that you and President Nixon have charted in your summit meetings...in the general spirit of cooperation we have established.”<sup>9</sup> Ford's explicit

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<sup>6</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 16; John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), pp. 117-131; Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 147-149, 154-156.

<sup>7</sup> Ford spent much of his time in Congress as a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and as a member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. While this gave him some exposure to allocation of funding for defense, foreign policy was outside of his realm of serious interests. His desires to become Speaker of the House kept him focused on domestic politics and from supporting ideas in foreign policy that were disparate from mainstream Republicans of his time.

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Kunhardt Jr., *The American Presidency: Gerald R. Ford "Healing the Nation"*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), pp. 79–85. Ford believed in internationalism in the post-World War II world, and was especially concerned for America's standing in it.

<sup>9</sup> Department of State, United States of America. Eds. David C. Geyer, Edward C. Keefer. *Foreign Relations of the United States, (FRUS) 1969-1976. Soviet Union August 1974-December 1976*. Vol. XVI. Document 4: Letter from President Ford to General Secretary Brezhnev, August 9, 1974.

desire, in the first paragraph of his first correspondence with the Soviet Union, to “continue” the “cooperation” and the path of détente that Nixon and Kissinger started down shows how seriously dedicated Ford was to at least appearing in favor of strengthening détente. Given the unease that the Soviets likely had with the massive upheaval in the White House over the eight months since Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned, Ford’s immediate reaction to assure the Soviets that a version of Nixon/Kissinger diplomacy would continue under President Ford was likely beneficial to initial Soviet understandings of the general aspects of Ford’s foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Ford’s reaction created a generally positive response from General Secretary Brezhnev: “Saying it straight, I and my colleagues were gratified to see your determination to continue...the good progress which was achieved...during the administration of your predecessor, President Nixon.”<sup>11</sup> Not only did it seem that the Politburo appreciated Ford’s plans to remain consistent with Nixon’s policy, but they also urged an approach that would further the stable relationship of the two superpowers in an attempt to ensure long-term peace. Ford’s inclinations to cooperate and include set the relationship between the Ford Administration and the USSR off on the right foot, at least in what can be seen in explicit diplomatic overtures.

After his initial interactions with the Soviets, Ford largely stayed on the periphery of technical policy meetings with members of the Soviet delegation, preferring instead to confirm much of what was discussed by Kissinger and his other policy advisors

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*. Pg. 64.

<sup>11</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Document 7: Letter from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Ford, pp. 15-16.

beforehand.<sup>12</sup> Many of the initial meetings, as Kissinger readily reminded Ford, served to introduce Ford to the Soviets, who regarded the new president as somewhat of a wild card until regular meetings convinced them of his seriousness negotiate in favor of détente, as he claimed he would in his early correspondence. Kissinger, did not initially intend for the first meeting between President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev to be much more than a ‘get-to-know-you” session, as he states in August 1974: “Your first meeting should not be a negotiating meeting/ One or one-and-a-half days there would be plenty. The big meeting [on the details of SALT II] should be here [D.C.] in ’75.”<sup>13</sup> Clearly, this plan did not work, as the only significant SALT II summit occurred roughly four months after that conversation. It is noteworthy, however, that while plans for a face-to-face meeting existed from August onward, as late as September 20, Kissinger was still advising Ford outright that the main SALT II negotiations should take place at a convention in Geneva, or in the United States, in 1975, designating that the plan from August was still Kissinger’s main focus for the summit when it was first planned.<sup>14</sup> A letter from President Ford to the Soviet leadership, likely written on October 9 in advance of Kissinger’s trip to Moscow, also discusses the general approach that Brezhnev and Kissinger should attempt to set up such a framework for the talks in Geneva to work out the details of a SALT II proposal in full.<sup>15</sup> Little explicit mention of a Ford-Brezhnev summit occurs outside of the initial planning for the trip during a meeting on September 20 with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko until Kissinger’s trip to Moscow in late

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<sup>12</sup> For examples of such meetings, see FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Documents 11, 24, 36, and 37.

<sup>13</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Documents 10, 11.

<sup>14</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Document 36: Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford, September 20, 1974.

<sup>15</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Document 53: Letter from President Ford to Soviet Leadership, Undated, pp. 151-152.



October.<sup>16</sup> Much of what led to the administration's relaxed understanding of any summit taking place between Ford and Brezhnev was likely due to the an underestimation of Kissinger of Ford's desire to shape policy and a Soviet desire to get to know Ford before pushing difficult discussions on nuclear arms. Ford, however, did all he could to rise to the occasion in Vladivostok. After the summit was announced at the end of Kissinger's trip to Moscow, Ford and his administration moved into a new phase of preparation for the Vladivostok Summit—one of concrete discussions of SALT II issues and hurdles to overcome in Ford's understandings of technical dimensions of the debates surrounding nuclear arms.

### **Soviet Relations: Technical Issues**

Kissinger and Scowcroft's influence was vital to Ford's preparation for the Vladivostok summit. Throughout the four months preceding the summit, Kissinger, as Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, and Scowcroft, as Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, informed and influenced President Ford on strategies to pursue concerning the Soviets. For the most part, Kissinger and Scowcroft were essential in helping Ford understand the technical concerns of the American delegation and coordinate the physical diplomatic meetings between the Soviet and American delegations. Kissinger and Scowcroft were regularly involved with preparing briefings for and participating in meetings with the president to help foster an understanding of how he should think and act in response to potential events at Vladivostok, especially ones technical in nature.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Documents 37, 62, 64, 65.

<sup>17</sup> In the first month of the Ford presidency alone, Kissinger and Scowcroft were involved in as many as six meetings or memos pertaining to the USSR and SALT. FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI.. Documents 9, 10, 11, 17, 19, 20.

Before the Moscow trip, Ford's team handled much of the specific documents concerned with goals of the new SALT II talks, while after the Moscow summit Ford joined in deliberations on the technical aspects of the agreement. Ideas that were discussed and prepared by the National Security Council to be signed off by Ford in September were presented to Ford for evaluation and discussion in early November.<sup>18</sup> While Ford had some idea of defense spending from his time in Congress, the discussions of the technical aspects of nuclear arms, which many spent their entire careers studying and debating the effects of, like Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs), Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), heavy bombers, Tomahawk Missiles, terms like throw-weight, common lower level, were at a very high scientific level and often difficult to compare to one another.

Ford's attempts to learn these detailed technical aspects of the SALT II debates were buttressed by National Security Decision Memorandum 271, approved by Ford on September 18, 1974. This document was likely Ford's first take on specific recommendations from the Department of State to achieve the broad goals of the SALT II delegation. The memo asserted that the U.S. delegation's main goals were a reduction of arms to "a mutually acceptable common lower level", a limitation on throw weight "to constrain the potential destructive capability" of the nuclear warheads, and the limitation of the "number of MIRVed missiles".<sup>19</sup>

An influential figure from outside the administration that helped Ford prepare for the long-term debates surrounding SALT II and the technical aspects of the agreement

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<sup>18</sup> *National Security Decision Memorandum 271*. September 24, 1974. Pp. 1-4. Box 3, Records of the National Security Council: To Secretary of Defense from Henry Kissinger, Instructions for the SALT Talks, Geneva. National Security Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>19</sup> *National Security Decision Memorandum 271*. September 24, 1974, pp. 1-4. Box 3.

was former Deputy Secretary of State Paul H. Nitze. Nitze had nearly as much, if not more, experience working with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms agreements—Nitze was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs when President John F. Kennedy signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, served as Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense under President Lyndon B. Johnson, and was a member of the SALT negotiating team under Nixon. While Nitze did not hold an official capacity in the Ford administration, his wealth of knowledge and experience gave him the President’s ear on SALT II. Nitze sent Ford a letter on November 2 outlining his understandings of what informed the SALT II debate with the Soviets and what a new SALT treaty might mean for both sides. Nitze argued that the main issue in the numerical discrepancy between the U.S. and USSR was that since the 1960s, the U.S. had focused on improving its existing bombs and missiles while the USSR had focused on creating more bombs and missiles.<sup>20</sup> While Nitze believed that the prospects for an agreement on SALT II were relatively good, he was less certain of the potential benefits of such an agreement. While he admitted that reaching an agreement to come to numerical or throw-weight (or total tonnage of bombs) equivalence might help political concerns in both countries, he argued that the effect of a disparity in either metric would change little in the U.S.-Soviet political relationship.<sup>21</sup> While Nitze did not see much practical use for a SALT II treaty, he argued that Ford should nonetheless attempt to get a treaty concerning arms reductions signed for its practical political benefit and the benefit of reaching an

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<sup>20</sup> Letter, Paul H. Nitze to President Ford, November 2, 1974, Folder 8: Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) Correspondence 1969-1979, Critical Issues in the Control of Strategic Arms, Box 154, Paul H. Nitze Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington D.C.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, Nitze to President Ford, November 2, 1974.

agreement with the Soviet Union early in his presidency.<sup>22</sup> With Nitze's support, Ford continued with the goal of reaching a significant agreement with the Soviets on SALT II despite the difficult technical questions that remained.

The difficulty that came with comparing each weapon's effectiveness to one another, along with the difficulty of comparing new weapons to the old and distinct and different Soviet and American weapons created a more technology-focused approach for Ford. The issues surrounding such comparisons were laid out for Ford in a November 4 document titled "Ford-Brezhnev Meeting In Vladivostok". The document contained a series of briefing papers on SALT II, Vladivostok as a whole, and planned subjects to touch on and avoid. This document was the final indicator to Ford of the positions of the Soviets and Americans on technical issues of the SALT II agreement as they approached Vladivostok. Outlining what was discussed during the last SALT II talks at Geneva, the report gives insight into the shifts that occurred between NSDM 271 in September and the end of the November deliberations. Instead of focusing on equal throw weight considerations for the two sides, the report claims that it is not a viable, measurable way to understand equivalence in nuclear arsenals. The "Ford-Brezhnev" report focuses on getting the Soviets to agree on equal aggregate numbers of launchers, especially restraining the B-1 Bomber and Trident Missiles, mobile ICBMs, and limiting the number of those systems that can be equipped as MIRVs.<sup>23</sup> While the technical details on each weapons system varied in its deployment and proliferation on each side, the report's

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<sup>22</sup> Letter, Nitze to President Ford, November 2, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Department of State to National Security Council, *Ford Brezhnev Meeting in Vladivostok*, November 4, 1974. Box 3, Subject Files Political & Defense: POL 7 –High Level Visits, General Records of the Department of State, Bureau of European Affairs, Office of Soviet Union Affairs, Multilateral Political Relations, Multilateral Subject Files 1948-1976. National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

commentary pushed Ford to agree with the Soviets on a ceiling under the projected growth that the SALT limitations placed on each nation, likely in the range of 2,200-2,400 total launchers. It is difficult to ascertain precisely what Ford needed to know about each of the systems and the respective American and Soviet armaments to appear enlightened during the technical debates at Vladivostok. Despite this difficulty, the reports he received from his advisors and from the State Department kept him up to date with the current negotiating position and strategy of the American delegation and with the technical provisions necessary to understand each of the points of a potential agreement at Vladivostok.

Taking a technical approach to the summit pushed Ford to not only craft his own style of diplomacy in preparation for Vladivostok, but also highlights how difficult it is to learn the information in a short amount of time. Ford attempts to learn as much technical information as possible on nuclear arms so he can at least appear to be well informed while at the summit. He likely expected to accept positions that Kissinger and Brezhnev negotiated on the small differences between the Soviet and American ideas on contentious matters within the realm of nuclear arms control while hoping to remain an important player in the discussions overall. The time after Kissinger's trip to Moscow and before his trip to East Asia is a critical moment where Ford must assume another role as president by deciding to take part in the technical deliberations on SALT II. Ford allows Kissinger to discuss much of the technical aspects of SALT II without him at the Moscow summit, but given Ford's deficiencies in technical knowledge at the time and trust in Kissinger to continue on the path he and Nixon created for the U.S., it seems to be a reasonable course of action. In his preparation for Vladivostok, Ford attempted to learn

policy and understand technical debates over a course of four months that Kissinger and Brezhnev had dealt with and debated over half a decade.

Ford received intense pressure from multiple fronts, from his advisors, to Congress and the American public, to the Soviets themselves, to figure out the course of action for Soviet-American relations after he took power August 1974. Given the pressures domestically and internationally, including the backlash of the Watergate scandal and the deepening recession that occurred in 1974 and the ever-present, seemingly endless, Vietnam War, President Ford's actions concerning the Soviet Union and arms control were vital for his burgeoning administration to make a positive mark on the first four months in office. This is perhaps why Ford chose to undergo such a rapid crash course in the diplomacy and technical details surrounding Vladivostok, leaning on veterans like Kissinger and Scowcroft to begin the path to SALT II under his administration while he learned exactly what was necessary to deal with the likes of the Soviet leadership and decided what avenue his diplomacy would take to achieve his goals of extending détente and reducing nuclear armament with the Soviet Union and of increasing cooperation and understanding globally.<sup>24</sup>

Ford focused on the aspects of Vladivostok that he would need to know to deal with the Soviet Union throughout his preparation for the summit, from policy memoranda to biographical summaries of Soviet leaders. By learning about the different aspects of the negotiations, including types of launchers, available negotiation tactics and strategies, and the positions that the delegation could not budge on, Ford prepared himself thoroughly for his trip to Vladivostok. As he focused on both the broad diplomatic

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<sup>24</sup> Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*. Pp. 147; and for Kissinger's thoughts on Ford's diplomacy during the SALT II talks and his presidency see: Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995). pp. 253-54, 292-96, 1064-1068.

understandings undergirding the summit and the technical debates that would flesh out the agenda, Ford largely ignored political developments in America. As discussed in the next section, the debates surrounding the Soviet Union and Ford's lack of preparation of America for his trip would prove to be just as important as his preparation for the Soviets in the outcome of the SALT II negotiations.

### **Congress and the Media**

Ford and his administration had the opportunity to be proactive about their approach to the Soviet Union and the arms control situation, but they still needed to position themselves to the Soviets and within the political and public understandings of arms control by both Congress and the American people. The American people—represented by the media discussions of events because the proliferation of information on the summit came largely from news sources—and Congress on the other hand, could only react to the administration's decisions and hope that the administration would respond through change of their actions. However, as Ford prepared for Vladivostok by learning the long-standing diplomatic debates and technical issues present in the SALT II talks, he lost focus on a series of similar debates at home. Tempered by the contemporary political understandings of Ford, his abilities, and his policies, the reactions of the legislature and the public media to the Vladivostok summit's announcement were mixed, and expected not much other than a sit-down between President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev.

Congress was key to Ford's interactions with the Soviets, as the Senate was responsible for affirming any formal agreements made concerning SALT II. Yet, Ford did little to interact with Senate leaders before the summit to address any of their

potential concerns. Unfortunately for Ford, the strong coalition within the Republican members of Congress and the trust and respect that he built with nearly all of Congress did not follow him in his actions in the Oval Office<sup>25</sup>. Partly because of the Democratic-controlled Congress led by the likes of Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson (Senator, Washington – D) and partly because of his ill-timed and poorly explained pardoning of President Nixon, Ford lost much of the mandate he built during his years as a Congressman.<sup>26</sup> Ford also did himself few favors with mainstream Republicans as he selected his cabinet; he picked liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller as his Vice President and several other liberal Republicans, along with a few Democrats, to make up his administration.<sup>27</sup> Ford’s distancing himself from the Republican mainstream largely ended there, as he pursued conservative economic reform to combat the growing recession and decided to continue his own form of détente with the Soviets, centered around cooperation and understanding.<sup>28</sup>

Jackson’s ideas on interactions with the Soviet Union were staunchly against détente and arms control as Nixon and Ford planned it. Jackson opposed the SALT II summit in Vladivostok based on the idea that any agreement coming from the meetings could give a further advantage to the Soviets who held a greater number of warheads than the United States. It was important that the United States not give up more ground to the Soviets in nuclear arms, else they could reign over the U.S. in diplomatic and wartime

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of Ford’s time in Congress, see Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 30-33.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on the effects of the Pardon of President Nixon, see: Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 60-74; Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, pg. 50-66; and Alexander Reger. “Following Ford: Reassessing the Pardon of Richard M. Nixon.” *White House Studies* vol. 13, no. 1 (January 2013): pp. 83–108.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pp. 83-85, 117-18, 122-23, 146.



situations, due to their nuclear supremacy.<sup>29</sup> Two other main groups interested in the series of negotiations with the USSR, especially when nuclear arms were concerned, were war “hawks” and peaceful “doves”. Hawks generally desired an increase in the armament from which the United States could draw on, and were concerned with the impact that any reductions might have on the ability of the United States to match the USSR’s nuclear arsenal. Doves, as their name suggests, wanted as drastic a reduction of arms as possible, to better protect peace in the world, and would likely oppose any agreement that allowed for buildup to continue unhindered.

The pushback that Ford received from Congress concerning the Soviets did not begin with arms control, but rather trade, and originated from Jackson and his like-minded allies. While the hawks and doves took relatively little issue with the prospect of a meeting with the Soviet Union, Jackson and his group had much to say before the summit. Historian Jussi Hanhimäki sees resistance against détente largely as a product of Jackson’s crusades: “By the time Ford was sworn in as president, Jackson had emerged as the main critic of détente...”<sup>30</sup> A hawkish Democrat, Jackson took issue with the majority of Ford’s interactions with the Soviets whether they conflicted with his stances on policy or not. Jackson’s first challenge to Ford’s administration came during the months of August-October 1974 with the introduction of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Bill of 1974/75. This amendment was designed to reduce U.S. trade with countries of “non-market” economies that restrict or “denies its citizens the right or opportunity to emigrate...”, specifically the Soviet Union. Hanhimäki asserts that the

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<sup>29</sup> See Walter Issacson’s discussion of the Death of Détente for more information. Walter Issacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (Simon & Schuster, New York 1992), pp. 607-629.

<sup>30</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013), pp. 81.

issue of Jewish emigration from the USSR was a particularly emotional argument introduced by Jackson, at a time where the Ford administration hoped to normalize relations with the Soviets.<sup>31</sup> The amendment introduced a layer of complexity to American-Soviet relations, along with a layer of humiliation for the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> Ford and his administration moved quickly to handle the situation from the Soviet perspective, but did little to corral Jackson and Charles Vanik, or even discuss with the two the issues that their amendment created for the administration. For their part, the Soviets were concerned by what they saw as audacious overtures by a U.S. Senator concerning human rights violations in their country.<sup>33</sup> The care that the Soviets took discussing their concerns surrounding Jackson, his policy, and his bombastic approach show how prevalent his, and by extension the American Congress', influence was as preparations for the Vladivostok summit began and progressed.

While Congress voiced some concerns on the potential outcomes of the Vladivostok summit, the public media reaction to the announcement of the summit was somewhat different. The media is an inherently reactionary entity. Unlike the Ford administration and congressmen like Jackson, the news is dedicated to reacting and responding to the actions of others. Following the stories written by major newspapers concerning arms control, the major ideas preceding the Vladivostok summit were

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<sup>31</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>32</sup> The impact this amendment had on immediate relations with the Soviets can be seen in FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, Document 5: Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford, August 9, 1974. To see the Trade Act of 1975, see: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-88/pdf/STATUTE-88-Pg1978-2.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> For further readings on Soviet concerns on the Trade Act, see FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI Documents: 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 90. From the proliferation of documents, one can see the significant impact this amendment had during the months of August-October 1974. Soviet concerns over the subject also reached the discussions between Brezhnev and Ford at Vladivostok and lasted well after the summit concluded.

concerned with Kissinger's trip to Moscow, setting the stage for the events in Vladivostok, and outlining the perceived outcomes for the summit. Television news, on the other hand, was largely interested in reporting on the aftermath of the summit, rather than the preparations for it. With the first discussions of arms control and Vladivostok emerging after the Moscow summit, reactions from news outlets were varied in timing and mostly moderate in reaction. The first reporting done concerning Ford and the arms control talks occurred after the announcement was made on October 27 from the Washington Post. "Brezhnev and Ford to Meet" announced the summit, saying "...the two leaders will meet earlier than expected to establish a personal relationship... The Ford administration initially took the position that if there was to be a Ford-Brezhnev meeting, it should be more than a 'get-acquainted' session, and should have the prospect of making substantive progress on specific issues."<sup>34</sup> This initial reaction, shared in the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, shows the Ford administration in a decidedly different light than what was actually planned by the administration before Kissinger's Moscow trip. As discussed in a previous section, the administration actually only desired a get-together meeting during the initial talks about the visit, with a shift towards a working meeting occurring after the trip was announced in October.

The media reaction throughout November 1974 was mixed, with some averring the importance of a relationship with the Soviet Union as necessary and vital to U.S. interests and others that were less convinced of the need for such a summit. A New York Times article in favor of the discussions states "the underlying reason we pressed for this summit at this time is that the opening that permitted out created diplomacy over the last

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<sup>34</sup> Murrey Marder and Peter Osnos, "Brezhnev and Ford to Meet: Vladivostok Set for November Summit Talks," October 27, 1974. Washington Post Foreign Service. *Washington Post*, pg. A1.

five years is showing signs of closing.”<sup>35</sup> Those opposed to the summit were often concerned by the speed at which the talks were taking place—only four months after President Ford entered office. Another New York Times article says:

The Ford-Brezhnev meeting at Vladivostok was arranged—primarily on the urging of Moscow—at a particularly awkward time for the United States...there are at least three reasons why it is likely not to make much progress...the U.S. Government itself is divided on what it intends to do and what it expects the Soviet Union to do under the so-called policy of ‘détente.’<sup>36</sup>

Yet others were against meeting with the Soviet Union on grounds similar to Senator Jackson’s, that they had already violated the intentions of SALT I and further dealings with the Soviets would only deepen the issues present in arms control.<sup>37</sup> Regardless of the specific reactions, the large proliferation of reactions on all sides of the issue exhibits the ambivalent response of many Americans to the SALT II talks. One idea that was shared by nearly all of the news outlets was expressed well in an outline of Ford’s trip to the Far East in the L.A. Times:

The final leg of Mr. Ford’s journey will take him to Vladivostok, Siberia, for his first meeting with Soviet party chief Leonid I. Brezhnev. There is much to talk about—arms control, trade, the Middle East—but substantive results are unlikely. It appears, rather, that this will be a get-acquainted meeting, two politicians taking each other’s measure, a helpful prelude, perhaps, to the full-scale summit conference set for next year.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> William Safire. “Essay: The Closing Opening,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 1974. Pg. 33.

<sup>36</sup> James Reston. “Premature Summit,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 1974. Pg. 39. Omitted from the quote are the first two reasons, not to have the summit: issues with policy directives on the Soviet Union and the Middle East and issues between the U.S. and USSR on a Middle East peace keeping resolution put forth in the U.N.

<sup>37</sup> “Violating the Intent of Arms Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1974. Pg. C6.

<sup>38</sup> “The President’s Trip to the Far East.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1974. Pg. C6.

The poor understanding of the approach that the Ford administration took to the preparation for the summit, as the administration and the Soviet delegation were planning a much more technical, results-driven summit than the media perceived, is reflective of the reactionary nature of the media, and the perception of the American public. This is important to note because of the administration's lack of preparation of the public for the events about to take place in Vladivostok. Vital to American news intake in the 1970s is television news, specifically CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite, yet television news is largely silent on the upcoming summit. This lack of attention comes from the fact that CBS Evening News largely left coverage of the summit out until it was about to occur; the only piece delivered before the summit came on November 20, and it focused on the possibilities that the summit had to affect the chances of war in the Middle East, and not on the potential for nuclear arms reductions.<sup>39</sup>

While Ford's administration did little to counter the concerns fielded by Jackson and others on the dealings with the Soviet Union, the administration's Soviet-centric focus before Vladivostok created a gap between the administration and public expectations of potential outcomes of the summit. While Ford and his advisors decided that the meeting would be more work than "meet-and-greet", the news coverage of the upcoming summit—and thus the generally available public information on the summit—focused on relatively few potential policy outcomes. Combined with a general lack of coverage, the uncertain expectations of those covering the preparation for Vladivostok created an environment in America that had little idea what to expect from the coming summit.

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<sup>39</sup> For an outline of the major television news stories of November 1974, see the Vanderbilt Television News Archive at: <https://tvnews-vanderbilt-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/siteindex/1974-11>.

The media and Congressional responses to the SALT II summit in Vladivostok were often ill timed, politically motivated, or discordant with the Ford administration's view. The explicit and prevalent discussions of Senator Jackson inside the administration and between the Soviet and American delegations mean that his understanding of events was not ignored by those making decisions, but those in the administration never publicly addressed his concerns and the concerns of others before Vladivostok. With the approach the administration took in November 1974, the summit would, contrary to popular belief, be a meeting that discussed significant policy surrounding nuclear arms and Soviet-American relations.

### **Conclusion**

Navigating the political minefield of domestic and international affairs at the onset of his presidency was by no means an easy task for Ford, and he spent significant time and resources preparing to meet the Soviets in Vladivostok. While he prepared for the Soviets in a comprehensive manner, he was also beset by a bevy of political concerns, from domestic issues like backlash over Watergate to international problems like growing wariness in dealing with the Soviet Union. As Douglas Brinkley states: "Aside from Washington, Lincoln, and FDR—America's Big Three—it's difficult to recall a president who took office amid less favorable circumstances."<sup>40</sup> Ford and his administration's responsiveness to the complicated domestic situation was not exceptional and left much of the concerns posed by member of Congress surrounding the Vladivostok summit unanswered. When the administration did not push back against the concerns of politicians like Jackson who opposed dealing with the Soviet Union by setting

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<sup>40</sup> Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, pg. 64.

expectations of the administration's goals for the summit so the public at large could understand why the summit was taking place, the administration created a situation where considerable pushback was possible after the trip to Vladivostok. By not creating expectations for the outcome and not attempting to separate the issues of dealing with the Soviet Union in general and protecting the world from nuclear destruction, the administration gave small concerns the room to grow once the summit was completed. As discussed in chapter three, Ford's lack of preparation on the domestic front would prove costly to his hopes for SALT II during his administration.

By quickly and assertively choosing to continue Nixon's policy of détente with a focus on cooperation, inclusion, and understanding, the Ford administration pursued relations with the Soviet Union to a point where a working summit on arms control was possible in November 1974, only four months after Ford took office. This dramatic push for détente with the Soviet Union and for a reduction in the growth of each nation's nuclear arsenal was a decisive choice on Ford's part to actively pursue a positive relationship with the Soviet Union from his first day in office onward. After deciding to work with the Soviet Union, Ford prepared himself in the different areas that negotiations would occur, without concern for his relatively little experience in foreign diplomacy.

What Ford's pursuit of serious negotiations in Vladivostok entailed was a pursuit of concepts that diplomats and military leaders spend careers honing, in roughly two month's time. From the introduction of the working summit as a concrete idea in September until it occurred, Ford and his advisors were concerned with developing his abilities and his foreign policy. As early as September 24, Ford articulated his wishes for international cooperation, but the process of learning about and understanding the Soviets

and their ideas on nuclear armament further progressed those desires to create specific policy directives. While his advisors often attempted to sway Ford to act one way or another, his own personality and clear negotiating style shined through at Vladivostok more than the adjustments from his advisors did. Many believed that the SALT II talks in the winter of 1974 would produce little of substance and the Ford administration eventually faced serious consequences for not outlining their plans for Vladivostok to the public. Despite these eventual consequences, Ford did all that he could to prepare himself for the diplomatic summit with the Soviets with the intention of returning from Vladivostok with significant progress on the SALT II treaty. How Ford conducted himself while navigating the murky waters of international negotiations and what provisions the sides agreed on will be the focus of the next chapter.



## Chapter Two: Negotiations at Vladivostok

### Introduction

This chapter will evaluate the first ever meetings between a United States President and a Soviet Union General Secretary in the Far East by highlighting the key points in the meetings between President Gerald R. Ford and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and other American and Soviet politicians at the Vladivostok summit in November 1974.<sup>1</sup> When the summit began, Ford and Brezhnev had exchanged letters, talked on the phone, and heard reports on each other from various staff members, but not met in person. In their first meeting, a general discussion of SALT II and the Middle East took place, and their subsequent meetings included technical discussion of SALT II proposals and foreign policy initiatives concerning each nation and the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup>

While the issues discussed during the Vladivostok Summit were complex and difficult for the two sides to consistently agree on, a closer look at the events shows how the two leaders understood the relations between each other and their nations and developed an understanding based on their mutual desires for peace. Ford's personal involvement in executing the foreign policy initiatives that his administration planned over the previous four months indicates a shift in his responsibilities as president; for the first time, Ford was responsible for crafting and enacting his policy in regards to the other global superpower. Beginning with an informal discussion on a train moving towards

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<sup>1</sup> Department of State, United States of America, Eds. Geyer, David C., and Edward C. Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976; Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976*, vol. XVI. (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012.) Pp. 320. Sources for this primary source discussion come from a Memorandum of Conversation between President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev that is contained within a primary source book compiled by the U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States – 1969-1976*, hereafter referred to as FRUS.

<sup>2</sup> FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 320.

Vladivostok, where no substantial policy was created or agreed upon, and ending with a conversation concerning the precise, technical aspects of nuclear armaments and foreign policy concerns, Ford began to step into his own as the foreign policy leader of the United States at the Vladivostok summit. While Ford by no means took a smooth path through the summit's proceedings, his personal growth and his policy's development throughout the summit helped to set the United States and the Soviet Union on a path of mutual cooperation and a relaxation of relations that continued throughout the rest of his presidency.

### **Building an Understanding with Brezhnev**

Opening the first meeting of the summit, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and General Secretary Brezhnev remarked upon the historical weight of their meeting.<sup>3</sup> These statements convey the importance to which both Kissinger (and by proxy, Ford) and Brezhnev hold the talks that are about to occur, and their seriousness in making this summit a worthwhile affair. Then, Ford joins the discussion on the by addressing the press situations in America, Egypt, and the Soviet Union – which they decide are all really the same, meaning that no one can control them.<sup>4</sup> These opening forays in dialogue while procedural and largely polite drivel for those observing actually play an important part in informing both parties that the other is in some way relatable, or that there is common ground for them to build upon during their discussions. Brezhnev continues the opening niceties by prompting the focus for the rest of the summit, “Let us speak not as diplomats but as human beings.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, Brezhnev continues the polite nature of

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<sup>3</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 320.

<sup>4</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 320.

<sup>5</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 324.

relating to each other's country and introduces the substantial, weighty issue of nuclear arms. Brezhnev's idea to speak as human beings, in support of the peace and safety of all humans, rather than as diplomats focused on the needs of their own nations, introduced a moral force in favor of completing an agreement, which the President affirms is necessary to foster progress on SALT II negotiations. For the President and the General Secretary to discuss what makes their two countries more similar rather than the differences that they have marks an important starting point for their relationship. By beginning with what is similar, they set a precedent of positive thinking in their interactions. This positive thinking continued forward throughout the Vladivostok talks, and helped to foster positive attempts to find solutions or compromise during discussions of technical policy that each group held disparate viewpoints on.

Similar to President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev's introduction to the summit, when other actors are introduced to the conversation, a focus on common bonds is emphasized. At a point where U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger and USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko briefly control the conversation, they focus on the past interactions between Russian and American political leaders, specifically concerning the Westphalia Treaty agreed upon in Vienna.<sup>6</sup> It is important that the political advisors of Brezhnev and Ford follow their foray into the summit in the same respectful and positive manner, this time by discussing what links their nations in the past. By introducing the political advisors and members of the summit following the same format as the two leaders, a symbolical understanding is established between the attendees that despite disconnects that may come later they all commit to a common understanding of the

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<sup>6</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 321.

benefits of their negotiations. From the opening remarks, all involved are looking forward to the discussions to come and the progress that should follow – at least outwardly. Given Kissinger’s recommendations to Ford on his goals at a personal level from before Vladivostok, this time spent setting up the relationships of all involved in the summit is important to establishing “a constructive relationship” and showing Brezhnev Ford’s willingness to “meet him half way” on nuclear arms issues.<sup>7</sup>

Ford is the first to shift the discussion to the reason behind the summit, but allows Brezhnev to give the opinions of the Soviet Union on what must be addressed during the summit and in what format that the discussions will be held.<sup>8</sup> By giving Brezhnev both the opportunity to dictate his ideas on the agenda for the summit first and the initial agency in shaping the policy issues of the summit, Ford politely allows Brezhnev to influence how the summit will be run. By allowing Brezhnev to take the lead in planning for the day’s discussion and the agenda of the summit, Ford shows his support for Soviet agency in helping craft the newest version of détente.

As the discussion moves to statements on policy that Brezhnev and Ford share, an explicit desire for peace and for an extension of the ideas of détente is expressed by both parties.<sup>9</sup> Brezhnev first states his desire for peace, to avoid nuclear war between the U.S. and the USSR, which prompts Ford to agree. Ford’s response to Brezhnev is, in part, a desire to continue the détente policies begun by his predecessor, Richard Nixon. “I want you [Brezhnev] to know that our foreign policy will be a continuation of the policy

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<sup>7</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 293.

<sup>8</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 323.

<sup>9</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 324.

pursued by President Nixon.”<sup>10</sup> Ford’s explicit statement that his foreign policy will be an extension of President Nixon’s is a clear indication to the Soviets that Ford is willing and able to keep U.S. nuclear arms policy relatively stable, at least in ideological terms.

The following discussions largely concern the agenda for the summit and are more administrative than impactful. Thus, moving to the closing remarks made by Brezhnev and Ford helps to give context to the pressures that both leaders felt were driving the conference. Brezhnev began by saying that Soviet policy is not to attack or to push for an arms race, but when Soviet media pushes for a stronger response to American rhetoric or perceived aggression, it can be taxing to please the public and remain diplomatically neutral.<sup>11</sup> Ford responds to his concerns by pushing to solve what he calls “important issues” that they are going to be addressing at the summit, and to advise Brezhnev to ignore media addresses or remarks made by those who are not the two of them, in favor of their personal correspondence.<sup>12</sup> This exchange is important because it belies concerns that Brezhnev has in how each leader is perceived by the other, and shows Ford’s attempts to allay those concerns. Both leaders explicitly mention the influential role the media has in shaping of domestic sentiment, and the role that domestic feeling has in policy development. Ford’s answer to Brezhnev is a sincere attempt to push for substantial coverage on weighty policy issues , including setting the foundations for the SALT II treaty and shows Ford’s commitment to the following discussions.

Beginning the second round of talks in the evening of November 23, General Secretary Brezhnev and Secretary of State Kissinger discussed common ground—this

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<sup>10</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 324.

<sup>11</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 328-329.

<sup>12</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 329.

time of their previous meetings without President Ford—to break tensions surrounding the discussion. The pair seamlessly included President Ford in their past relationship by using Kissinger as a figure at which they can all poke fun.<sup>13</sup> Moving into more weighty matters, Brezhnev brings up the relationship that he and the Soviet Union have with the United States, specifically politicians and businessmen that he has personally met:

Mr. President, to open the discussion, I would like to recall what was said during our last conversations with Dr. Kissinger. First, we want friendly, stable, and mutually advantageous relations with the United States. Not only I but our entire party, government, and all of our people want friendly relations with the United States. What is required to achieve this is that we, our governments, do everything in our power to ensure that things proceed in that direction regardless of what some people may say or write. During the past several years, I had numerous conversations with different U.S. personalities except, of course, Jackson.<sup>14</sup>

Not only does Brezhnev open up a serious topic for discussion to follow the evening's true agenda, he allows Ford to interact with him on both a personal and a political/diplomatic level. The line "...regardless of what some people may say or write..."<sup>15</sup> is of particular importance because with it, Brezhnev stresses the importance of ignoring (or trying to avoid the influence of) outside political and domestic stressors that were present in the United States at the outset of the summit, as outlined in the first chapter. Additionally, Brezhnev accentuates the sovereign power that the two leaders of the world's superpowers had at the negotiation table, above those that they represent at the table. Introducing Senator Jackson allows the two to again find common ground, and Ford follows Brezhnev's lead by also expressing his disdain for Senator Jackson, simply

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<sup>13</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 330. The pair use Kissinger's well known love of sweets and his eating of sweets during negotiations to quell his nervous disposition to both make fun of Kissinger and to acknowledge common ground between them—an close relationship with Kissinger.

<sup>14</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 330.

<sup>15</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 330.

stating: “I have also had differences with Senator Jackson.”<sup>16</sup> By introducing a figure such as Senator Jackson, the pair can agree on the disruption that Jackson has on their vision of Soviet-American relations finding further common ground in their search for understanding that they had developed to that point. This is also an important indicator of Brezhnev’s understanding of U.S. politics and a moment where one can see the profound impact that American domestic political developments had on Soviet politics. If Jackson is an important enough figure to bring up during discussions with Ford, clearly Brezhnev feels the potential influence that he and his followers may have on Soviet-American relations.

After finding common ground through their negative opinions surrounding Jackson, Brezhnev seeks to appeal to their equal respect and good feelings toward the American public. Ford reciprocated Brezhnev’s search for common ground by stating his own desire to follow Kissinger’s lead towards a reduction, or at least a slow down in the nuclear arms race.<sup>17</sup> This interaction affirms the explicit desires of all involved to reach a common goal and recognized that in spite of the different approaches that they came at towards nuclear arms limitations and other foreign policy they all held a desire for peace. Beginning the summit with an explicit statement of their desire to work together is vital to the summit process that will follow, which often had contentious and difficult moments that would try the resolve of those negotiating.

After restating their mutual desire for good relations, Brezhnev moved into the deeper issues of the conversation and the point of their summit: to discuss differing foreign policy issues from nuclear armament to the overall relations between the U.S. and

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<sup>16</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 330.

<sup>17</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 331.

USSR. Careful to confirm with Ford his status as a full partner in the talks, Brezhnev opens the summit's proceedings in the same casual manner as he did their introductions while also calling attention to the seriousness of the issues at hand.<sup>18</sup> As the two sides slowly wade deeper into the murky waters of negotiation on SALT II provisions, they began by touching on familiar and mutual understandings of their nuclear armaments before moving towards concerns that each side had about the other. One such concern was the depth and width of the current ICBM silos that each side had and the possibility that either was making the silos deeper or wider to accommodate larger ICBMs.<sup>19</sup> Given the amicable nature of the second session to this point, readers can observe a clear shift in tone at the negotiating table as discussions move to more contentious matters.

Soviet concern after the discussion of silo changes involved provisions introduced by the United States to the SALT II initiatives after Kissinger's Moscow summit in October, in preparation for the Vladivostok meeting. The new provisions sought to find avenues to reach numerical equivalence between the United States and the Soviet Union in terms of launch mechanisms for nuclear arms. As the State Department memorandum details after some discussion takes place, the Soviet delegation was not only confused but also angered by the plan proposed by the United States delegation, allowing for the United States to build new silos and leaving the Soviet Union behind in numerical terms

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<sup>18</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 331-32.

<sup>19</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 332-33. Brezhnev in particular is concerned with the United States' missile silos and possible actions to change the silos. This is likely due to the 'lead' that the Soviet Union held in terms of 'throw weight' at this point in the talks, and the potential that the United States could create larger missile silos, to in turn create larger missiles, which would be able to deliver larger warhead capacities. For further reading concerning the technical aspects of the throw weight differentials between the two nations, along with a myriad of other technical aspects of the nuclear arms race see: Aviation Week & Space Technology, *SALT II Compilation*, undated. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Paul H. Nitze Papers, Box 155, Folder 1—SALT General, 1974-1976.



of MIRVs.<sup>20</sup> Ford and Kissinger operated in tandem to help control the outbursts from Brezhnev, such as “We know it for a fact that you are converting medium missiles into heavy ones” and “...I don’t really need your assurances because you can see what we are doing and we can see what you are doing.” and explain the different proposals.<sup>21</sup> Before Foreign Minister Gromyko and Ambassador Dobrynin realized the position of the U.S. delegation, Dobrynin more politely states: “Your formulation [on the numbers of launchers included] isn’t very clear”.<sup>22</sup> After further explanation from Kissinger on the technical differences in the American position, the two Soviet officials stepped in to the conversation and helped explain the previously convoluted American position more clearly to Brezhnev.<sup>23</sup>

As the Soviet delegation understood the American proposal more clearly, Brezhnev and Kissinger shifted the conversation to the common understandings that the two sides share, utilizing a sense of courtesy and attempts at humor to do so.<sup>24</sup> For nearly three pages of text, Ford allows Kissinger and Brezhnev to dominate the conversation that has turned to the technical aspects of the new SALT II agreement.<sup>25</sup> These

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<sup>20</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 333-35.

<sup>21</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 333. While Brezhnev is agitated and often uses harsh language to address the American delegation, his consternation is understandable if not forgivable because of the pressures that were likely on him and his delegation from the deep political concerns throughout the Soviet leadership concerning the nuclear arms agreement, similar to the American political discourse.

<sup>22</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 335.

<sup>23</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XVI, pp. 335. The state department notes: “In a further exchange among members of the Soviet group, Dobrynin and [Deputy American Foreign Minister Gregory] Kornienko explained to Brezhnev that the United States formulation was misleading but that it had now been clarified...Brezhnev said that in that case the Soviets could agree.”

<sup>24</sup> As in previous transitions, Kissinger is used as a target at which jokes can be made for the betterment of relations between Ford and Brezhnev. These moments could have served as a quasi-comic relief in the midst of tense negotiations for both sides of the negotiating table.

<sup>25</sup> The timeline of the conversation can only be inferred by using a few specific points where the State Department document indicates the exact time. The start, end, and a pair of points of break indicate the exact time throughout the meeting but the rest of the conversation flows freely, with no indications of time

deliberations signal a peak of tensions at the table for the day. Observations of many kinds can be formed while noticing Ford's lapse in participation. Ford could have relied on Kissinger to help maneuver out of the difficult and contentious situation using his understanding of the Soviets and the relationship that they had built over the previous 6-7 years, because Ford did not understand the intricate technical aspects of the conversation clearly enough or the military importance of concessions or requests of the Soviets, because Kissinger really was the leader of the American delegation and American foreign policy, or a number of other reasons. A combination of factors likely contributed to Ford's quiet spell at the height of negotiations. Ford probably realized that he would likely be unable to match the rapport that Kissinger had with the Soviets and he would not be able to match or overtake Kissinger in the depth of technical knowledge that he had concerning the nuclear arms situation.

While Hanhimäki asserts Kissinger's supremacy in foreign policy and Ford's inability to match him in these technical areas, I find Ford's silences to be revealing of great character and strong leadership.<sup>26</sup> While Ford could be eager to show his agency in the proceedings at times, his silences speak volumes about his ability to recognize deficiencies in his own capabilities and allow others to lead the conversation in his place. There is a precedent for such a leadership style in the presidency at the time of Ford's administration. As can be seen in Fred Greenstein's *The Hidden Hand Presidency*, Eisenhower's leadership style was one that attempted to "conceal the political side of his leadership," meaning that Eisenhower often used different strategies "that enabled him to

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passing. This leaves the reader a difficult task while discussing the meeting, as indications of exact time are difficult to come by.

<sup>26</sup> Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 371-72.

exercise power without seeming to flex his muscles.”<sup>27</sup> Eisenhower’s “hidden hand” style often employed middlemen to wield power and push on adversaries in a way that would often have seemed heavy-handed if Eisenhower himself had performed the actions himself.<sup>28</sup> Though Kissinger often acted as the point man for technical conversations, Ford’s choice to back away from the conversation and allow Kissinger to argue and debate with the Soviets in was likely for the betterment of the summit and shows a selflessness and aptitude for tact that many in his place would not be able to exhibit. It is no small feat that Ford was able to withstand the intense personal pressures of being President the pressures surrounding his presidency along with his role as second fiddle to Kissinger in foreign policy.

Though he possessed a remarkable amount of restraint in a desire to further the summit, it is difficult to imagine that Ford was entirely comfortable with Kissinger in control of the American delegation, conversing with Brezhnev on SALT II proposals. So, as soon as the conversation’s tone relaxed, Ford reentered the conversation. Unfortunately for him, the contributions he made to the conversation were marginal and repetitive, as Brezhnev hits at.<sup>29</sup> The circular conversation prompts Ford to ask for a short break in the session.

Following the break, a conversation less hinged around the technical aspects of the nuclear arms agreement occurred, with the political aspects of the agreement taking forefront of the discussions. In this section of the summit, Ford’s expertise in dealing

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<sup>27</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982), pp. 5, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, pp. 59.

<sup>29</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 337. Brezhnev states in reply to one of Ford’s suggestions concerning basing equality of the two nations’ armaments on throw weight: “We tried [already] but nothing came out of it.”

with political actors when political ramifications are concerned comes in handy. His ability to perceive the political ramifications in the United States of a SALT II agreement concerning any number of potential terms and then to effectively convey them to the Soviets proves vital in contributing to the Soviet delegation's understanding of American positions. While his ability to discuss different American political responses to potential provisions seems discordant with his lack of political acuity before the summit, it is likely that Ford used American politics as a negotiating tool to push his own political agenda. Ford Kissinger attempted to explain the ins and outs of American governance from an executive level and help to explain to the Soviets precisely why certain pieces of the agreement were vital to American interests, and why the delegation insisted on certain provisions so heartily.<sup>30</sup>

Keeping with his desires to engage in the talks and contribute in a significant manner, Ford offers political collateral in exchange for a furthering of the SALT II proposals concerning the equivalence in the cap numbers for each side—the abandonment of the American nuclear submarine base in Rota, Spain by 1984.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the latter half of the meeting Ford explains clearly and delicately to Brezhnev how multiple decisions that he makes "...[do] not necessarily accord with that of..."

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<sup>30</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 339-340. In two cases during this section, Ford explains why particular pieces of the negotiation must be executed in precise ways. First, he and Kissinger relate to Brezhnev that a letter between Brezhnev and Ford, relying on a 'gentleman's agreement' concerning the ceilings placed on the aggregate and MIRV limits would not necessarily hold the following president to the same standard, so those provisions on nuclear launchers should be a part of the formal agreement. Second, Ford states that he would like to begin a path on which the following of détente would be 'irrevocable' for any following administrations. This is an indication of Ford's serious devotion to both the nuclear arms reduction and relaxation of relations between the U.S. and USSR that is not merely lip service. That his comments come in the midst of negotiations surrounding nuclear armaments is notable.

<sup>31</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 341. Given the proximity of Rota to the seas of Northern Europe, abandoning a nuclear submarine base in this area would be of strategic importance for both sides of the negotiating table, something Ford hints to in his delivery of the offer, but it seems easily given up as collateral, signifying that it was not a very difficult concession in return for equality in the final cap number of launchers for each side.

many different groups in America and within his own group of advisors, "...in order to promote and strengthen détente." This shows that Ford is not only willing to talk but also act in favor of strengthening the resolve in favor of détente and against nuclear war against the Soviet Union. That Ford eagerly proffers the loss of a military base in exchange to keep the conversation moving shows both his desire to keep control of the American side of the conversation and his desire to make serious inroads in the SALT II agreement while at Vladivostok. This example furthers the idea presented in the first chapter concerning Ford's desire to make the Vladivostok summit a meaningful one and accentuates Ford's growth into his role as a foreign policy leader because he is willing to reach out to the Soviet delegation in search for compromise and a solution to issues that concern both sides. Ford's ability to work in a direct fashion with the Soviets, and in Kissinger's words, with a focus on "...sincerity and on substance than on facileness,"<sup>32</sup> helped him to find a path through much of the political flak that occupied the Vladivostok summit.

As the meeting wore on, several moments where Brezhnev is agitated by what he perceived as issues with the United States' position on SALT II, or with the United States' current actions in accordance with the original SALT provisions. One such moment came during a discussion of how to calculate the total number of different types of bombs:

Your missile used to weigh 35 tons and now it weighs 120 tons. What should that missile be called—light, medium, or heavy? Outwardly, you don't violate the agreement, but in effect you have a new missile, and this makes a tremendous difference that cannot be swept under the rug.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 1066.

<sup>33</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 337-338.

When moments like this occurred, the President and Kissinger worked in tandem to calm Brezhnev down, explain the U.S. position or actions that upset him to clarify the U.S. point of view and to help him understand the reasoning behind the U.S. position.<sup>34</sup> In this instance, Kissinger explained the reasoning behind the U.S. position from a domestic standpoint by saying "...for internal reasons we will have to show that we have reached equivalence in aggregate levels and MIRV levels."<sup>35</sup> The groups followed a generally friendly tone in this meeting, though an issue concerning 200 of the Soviet Union's MIRV missiles and their attempt to find numerical equivalence threatened to derail the genial atmosphere. Tension crept into the conversation likely because of the tangible difference in each side's policy. Before they can resolve the final issue of the night, Brezhnev announces that the day's talks should conclude. The tension left in the room is tangible and likely influenced the next day's events, as Ford's eagerness to mediate and find a solution as quickly as possible shows.

After the first day of the summit, the two sides agreed on a few important proposals and ended the discussions arguing over another. The two sides agreed that their respective nuclear arsenals would reach "full equality" at "the levels of 2400 and 1320" during the lengths of the agreement, until 1985.<sup>36</sup> This agreement came along with a statement "...that by June or July next year [1975] both sides will finalize an agreement based on the principle of equal security."<sup>37</sup> These two agreements alone, Brezhnev postulates, would send Ford "...home with achievements no less important than those

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<sup>34</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 342-349. There are at least three occasions from pages 342-349 in the discussion where Kissinger and Ford have to talk Brezhnev down from a contentious position, and are able to do so.

<sup>35</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 338.

<sup>36</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 346.

<sup>37</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 346.

Mr. Nixon had brought back.<sup>38</sup> Along with agreements that neither side would build new nuclear silos and that the American naval base in Rota, Spain would be abandoned in 1983, the first day's results were very positive. The only sticking point was the discussion of whether to include, or how to count bombers—of which the U.S. had many more than the USSR—in the aggregate totals for each side. Though this discussion signaled a heated end to the day's talks, the first day was nonetheless positive and productive for the two delegations.

### **Technical Debate and Final Agreements**

As the groups entered the rooms to begin the second day of negotiations at Vladivostok, Ford took an abrupt approach to open the conversation:

Mr. General Secretary, I have consulted with not only Dr. Kissinger but also others. In the spirit of progress in the area of strategic arms limitation as well as other areas in our relations, we considered the various issues before us, including that of bombers. I know you have deep concern about counting ballistic missiles on aircraft. In the spirit of progress in our negotiations and broader aspects of our relations we can agree to count any ballistic missile with the range of over 700 kilometers within the 2400 ceiling. This in effect will mean a serious limitation on our capability to use such systems.<sup>39</sup>

Given the arguments that ended the talks the night before concerning the 200 missile limitations, Ford likely felt pressure from his American advisors and from his personal desire to foster cooperation to address the contentious points from the night before. Unfortunately for Ford, his inexperience in dealing with international diplomacy at an executive level, his likely desire to show control over Kissinger and the American negotiating delegation, and his eagerness to play arbiter begin the meeting far too suddenly. Ford proposed a limit on the number of bombers before the meeting has really

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<sup>38</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 346.

<sup>39</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 351.

begun, and Brezhnev barely reacted to his offer. Brezhnev asked to clarify Ford's position, then immediately switched to relay an anecdote on souvenirs for both President Ford and Mrs. Ford, from Brezhnev and his wife. This abrupt change in tone from Ford's initial urgent and businesslike manner is to one of friendliness and geniality. Brezhnev's response shows that Ford began too eagerly with the business at hand, without the proper etiquette necessary for diplomatic relations. Yet, Ford recognized the switch in tone and continues along with Brezhnev, warmly inviting him to the U.S. in 1975 "When you come to the United States, I would like to take you to the Merriweather Post Estate in Florida," and relating what his home life in Nebraska and Michigan was like, upon Brezhnev's prompting.<sup>40</sup> Despite the rocky start from Ford, the lessons he learned from the first day of meetings in the role as arbitrator served well to create a productive session on SALT II and helped to educate Ford further on the intricacies of diplomacy with the Soviet Union, further forming his foreign policy platform.

Ford's dogged desire to address the issue from the previous night returned as soon as possible following the pleasantries that opened the meeting, but his second attempt to address the change from the past conversation followed the pattern set by Brezhnev: using common ground as an approach to greater understanding. Ford claims to have worked against the advice of his advisors in conceding on the issue of long range bombers included in the 2400 ceiling, in hopes of moving forward with the talks. While it is true that Ford makes this concession against some of his advisors' advice, how impactful the concession was is up for debate, as his advisors had previously pressed for a limit of 2,200, not 2,400, launchers. In practical terms, in retrospect, one can see only a

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<sup>40</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 352.



small disparity in the destructive power between the two figures. Brezhnev, getting a reasonable concession from the American delegation and understanding Ford's eager nature to push forward with the discussions, replied: "When I went to bed last night, I had difficulty falling asleep and kept thinking about our talks...Personally, I did not have the impression that we were in an impasse."<sup>41</sup>

During the rest of the conversation, Brezhnev pushes the Americans further on the issue of long-range bomber and the missile limit. A contentious moment follows their defense in which a discussion of a counter proposal ensues. With Kissinger's mediation, the President and Brezhnev stayed away from circular debates on the details of the SALT II policy, attempting instead to continue their discussions focused on principle rather than minutiae. Unlike the first day of talks, Ford decides to immerse himself in detailed policy talks with Brezhnev, rather than allowing Kissinger to take the lead. Ford's shift from day one to day two is notable because of his desire on day two to involve himself in discussions he readily avoided during the previous meeting. Why Ford decided to partake in the murky details of the second day's discussion is unclear, but likely stems from similar reasons as his abrupt start to the meeting—Ford probably desired to fulfill the goal set by Kissinger in early November to be the leader of U.S. foreign policy, and to show control over the U.S. half of the conversation. Though his natural inclination to allow Kissinger to discuss difficult details kept his involvement in check during the previous evening, Ford pushes for his own understandings on the policy issues on the second day. Though Ford attempts to push his policy Kissinger still had a leading role in the discussion, and he was vitally important to the conversation and a proposal of a ban

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<sup>41</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 352

on American MIRVs with a range over 3000km, while securing a Soviet agreement to limit their “MIRVed heavy missiles” to 200.<sup>42</sup>

As the discussion continued, Ford drew on the reservoir of common ground with Brezhnev that had been built up over the previous days by complimenting the pipe that Brezhnev gave him at the start of the day. This allows the conversation to continue amicably, and Ford moves with the flow of the discussions well. The advisors present in the American contingent guiding Ford to the proper direction to take with the Soviets likely precipitated this shift. In the following discussion, Ford’s ability to accept the advice of his advisors and adapt to the situation, to recognize when he overstepped his boundaries of technical expertise, helped to funnel the conversation in a positive direction.

In the midst of their second conversation, Ford, Brezhnev, and the senior members of each delegation broke away to discuss the possibility of preventing nuclear war across the world, and between their two nations. Brezhnev cites an initiative that he started with President Nixon as they prepared to back the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and discussed some in the summer preceding Nixon’s resignation. Brezhnev suggests the possibility of a mutual agreement to come to the aid of the other country in humanitarian terms, in event of a nuclear attack from a third party, along with an agreement to refrain from using nuclear weapons on one another.<sup>43</sup> Ford expresses interest and an overall positive reaction to Brezhnev’s request, while responding to the somewhat exceptional proposal in a reserved manner. Acting as a moderator and an arbiter between their nations and for Brezhnev’s proposal, Ford pushes Brezhnev on the

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<sup>42</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 354.

<sup>43</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 370-371.

details of such an agreement. Ford exhibits the same candid honesty that he grew in to during the latter part of the first and second days during his examination of Brezhnev's proposal, concluding safely: "We do want to prevent nuclear war and your country and mine have a great responsibility. We should talk further [on this agreement]."<sup>44</sup> Given the weight of the proposal in the midst of difficult and contentious nuclear arms talks and his relative dearth of experience dealing with such issues, Ford's ability to adapt his businesslike style of negotiation to Brezhnev's at times unwieldy nature is noteworthy, and will be explored further in the conclusion to this chapter.

There is little of note to discuss after the small meeting between Ford and Brezhnev on nuclear war and a desire for peace. Much of the time following the break is spent hammering out the details surrounding the agreement to announce the summit's results on SALT II to the public and how the wording of the press release will work best for both sides. As they move on from SALT II, they discuss the Middle East and the possibility of war there and their mutual concerns for Israel, then the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).<sup>45</sup> The conversation on CSCE, or what would also be known as the Helsinki Accords, is of note here because of its long-lasting impact on the Soviet Union and global politics. The Soviet leadership—spearheaded by Gromyko—lists six different issues that they have with the current CSCE provisions, including a "...question of borders" and "exchanging observers at maneuvers [of troops

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<sup>44</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 371.

<sup>45</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 361-369.

For more information on the CSCE, see: Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Chapter 25: Détente, Section: Helsinki Accords" in *Guide to U.S. Foreign Policy: A Diplomatic History*, eds. Robert J. McMahon, Thomas W. Zeiler, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012) pp. 371-382.

in Europe].”<sup>46</sup> While the U.S. was not a major partner in the CSCE negotiations, Kissinger attempts to answer for the U.S. position on three of the six points, and Ford promises that he “...will meet with [West German Chancellor Helmut] Schmidt and [French President Valéry] Giscard and will discuss these CSCE issues with them in order to try and develop a method for solving all the points raised by the Foreign Minister [Gromyko].”<sup>47</sup> Despite their lesser role in the CSCE negotiations, this promise reaffirms America’s dedication to détente overall and CSCE as a part of the process of relaxation of East-West relations.

Throughout the conversation after the breakaway session, Ford transitions from point to point smoothly and fluidly, helping to show his generally sound global political understandings. After the contentious moments between the two groups, the conversation continued amicably lead by Brezhnev and Ford until the day’s talks concluded.

The provisions agreed upon during the second day of talks largely shored up the first day’s agreements. In terms of policy, the direct results were not as significant as the previous day’s limits of 2,400 and 1,320. The two sides confirmed the 2,400 and 1,320 limits on launchers and MIRVs. They decided that bombers with a range under 600 kilometers would count as one launcher in the aggregate totals, that bombers with a range between 600 and 3000 kilometers would count toward the aggregate total based on the number of missiles that they carried, and recalled from the previous day that bombers with a range over 3000 kilometers would be allowed without extra constraints in the 2,400 limit.<sup>48</sup> For their last agreement, the two delegations confirmed that neither would

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<sup>46</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 366.

<sup>47</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 367.

<sup>48</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 355-356.

be limited in the number of ‘heavy missiles’ or on the number of such missiles that could be MIRVed within the 1,320 limit.<sup>49</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By focusing on the specific moments in the SALT II negotiations rather than merely outlining the summit and the agreements reached, one can understand several elements key to Ford’s foreign policy legacy. One can see Ford’s ability to apply the skills of diplomacy and negotiation on an international scale, as well as the technical details surrounding nuclear arms, that he learned over the previous four months. His negotiating skill was nascent in its development in comparison to Kissinger and his predecessor during their interactions with the Soviet Union, and yet, Ford’s personal connections and leadership fostered significant results from the summit when few expected them. The initial personal and professional bonds built between Ford and Brezhnev helped facilitate progress in difficult conversations throughout the summit. Ford’s ability to interact with Brezhnev on personal and political levels is highlighted during each day’s talks. What Ford lacks in technical expertise and diplomatic experience is made up for by his ability to connect with Brezhnev and foster a positive environment for the summit. A detailed discussion of the summit conversations helps to show that both sides genuinely wanted a new SALT agreement, and despite difficult and contentious moments, were able to make considerable progress on agreeing on the treaty. As Dick Cheney said in 1993, “These were *not* negotiations, in which the details had been worked out at the staff level, and all the leaders had to do were come in, shake hands, and sign an agreement...President Ford and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev

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<sup>49</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 355-356.

engaged in very tough negotiations,<sup>50</sup> but they were nearly completed the treaty after two difficult days of negotiations.

The most important provisions coming out of the summit at Vladivostok, announced November 24, 1974 as what would be called the Vladivostok Accords, were agreements on the upper limits for each nations' nuclear arsenal of 2,400 launchers of nuclear weapons, with 1,320 of those as MIRV launchers. Within these limits, the two sides agreed upon which types of launchers were included in the aggregate totals. These ceilings would be active for 10 years upon signing the SALT II treaty, with an anticipated end date of 1985—at which time a new agreement was expected to follow. Although the provisions did not truly reduce the number of nuclear launchers either side had at the time of negotiations, the agreement curbed the expansion of each sides' launchers over the 10 year period, significantly so for the Soviet Union. Agreements constraining either side's ability to build up their nuclear arsenals were very difficult to reach because of the disparate makeup of the two nations' weaponry. The different focuses of each nation's military on throw weight and accuracy, MIRV and aircraft-launched bombs, and submarine-launched and land-based missiles are some examples of such disparities between their nuclear arsenals. Because they had such different armament compositions, that they could agree on blanket ceilings for both to abide by—that curbed the production of both in the long run—is significant. Such an agreement shows the dedication of each side for furthering détente and preserving peace.

Summing up Ford's participation at Vladivostok, from polite procedural moments to technical conversations while dealing with an unwieldy adversary, one can see that

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Cheney, "The Ford Presidency in Perspective", *Gerald R. Ford and the Politics of Post-Watergate America*, vol. 1, Edited by Bernard J. Firestone, Alexej Ugrinsky, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp. 5.

Ford needed to both navigate treacherous political waters at home and compromise with a Soviet leader described by Kissinger as “a brute.”<sup>51</sup> Ford utilized the same direct, hands-on style he honed while a member of Congress to varying levels of success during his time in Vladivostok. At moments on both the first and second days of discussions, Ford’s reactions to similar conversations varied greatly from one another. In just one example of such a change, Ford preferred to remain quiet during technical conversations on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, but then jumped into contentious moments to little avail a day later. Perhaps following instructions of his advisors, perhaps looking to have a greater influence on the summit’s proceedings, Ford did not have a very well planned strategy as to what to do at different points during the meetings. Nonetheless, by showing tact throughout the discussions, as well as a natural ability to relate well personally with Brezhnev and a tendency to be direct and honest, Ford produced significant progress on a SALT II agreement that few expected. However, surprisingly, Ford found it much more challenging to make the case for the Vladivostok Accords to Congress and the American public after the delegation’s return to Washington, as discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 1026. Kissinger’s personal evaluation of Brezhnev was presented to Ford in the lead-up to the summit, and included this colorful phrase to point at Brezhnev’s tumultuous demeanor at the negotiating table.





## Chapter Three: The Aftermath of Vladivostok

### Introduction

The press release on November 24, 1974 at 4 a.m. EST outlined what would soon be specified by members of the American delegation returning home from Vladivostok—a major step towards a nuclear arms reduction treaty, SALT II. While the release outlined much of what was discussed at Vladivostok, from Cyprus to Israel and from wheat subsidies to ICBMs without specifying the potential results of such agreements, it was clear to those present at the summit that a new era of Soviet-American détente was nearly at hand. The major obstacles to nuclear arms reduction were cleared at the summit—aggregate numbers of 2,400 ICBMs, submarine launched missiles, and heavy bombers, 1,320 of which could be armed with multiple warheads (MIRVs) set the ceilings for each nations’ nuclear arsenal. The provisional agreements also clarified the types of launchers that would count against the total number for each side. It seemed to the American delegation that only small details remained before a treaty would be ready to sign. President Ford declared in a nationally televised press conference on December 2, 1974 that the realistic goal would be “...completing this agreement next year.”<sup>1</sup> It seemed as though all the momentum necessary to complete the SALT II treaty was present in the winter of 1974. Yet, when Ford lost his bid for election to the presidency two years later, SALT II seemed only a fanciful agreement, with the talks mired in the very details that both sides sought to quickly iron out in the summer of 1975 and debates in America

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald Ford, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, August 9 to December 31, 1974*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 679.

raging on the future of American-Soviet relations. The agreement that Ford had hoped would be the “hallmark of his presidency” remained unfinished during his time in office.<sup>2</sup>

What went wrong for Ford and his delegation following the hope that abounded in the winter of 1974? What slowed the momentum of the Vladivostok summit to a halting stop by the fall of 1976? While Ford and his Republican supporters in his administration likely anticipated some resistance on behalf of Senator Henry Jackson and other Senate Democrats, the general understanding that treaties and foreign agreements were positive for the nation would have quelled many concerns. Generally speaking, there was and still is an idea that international treaties of some sort have positive ramifications for the nation, an idea well expressed by the overwhelming amount of treaties ratified over those not.<sup>3</sup> While the SALT II talks did not produce a formal treatise in the winter of 1974, achieving general support for the coming treaty was a realistic goal for the Ford administration as they returned from Vladivostok. The resistance that the Vladivostok Accords met in Congress, in the media, from nuclear arms ‘experts’, and from the American public was, as Secretary of State Kissinger termed it in later years “...opposed [to] the fact of an agreement [with the Soviets] more than its content.”<sup>4</sup> SALT II came under serious scrutiny in a complex domestic political climate only four months out from Watergate and President Nixon’s resignation, in the midst of international trade negotiations contingent on emigration of Jews from the USSR, and a struggling economy. While Ford described the political situation as a time “...during which Murphy’s Law

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, (New York: Times Books, 2007), pp. 108.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Treaties.htm> From 1787-1987, the Senate approved 1,500 treaties, rejected 21 and did not vote on 85 due to a lack of support. The overwhelming number of treaties approved by the Senate indicates a historical desire to accept international treaties—normally negotiated by the Executive Branch.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp. 299.

prevailed,” the administration’s inability to convince detractors of SALT II of its merits is a clear component of the negative response to Vladivostok.<sup>5</sup> A combination of these factors and growing intransigence on both the American and Soviet sides of the SALT II negotiating table kept negotiations open until 1976, when Ford resisted further negotiations because of their political ramifications and the talks ended.

Reactions emerged immediately following the announcement of the accords and the presentation of the provisions’ details to the public, with few responding positively. While Ford’s negotiating ability was limited during the summit, his ability to discuss policy, maneuver in domestic political circles, and present potential legislation was practiced, albeit on a more localized scale, over his 24 years in Congress. The differences with the SALT II agreements—as opposed to his work in the legislature—came from the national level and the executive branch, rather than Ford’s normal legislative perspective. Ford’s initial attempts to endorse the agreements culminated in a national press conference on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, at which he emphasized the potential benefits in the agreements in comparison to an unrelenting arms race. The discussions surrounding the SALT II talks intensified and deepened following Ford’s press conference, and the early resistance to their main provisions remained.

In the weeks and months following the Vladivostok summit, resistances to SALT II and strengthening détente remained domestically while new issues between the Soviet and American delegations emerged. Soviet concerns over Democrat demands of a lower overall ceiling and other proposals originally considered to be of minor detail—like the inclusion or exclusion of bombers with a range of 600km or less from the aggregate

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<sup>5</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1979) pp. 219.

limits—became sticking points in the creation of an actual treaty. As the months stretched on into late 1975 and early 1976, the momentum that came out of Vladivostok slowed and eventually stopped. Vocal critics of Ford’s attempts at foreign policy ranged from Republican Presidential Candidate Ronald Reagan to Jackson and beyond. Three groups emerged in resistance to the agreements, groups that likely would not have agreed on other policies concerning the Soviet Union; Jacksonian Democrats, the war ‘hawks’, and the ‘doves’ all sought changes with the administration’s provisional SALT II agreements. A bevy of other policy concerns took over the Ford administration’s agenda as the political situation surrounding SALT II soured, eventually placing the agreement on the back-burner of policy initiatives, to be completed after Ford’s election to the presidency in 1976.

The domestic pressures felt from both Congress and the media negatively impacted both the chances for the U.S. delegation to negotiate a formal SALT II treaty with the Soviets and the chances of such a treaty being approved by the Senate. These domestic pressures also helped fuel Soviet intransigence during SALT II negotiations throughout 1975. As Kissinger put it:

...at a time when he [Jackson] and his allies were eliminating trade and credit which could have served as Soviet incentives... We were being urged to demand concessions [on SALT II] but were simultaneously deprived [by Congressional debate over SALT II and emigration of Soviet Jewry] of the ability to offer a quid pro quo [in the Trade Act of 1975].<sup>6</sup>

Yet the collapse of international negotiations was not such a straightforward story Kissinger later relayed. The American delegation’s choice to resist concessions on the provisions left on the negotiating table after Vladivostok and their understanding that the

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<sup>6</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 300, 305.

Soviets would continue making concessions without U.S. reciprocation also strongly impacted the breakdown in negotiations. In a sense, issues in both American domestic politics and Soviet-American international politics combined to stall SALT II negotiations during Ford's term as president.

### **The Immediate Aftermath**

The American delegation had much to be hopeful for when flying home after the final day of deliberations at Vladivostok. Securing significant concessions from the Soviets on many points of SALT II—most notably the ceilings of 2,400 aggregate and 1,320 MIRV missiles that significantly curtailed future buildup of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and allowed for perceived parity in the numbers of missiles in 1985—gave the delegation confidence in the accords that they negotiated over the previous few days.<sup>7</sup> The delegation believed that the agreed upon terms satisfied much of the administration's plan going into the summit to achieve results in line with the desires of the American people, their own understandings of the arms issues, and provisions palatable to the Democrat—controlled Senate. Reception to the accords seemed largely split down inter-party lines, with Senator Henry Jackson leading a section of hawkish Democrats against the provisions and a bipartisan group of congressional leaders that were generally supportive. Given Ford's experience in Congress and his previously practiced skills at wrangling support for bills in the interest of the American people, it could be expected that his domestic political expertise would pay off in a search for support of SALT II. However, the complicated political factors surrounding SALT II and Ford's presidency as a whole strongly influenced initial reactions to the accords' provisions.

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<sup>7</sup> Department of State, United States of America, Eds. Geyer, David C., and Edward C. Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976; Soviet Union, August 1974-December 1976*, vol. XVI. (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012.), pp. 288-310.

While Jackson was the most prominent figure to come out against SALT II and nearly all U.S.-USSR interactions, he was by no means the only politician against the SALT II provisions. Jackson led a group of Senators who were generally opposed to the Soviet Union on moral grounds, most pointedly on issues of Soviet Jewry. The issue of Soviet Jews' emigration from the USSR to Israel was an emotional one for many Americans who still felt the lasting effects of the Holocaust. This impacted the Soviet political dealings with the U.S., though it was not the only issue Jackson focused his critique on. Jackson loudly and consistently attacked the proposals of SALT II after Vladivostok for having set both too high a ceiling for each nation's nuclear launchers and for allowing the Soviets to maintain an advantage over the period of the agreement until parity was reached in or around 1985.<sup>8</sup> Given Jackson's reluctance to deal with the Soviets concerning many issues, it is unlikely that any administrative action would mollify his concerns. Two other groups who were generally open to negotiations with the USSR but developed concerns with the Vladivostok Accords for nearly opposite reasons were the so-called war 'hawks' and 'doves'. Cold War 'Hawks' were known to be staunch supporters of military buildup and strengthening the U.S. armed forces. 'Doves' were known for their desires to achieve diplomatic solutions to further peace and their support of nuclear arms reductions to avoid the potential catastrophic effects of a nuclear war. The two groups of politicians did not have the same outspoken leader as the anti-Soviet Jackson group did, but a general understanding that hawks were against the Vladivostok Accords because of the reduction of U.S. nuclear capabilities, and the doves

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<sup>8</sup> *Memorandum by Senator Henry Jackson*, December 1974, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Paul H. Nitze Papers, Box 160, Folder 5—Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) Vladivostok Accord Nov. 1974. Jackson was primarily concerned with the potential economic strain that an arms buildup would place on the United States during the 10 years the agreement would take effect.

were against the accords because they did not produce actual, meaningful reductions in nuclear arms for either side.

From the press release on November 24 to the nationally televised press conference December 2 and the Aide-Memoire concerning specific SALT II strategies and goals released on December 10, the administration attempted to control the flow of information about the Vladivostok Accords. Despite this attempt, the details that emerged quickly came under scrutiny from all angles. The administration could only control information to a point given the mass proliferation of reactions to the provisions immediately following their release.

The administration released general and then increasingly specific information in controlled settings. The first piece of information given to the public was the aforementioned press release, generally outlining the events of the summit and the good-natured environment in which it was conducted. The most specific information on the provisions of the SALT II agreement remained purposefully vague:

Special consideration was given in the course of the talks to a pivotal aspect of Soviet-American relations; measures to eliminate the threat of war and to halt the arms race...the US and the USSR will continue to exert vigorous efforts to achieve this historic task.<sup>9</sup>

The vague description provided some cover for the administration and for Brezhnev as they both prepared to lay out more detailed description of the accords to their respective governments, and especially for Brezhnev to travel back to Moscow to affirm the details of the provisional agreements with the Politburo. Its vagueness likewise allowed for confusion through similarly vague reporting, an unfortunate side effect of keeping the

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<sup>9</sup> Office of the White House Press Secretary, *Joint US-Soviet communiqué*, November 24, 1974. <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Joint%20US-Soviet%20Vladivostok%20Statement%20and%20Communique,%20November%2024,%201974.pdf>

specific provisions under wraps. The press release's vagueness was a necessary evil directly after the summit because Brezhnev did not have the same mandate on foreign policy creation as General Secretary that Ford expected to have as President. Responses to the initial press release and the Kissinger press conference that followed were, naturally, focused on the limited information given leading to an increase in speculation.<sup>10</sup>

The national newspaper coverage on Vladivostok included publications such as the Los Angeles Times, the Detroit Free Press, The New York Times, and the Chicago Tribune, among others. While largely reporting on the chronology of the trip, they offered little in terms of evaluation of the summit. Similarly, the national television news coverage on Vladivostok was also somewhat neutral in the opening discussions of the accords, generally following the administration's line in evaluation of the talks. ABC, NBC Evening News, and CBS Nightly News segments on November 24 covered the events in some detail—all offering their own takes on the events. Of particular interest are CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite and NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, two cable news outlets with recognizable personalities, known and trusted across the country. Along with respected news journalist Eric Sevareid, Cronkite dominated the national news coverage in 1974, offering detailed and comprehensible information to his viewers. On November 24, their eyes, along with the eyes of America, turned towards the accords, which seemed to be “another breakthrough towards stabilizing the big power

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<sup>10</sup> Kissinger held an off the record press conference on the Vladivostok summit and the SALT II discussions as the press release was prepared. The press conference helped to shape much of the understandings formed by the reports following the summit. For the text of the press conference, see: United States, Department of State, Office of Public Communication, *The Department of State Bulletin: The President's n*, vol. 71, October-December 1974, December 23, 1974, pp. 898-905.



nuclear arms race.”<sup>11</sup> With a combination of factual presentation and commentary, NBC Nightly News and CBS Evening News discussed Vladivostok in a clear and precise manner, with hope that Ford and Brezhnev would meet in the coming months in the U.S. “...to sign the agreement that Kissinger says will break the back of the arms race.”<sup>12</sup>

Though the press release and initial press conferences limited the information presented publicly, by November 26<sup>th</sup> members of the bipartisan Congressional leadership had discussed the 2,400 ceiling in a meeting with President Ford. The main discussion focused on the concerns that Senator Jackson publicly stated earlier that day: that the 2,400 ceiling that came out of Vladivostok was too high, and that 1,700 was a preferable cap.<sup>13</sup> It is unclear where Jackson got the figure of 2,400, but the inability of the administration to contain information was a worrying sign. That the official number was released before an official public announcement or the meeting with the congressional leadership shows the administration’s inability to control the flow of information as effectively as it wanted to during this initial period. In a January discussion between Kissinger and Ford on the ongoing negotiations with the Soviets on SALT II, Kissinger remarked, “...the major thing is to stop leaks like this.”<sup>14</sup> That even two months after Vladivostok the administration had difficulties keeping its SALT II information secret was a major concern for the upcoming negotiations. Widespread concerns grew in the following week both over the suggested provisions of SALT II and the viability of those proposals under scrutiny from Congress and under the pressure to

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<sup>11</sup> CBS Evening News, Segment: November 24, 1974, Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University. <https://tvnews-vanderbilt-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/siteindex/1974-11>

<sup>12</sup> NBC Nightly News, Segment: November 24, 1974, Television News Archive, Vanderbilt University. <https://tvnews-vanderbilt-edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/siteindex/1974-11>

<sup>13</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 372.

<sup>14</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 437.

craft an actual treaty between the two nations. The Guardian presciently stated that "...it remains to be seen whether the 'conceptual breakthrough' at Vladivostok can really be followed through by a substantive SALT treaty," in a November 25 article.<sup>15</sup> Despite a generally positive meeting with the bipartisan leadership, during which Ford explained that SALT II "...puts a ceiling on [Soviet] planned development," pushback from the press and Congress continued.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the neutral reporting and the administration's positive presentations of the Vladivostok Accords in the days following the summit, editorials and public responses written against the accords appeared around the time that officials released the specific numbers in the provisional agreement. Pieces and comments of particular vitriol emerged in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. One editorial, titled "Whose Triumph?" in *The Wall Street Journal* summed up both the grievances and confusion surrounding the accords particularly well, stating that "The breakthrough consisted of the abandonment of essentials of the American negotiating position," and that the agreement "...allows the Soviet Union a missile force three times as large as the American one when measured by the most relevant criterion."<sup>17</sup> The editorial continues to say that Soviet throw weight, or tonnage of bombs, will almost triple the American throw weight by 1985, given the proposals in SALT II. Yet, while it smashes the provisions for not addressing the disparity in throw weight, there is still an explicit lack of understandings of the significance of the "3-1 strategic advantage" held by the Soviets.<sup>18</sup> The article

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<sup>15</sup> Hella Pick, "Ford wins arms pact agreement", *The Guardian*, November 25, 1974.

<sup>16</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 372-375.

<sup>17</sup> "Whose Triumph?", *The Wall Street Journal*, December 2, 1974, pp. 18.

<sup>18</sup> "Whose Triumph?", *The Wall Street Journal*.

itself, accepts that “Intelligent people argue that a 3-1 strategic advantage makes no difference when weapons are as destructive as present ones.”<sup>19</sup> Given the two main concerns of *The Wall Street Journal* and its presence as a news source nationwide, it is not particularly difficult to imagine that many in the American public were similarly confused about the provisions and their impacts on the nuclear arms race.<sup>20</sup>

During the week following the press release at Vladivostok, the Ford administration attempted to assemble some support for the accords as they stood. Ford and Kissinger met with Bipartisan Congressional Leadership, labor leader George Meany, and Soviet academics in attempts to shore up support for their accords. Yet, it did not seem as though the administration had a truly coordinated plan to defend SALT II from those seeking to undercut its proposals.

Former Deputy Secretary of Defense and SALT delegation member Paul H. Nitze entered administration discussions over SALT II before the trip to Vladivostok and continued defending the accords after they were announced, in perhaps the most coordinated effort to garner support for the agreements. In a note to President Ford on November 2, 1974, Nitze detailed the reasoning behind the disparity between the U.S and Soviet nuclear arsenals and presented the opinion that he believes any SALT II agreement would not be particularly helpful to U.S-USSR attempts at political equivalence—that is to say that neither side would have leverage over the other in a

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<sup>19</sup> “Whose Triumph?,” *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>20</sup> Ford specifically discussed the impact of the *Wall Street Journal* article in his December 2 National Security Council meeting, the morning of his national news conference on his trip to the Far East. NSC Meeting December 2, 1974, pg. 2-3. Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Online Collections.

political situation because of a disparity in their nuclear arsenals.<sup>21</sup> Nitze argued that any agreements concerning nuclear arms would likely have little impact on U.S.-USSR decision-making, but rather would benefit the political understandings of nuclear arms in each country.<sup>22</sup> After the release of the Vladivostok Accords, Nitze became a vocal proponent for a SALT II agreement that focused on numerical equivalence between the United States and the USSR. As he claimed in a winter 1974-75 piece in the journal *Foreign Policy*, “The task today is to make sure that the progress we have made [on furthering détente with the USSR] is maintained and not reversed... The best approach would be through agreed arms control measures...”<sup>23</sup> Nitze’s viewpoint was one of the few in favor of an equal SALT II agreement in the public debates on SALT II. While his experience as Secretary of Defense under President Lyndon B. Johnson and as a SALT negotiator likely informed his general “Détente is a good thing,” understanding of U.S.-Soviet relations, his voice had little effect on the public perceptions of SALT II. No major coverage or response to Nitze’s paper proliferated in the days or weeks after it was published. Despite repeated attempts to disseminate information clearly, the administration still struggled with getting its message across and outside actors in favor of the agreements had little effect on those resisting the Vladivostok Accords.

The damning, yet confused Wall Street Journal editorial previously mentioned, and a National Security Council Meeting (NSC) focused on SALT II and its domestic reception, prefaced Ford’s national press conference on December 2. The NSC meeting

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<sup>21</sup> Letter, Paul H. Nitze to President Ford, November 2, 1974, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Paul H. Nitze Papers, Box 154, Folder 8: Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) Correspondence 1969-1979, Critical Issues in the Control of Strategic Arms.

<sup>22</sup> Letter, Paul H. Nitze to President Ford, November 2, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Paul H. Nitze, “The Strategic Balance between Hope and Skepticism”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 17, Winter 1974-75, pp. 139-140.

began with Ford's evaluation of the accords, which he remarked were "...far better than what I personally thought we would achieve," while lamenting that the coverage in the press was at "many instances...uninformed and inaccurate."<sup>24</sup> Ford insisted on the public support of NSC members against the growing pressures in the press and the "nitpickers" in Congress, to stem the resistance to "something that's in the best interest of the country."<sup>25</sup> Ford recounted the merits of his Far East trip and fielded concerns of the NSC members, especially on potential arguments against SALT II. However, the majority of the meeting was spent discussing the benefits of the accords as opposed to the potential alternatives faced if they were not completed and without discussion of a particular strategy to combat the growing resistance to the Vladivostok Accords. Ford's administration recognized the concerns regarding the Vladivostok Accords in the eyes of Congress and the American people, but the nationally televised presentation of evidence in response to those concerns was somewhat garbled that evening.

Ford likely hoped that his press conference would help clear up the confusion surrounding the accords. The press conference began with a summation similar to those since the summit concluded, with one significant difference in presentation: President Ford, and not Kissinger, discussed the accords. Ford's public presence on a national stage indicates the importance of the Vladivostok accords, placing it in the same category of national appearances as his inaugural address and his pardon of Nixon. Ford delivered a series of remarks, highlighting that the Vladivostok Accords set ceilings "...well below the force levels which would otherwise have been expected over the next 10 years [under SALT] and very substantially below the forces which would result from an all-out arms

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<sup>24</sup> NSC Meeting December 2, 1974, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Online Collections, pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> NSC Meeting December 2, 1974, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Online Collections, pp. 3.

race over that same period.”<sup>26</sup> Ford also attempted to reign in speculation on a perceived arms buildup as opposed to reductions and financial costs of creating arms to reach the 2,400 ceiling during the 10-year agreement by fielding a series of questions from reporters.<sup>27</sup> Following the discussion on SALT II and Vladivostok, Ford faced a series of questions of domestic economic policy.

In the week following the press conference, from December 3 to December 10, national and international newspapers wrote 174 articles concerning Vladivostok. The debate surrounding the accords raged on, with only some account taken for Ford’s assurances at his press conference. Press reception of the accords was split, indicative of concerns presented by Jackson and many others concerned with the provisional agreement. With headlines like “Vladivostok pluses and minuses,” “Be wary of summit ‘Triumph’”, and “Triumph and Skepticism,” it was clear that “SALT Questions remain[ed],” and that Ford’s press conference did little to address concerns on foreign policy that was quickly becoming a difficult domestic issue.<sup>28</sup>

While the American media dealt with the aftermath of SALT II, the international media coverage in the weeks following the summit was split, at times similarly indecisive over the results of the summit, but often far more critical than their American counterparts. Evaluation and critique of the summit is present in Canadian, British, and Hong Kongese newspapers throughout winter 1974-75. The Observer, The Guardian, The Globe and Mail, and South China Morning Post articles all commented on the

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<sup>26</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the President, Gerald Ford, 1974*, pp. 679.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the President, Gerald Ford, 1974*, pg. 679-684.

<sup>28</sup> Unknown Author, “Vladivostok pluses and minuses”, *Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1974, pp. A2; Carl Rowan, “Be wary of summit ‘Triumph’”, *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 6, 1974, pp. 4A; Anthony Lewis, “Triumph and Skepticism”, *The New York Times*, December 9, 1974, pp. 35.

proceedings at Vladivostok and their aftermath in the weeks after the summit ended. A *The Globe and Mail* article counted score for each side, saying “Chalk one up for the United States,” soon after the provisions were announced,<sup>29</sup> while a *The Guardian* article said that Ford “...has failed to still criticism...of his strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union...” and that “He was very much on the defensive...” during his national press conference.<sup>30</sup> International understandings of SALT II in countries allied to the U.S. were nearly as split as American understandings at the time, and show the lack of consensus on nearly any of the SALT II provisions coming out of Vladivostok both in America and abroad. Looking at the broader coverage of Ford and Vladivostok not only helps to contextualize American media confusion over SALT II, but also helps to normalize that confusion and highlights Ford’s apparent ineptitude in response to resistances to SALT II.

### **The Downfall of SALT II**

As 1975 wore on, resistance to the SALT II policies continued, and viable solutions to the details surrounding verification of the treaty’s provisions and inclusion of bombers under 600km flying distance in the aggregate totals became more difficult for the Soviet and American delegations to agree upon. Facing resistance to SALT II on three political fronts, an ailing economy, the end of the Vietnam conflict, continued issues in the Middle East, a country and Congress wary of presidential power, and new challenges from within the Republican Party, the Ford administration’s focus shifted away from the difficult issue of détente and arms reduction with the Soviet Union. The

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<sup>29</sup> John Gellner, “The Soviet Union—United States: Conceptual Breakthrough”, *The Globe and Mail*, December 7, 1974, pp. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Washington D.C. Correspondent, “Ford fails to still criticism”, *The Guardian*, December 4, 1974, pp. 2.

combination of resistances felt from American and Soviet forces against the completion of a SALT II treaty ultimately derailed the process, but that result was far from assured when the administration announced the results of the Vladivostok Summit in November 1974. The inability of Ford and his administration to accurately explain the benefits of a SALT II agreement contributed to those factors preventing SALT II's formal agreement.

While the administration moved away from negotiating SALT II under the stress of the 1976 election, the initial hopes for SALT II in late 1974 and early 1975 were positive despite the previously discussed public confusion and resistance to the accords. A memo concerning the provisional accords was circulated within the Ford administration on December 10. The memo outlined the specific objectives of the SALT II treaty to be signed in 1975, and the strategies necessary to achieve the SALT II agreement, most pointedly that "Negotiations between the delegations of the US and USSR...will resume in Geneva, in January 1975," and that "A new agreement will be completed as soon as possible..."<sup>31</sup> With a public debate swirling around détente with the Soviet Union generally and SALT II specifically, the administration attempted to keep its strategy and end goals under wraps because, as Kissinger told a group of academics that studied the Soviet Union, "You cannot conduct foreign policy if...while you are negotiating, every Senator tells you how to conduct the negotiations on every aspect," and "...the Soviets will not be happy if every time they say something to use they must worry about a public debate."<sup>32</sup> Likely in part to keep control over foreign policy decisions and in part to take a pragmatic step towards helping negotiations with the Soviets, Kissinger led administration attempts to keep specifics of SALT II

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<sup>31</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 380-382.

<sup>32</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 393-394.



negotiations out of the public eye unless they were deemed important progress and helpful if shared. Kissinger's decision was an indicator of the systemic issues that the Ford administration had in its public presentation of policy.

The resistance of Jacksonians, hawks, and doves continued in the weeks and months following the initial reactions to the summit. It is somewhat evident that the administration did not have a cohesive strategy to deal with the resistance against SALT II, but why they did not have one in place or create one once they felt the resistance is unclear. It would have been quite feasible for the administration to attempt a systematic rebuttal of the points of the three main political groups against the provisions, utilizing their Congressional leadership and figures like Nitze to support the accords. Regardless of Jackson's hard line against the Soviets, it is possible that the Ford administration could have swayed the many more hawks and doves—who were not opposed on principle to the agreements—to support the accords, if certain arguments were put forth. An argument in favor of the accords because of their ability to ensure numerical parity with the USSR over the long run could satisfy the concerns of the hawks on the deficiencies in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Similarly, an argument focusing on the reduction of long-term buildup of nuclear arms, and that SALT II could be the bridge to agreements on actual arms reductions could have satisfied some of the doves' concerns about a continued buildup of nuclear arms under SALT II. Why the administration chose not to pursue such arguments is somewhat puzzling, given the potential benefits. That the administration did not pursue such a course of action brings to light several possibilities as to why no plan was formed or enacted: Ford and his advisors simply did not recognize the mounting pressures against them and SALT II, Ford's administration decided that its current efforts would be

enough to stem the tide against SALT II given the Senate's historical proclivity towards approving treaties, or that Ford and his administration felt that they lacked the political leverage or will power to enforce considerable change in political opinion. In my view of the situation, this last possibility seems most likely, given the complex and unorthodox political situation that Ford found himself in as President and the considerable resistance to SALT II in particular. Nonetheless, regardless of the political realities that Ford faced, the administration's ineptitude in pushing its agenda on SALT II must be acknowledged, and contributes to the mixed domestic and international legacy that Ford left behind.

Ford, among others in his administration, did little to outline specifics on the SALT II negotiations as they continued in early 1975, while news reports and Congressional opinion continued to push back on the potential treaty. News reports on SALT II faded in frequency throughout 1975 and the more vocal critics in Congress quieted. While public attention on relations with the Soviet Union mellowed, relations with the Soviet Union were impacted by several developments in SALT II negotiations and trade agreement discussions in Congress.

Developing almost concurrently to the resistances to SALT II, a major trade act and debates surrounding the provisions of the act surfaced in early 1975. The Trade Act of 1975 pushed in to the debate surrounding the emigration of Soviet Jewry and again, as during the Vladivostok summit, the Soviets were concerned by public deliberations of their human rights record. A combination of U.S. and USSR politics likely contributed to the shift in Soviet willingness to compromise on issues of verification and different missile systems, but Brezhnev explicitly references the developments in the U.S. Congress as a hindrance to the arms agreement. In a letter to Ford in December 1974,

Brezhnev explicitly references his concerns about the trade debate's impact on the overall relationship between the two states:

However, the results of the discussions in the US Congress of the new legislation on trade and credits in its part dealing with the Soviet Union cannot but raise questions and—to say even more—firm objections on our part. Any attempts to condition the removal of discriminatory limitations with various kinds of artificial demands like the one for “freedom of emigration” from the USSR etc., cannot fail being considered as nothing but a clearly expressed intention of interfering in the affairs of our state, which are of no concern either for American legislators or anyone else.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless of the reasoning behind the shift in Soviet policy, its change precipitated a hardening of negotiations on both sides pertaining to issues each side had previously considered trivial. A State Department memo to Kissinger in March 1975 indicated that the Soviets had opened negotiations “about where we expected,” given the “limited shift to a less conciliatory posture in dealing with us.”<sup>34</sup> While the expectations were still that the Soviets had not changed their basic understanding of international politics in relation to the United States, the Ford administration recognized the issues that would follow in the Soviet understanding of events. Merely recognizing “...that U.S.-Soviet relations do not occur in a vacuum and that a “détente” that is in our interest cannot be isolated from the rest of our policies,” without changing the policy that informed the U.S. pursuit of détente was a major misstep in foreign policy creation.<sup>35</sup>

Given the understanding in the State Department that the Soviet goal was still one of increasing ties to détente, regardless of the external political environment, the idea that further concessions on the part of the Soviets were necessary or possible to finish the SALT II negotiations was not ill-conceived. However, as Kissinger noted in his memoirs,

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<sup>33</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 405-406.

<sup>34</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 522.

<sup>35</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 538.

as the Soviets became more entrenched in their position, the U.S. remained similarly strong on the final issues blocking the formal agreement of SALT II and U.S. congressional debates publicly pushing against Soviet human-rights violations.<sup>36</sup> The subsequent negotiations found the U.S. refusing to concede hardly any significant policy points on SALT II while expecting the Soviets to continue their concessions from Vladivostok. This approach was, in retrospect, naïve. With an American political environment of resistance to the Soviet Union and SALT II and an international political climate of instability, the Soviet desire to concede further points was likely severely limited.

Throughout the 1975 negotiations, though they approached talks with optimism and sincere interest in peace, American negotiators could do little to motivate Soviet participation while American congressional debates attempted to strip away incentives in the upcoming trade agreement. As Kissinger argues in *Years of Renewal*, the incentives for the Soviets to continue making concessions—largely economic in nature—were removed at the same time that many in the Senate demanded further concessions from the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> The proposed concessions were wide ranging, but most importantly included a lower MIRV ceiling and the inclusion of a mid-range Soviet bomber termed the *Backfire* in the 2,400 aggregate ceiling.<sup>38</sup> Kissinger attempted to introduce some of these concerns to his meeting with Gromyko in Geneva in February 1975 in preparation for the Ford-Brezhnev summit to sign SALT II that fall. Gromyko remained aloof on specifics of both the new provisions that required Soviet concessions and on scheduling a

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<sup>36</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp.300-305.

<sup>37</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 305.

<sup>38</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 458-460.

fall summit, saying: “We are not thinking of any particular time; we leave it open. But we proceed from the understanding [that the two will meet in the fall].”<sup>39</sup> Kissinger later reported to Ford: “They have noticeably cooled. They didn’t give us a date for the Brezhnev visit,” but “The change in our relations is just a nuance—they are still good.”<sup>40</sup> While Kissinger recognized the shift in Soviet understandings of the American position, he continued negotiations under the assumption provided to him by the State Department that the baseline Soviet position was to continue with détente and the arms reductions. While American actors confirmed their own understandings of the Soviet position and continued negotiations accordingly, the Soviet position on SALT II hardened in resistance to further concessions on nuclear arms and the two sides failed to recapture the momentum of Vladivostok.

With the emergence of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) agreement onto the international stage in the summer of 1975, pressures increased on the Soviet Union to concede further points on human rights and diplomatic recognition in return for acknowledgement of the Soviet sphere of influence. These pressures, and a likely perception that the U.S. was unwilling to concede much of value in the SALT II negotiations, probably demotivated Soviet movement on the issues previously considered trivial or technical and the new issues introduced by the American delegation. This, combined with the American political debates surrounding the Soviet Union that did not understand what SALT II offered in terms of tangible benefit, ultimately stalled negotiations by the end of 1975.

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<sup>39</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 490.

<sup>40</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 517.

## Conclusion

Though Ford was optimistic at the chances for SALT II's completion after Vladivostok, his pragmatic statement on the train on the first day of the summit ultimately rang true: "I also want to point out that 1975 is a crucial year, because an election year [1976] is not the best time for the US President to engage in some serious negotiations."<sup>41</sup> As early as summer 1975, Ronald Reagan represented the newly forming group of right wing Republicans who criticized Ford for many of his policies, especially those concerning relations with the USSR. In the roughly seven months after Reagan's official announcement of his candidacy for president, the CSCE Agreement, the Trade Act of 1975, and SALT II were all targets of vicious criticism and critique in a national forum. Ford effectively dropped the difficult SALT II negotiations until after the election season, hopeful that a win would give enough domestic support for his platform and time during his second term to complete the treaty. After surviving Reagan's primary challenge, Ford lost the first election of his political career to Democrat Jimmy Carter, and SALT II became a consideration for his successor.

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<sup>41</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 328.

## **Conclusion: Legacies of Vladivostok and SALT II**

Despite President Ford's administration's ultimate failure to get a formal SALT II agreement created and signed, the possibility of such an agreement had seemed almost certain after the Vladivostok summit. Considering that both sides saw largely technical barriers blocking the conclusion to negotiations and the American delegation thought it produced an agreement that would satisfy many of the concerns of the Senate, the hopes of completing SALT II were not unfounded. When evaluating the lasting legacies of Ford's attempts to create a workable SALT II treaty and foreign policy platform, one can discuss his effectiveness in two areas key to the execution of his policy: international diplomacy and domestic presentation of that diplomacy. The mixed results that Ford found in these two areas were indicative of the mixed outcomes that came out of Ford's term as president and contribute to the ambivalent historical understandings of Ford. The issues at Vladivostok were not only influenced by the political and military understandings of the two delegations negotiating, but also by public understandings of the nuclear arms issues. Ford and his team needed to navigate difficult diplomatic waters with the Soviet Union to create a formal SALT II treaty and they needed to sell the potential treaty to the Senate and the American public. While the delegations at Vladivostok took major strides towards agreeing on SALT II, progress after the summit ended was slow and difficult for both sides. In a domestic environment predisposed to negative evaluations of Soviet-American negotiations, Ford and his team failed to foster enough political support to assure both the passing of an eventual treaty in the Senate and public acceptance of the treaty.

Evaluation of Ford's legacy in foreign policy often begins with Vladivostok and

the subsequent negotiations on SALT II. Though many scholars and public figures of his time disparaged his attempts to foster cooperation with the Soviet Union, many scholars' opinions have shifted on Ford as the long-term effects of his policy have taken shape. The connections that Ford built at Vladivostok and Secretary of State Kissinger's stabilizing presence internationally established an era of foreign diplomacy that was consistent and lacked the eventful scandals of his successors, as well as their marked successes.<sup>1</sup>

Vladivostok was Ford's first foray into foreign diplomacy as President. By opening discussions with General Secretary Brezhnev in a cooperative manner and assuring the Soviets of the U.S. goal to strengthen détente, Ford reinforced the ties that President Nixon and Kissinger previously formed. Though Ford was moderately inept during much of the technical discussions and at times made significant errors in diplomatic etiquette, his presence at the summit was nonetheless influential. The major Soviet concessions came after Ford presented counter proposals to Soviet positions, and he likely set up an expectation that he was truly in favor of a relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union. This understanding was important for dealing productively with the pushback from the American political discourses on SALT II. As Brezhnev indicated in his December 25, 1974 letter to Ford while the Trade Act of 1975 raised "...firm objections on our part," his trust in Ford's leadership kept faith in the process alive. "I would like to say that the degree of mutual understanding revealed during our meeting in Vladivostok and agreements reached there...create not a bad basis for further intensive work..."<sup>2</sup> While this expression may have only been a polite political salutation, it

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<sup>1</sup> Carter and Reagan both have well-documented foreign policy accomplishments during their time in the White House, but Carter dealt with the Iran Hostage Crisis for 444 days to end his presidency and Reagan mishandled the Iran-Contra Affair badly during his stay in the White House.

<sup>2</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVI, pp. 407.



explicitly conveyed hope for the future. Brezhnev's expressed optimism and faith that he and Ford could continue to work together—rising above the resistances to peace in the US Congress—came largely as a result of Ford's ability to connect with Brezhnev on a personal level, as detailed in Chapter Three. As Douglas Brinkley noted in his biography of Ford, Ford's ability to connect with others on a personal level influenced much of his political career.<sup>3</sup>

The continuing cooperation between Brezhnev and Ford as leaders set the tone for negotiations on SALT II and other agreements like the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) completed during Ford's administration. Though CSCE was a conference to declare intention to improve relations between the West and the Soviet Bloc as a whole, and efforts to reach the accords signed in Helsinki were largely made by the nations of Europe, Ford's presence as a part of CSCE gave it legitimacy on an international scale. Initially, American opinions on CSCE were negative, as many spoke out against the perceived dominance that the USSR gained from the Helsinki Accords. Part of the agreements recognized sovereignty of those who signed and protected against the threat of violence between signees, which many critics argued allowed the USSR to solidify its influence on Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> In the years since the Helsinki Accords were signed, many scholars, including Alan P. Dobson, Shane Marsh, Jussi Hanhimäki, and Douglas Brinkley, have cited them as vital to numerous critiques of the Soviet Union's human rights record, and ultimately the collapse of the USSR in

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, (New York: Times Books, 2007), pp. 14-29, 31-32, 147-149.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State. *Helsinki Final Act, 1975*. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/helsinki>

1991.<sup>5</sup> Ford's commitment to internationalism included the United States in this agreement, which would become vital to resistance to the Soviet Union in the following seventeen years.<sup>6</sup>

One of the enduring legacies of Ford's presidency was poor communication. While deliberation on the new provisions from Vladivostok occurred throughout the country, the Soviet advantage in throw weight, or bomb size, was a principle issue of discussion. When Ford had a chance to publically allay fears of Soviet dominance regardless of the numerical equivalence in launchers, he simply said: "The Soviet military guidelines are for heavier missiles, heavier throw weight. Our military took a different point of view some years ago [in favor of accuracy over size]."<sup>7</sup> If Ford had more decisively assuaged fears regarding the issue of the throw weight discrepancy, he could have shifted the conversation away from the gap between the U.S. and the USSR on nuclear arms to a more productive discussion on the merits of the Vladivostok Accords. Similarly, Ford had issues explaining the merits of his CSCE policy during the signings of the Helsinki Accords, which continued into his blunder in the 1976 Presidential campaign concerning the Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> Ford's failure to accurately explain his Whip Inflation Now (WIN) campaign and his pardon of President Nixon in the fall of 1974 illustrates the systemic nature of his administration's

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *Gerald R. Ford*, New York: Times Books, 2007. pp. 112.; Alan P. Dobson and Shane Marsh, *US Foreign Policy Since 1945*, Second Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2006) pp. 44, 127.; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 433-438.

<sup>6</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013), pp. 145, 151.

<sup>7</sup> Gerald R. Ford, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald Ford, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, August 9 to December 31, 1974*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 683.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Ford/Carter debate, see Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, pp. 451-453.

inability to communicate clearly. The latter chain of events had particularly devastating effects on Ford's legitimacy and the people's perception of his rise to the presidency.<sup>9</sup>

Vladivostok and the subsequent negotiations with the Soviet Union did not have quite the same acute affects against Ford as WIN and his pardon of Nixon. However, the long running attacks on his dealings with the Soviet Union played a significant role in his demise—likely as much as his initial domestic missteps. With the hindsight of time, one might say—as James Cannon did in his biography of Ford—that Ford's attempts at international cooperation and work on the Helsinki Accords and SALT II strongly shaped the future of the global geopolitical landscape.<sup>10</sup> The developments in Helsinki that Graeme Mount argues "...turned out to be a major factor in ending the Cold War," would not have occurred without the benefits of the working relationship that Brezhnev and Ford developed at Vladivostok.<sup>11</sup> Although the Vladivostok Accords fell victim to forces resisting the formal agreement, the environment in which they were conducted had profound and lasting effects on the political climate between the USSR and the U.S. until Ford left office in 1977 and after.

The work that Ford and Kissinger put in to talks with the Soviets allowed for an agreement on SALT II to be made under President Jimmy Carter's administration. While Carter ran into issues in the Senate that were somewhat dissimilar to the forces that acted against Ford, Ford's international perspective helped pave the path for his successor's foreign policy.

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion on issues brought about by the Pardon of President Nixon, see: Alexander Reger's paper: "Following Ford: Reassessing the Pardon of Richard M. Nixon." *White House Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 2013): 83–108.

<sup>10</sup> James Cannon, *Gerald R. Ford: An Honorable Life*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 450.

<sup>11</sup> Graeme Mount, *895 Days that Changed the World: The presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, (New York: Black Rose Books, 2006), pp. 127.

Administrative failure to account for the informal coalition forming against the Vladivostok Accords and to explain how the benefits of SALT II outweighed the potential drawbacks permitted a disastrous domestic reception to form in the wake of the Vladivostok summit. The administration took an ineffective approach to respond to criticism and quell concerns in the aftermath of the summit, and paid for their lackluster response. Ford's meeting with bipartisan leaders and his national press conference attempted to curry support for the agreements. Yet, they attempted to gain this support without pushing back on any of the numerous critiques of the accords with specific solutions to those critiques. By keeping a general, positive outlook on the accords and not directly discounting critics or explaining the motivations for supporting SALT II, Ford allowed critics and neutral parties alike to question concerning pieces of the agreements. In his national press conference, Ford does not clearly state that the ceiling on nuclear arms both limits future buildup and allows for the U.S. to achieve parity in the number of nuclear launchers—two key components to the provisions that were the foundation of SALT II. This explanation could have mollified both the Cold War 'hawks' and 'doves' concerned with the provisions, allowing for negotiations to continue with the support of American lawmakers. Similarly, Ford's explanation of the reasoning behind reaching deals with the USSR failed to account for the administration's seeming deafness to human rights violations in the Soviet Union, emigration of Soviet Jews, or the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. All of these issues were important concerns of the group of Americans and members of Congress like Jacksonian Democrats who opposed deals with the Soviet Union on a moral basis. Ford attempts to fight the issue of nuclear arms while ignoring these problems instead of accepting the premises that many put forth and

arguing that agreements like SALT II were the beginning of an attempt to create a base from which many of these moral and political issues could be solved.

It is difficult to know the precise reasoning behind Ford's actions concerning the Vladivostok summit, but it is possible that both his internationalist understandings and his previous experiences in Congress hurt him as he took on the issues of SALT II. A focus on international cooperation and compromise like Ford's often necessitated negotiations with the USSR. While there was some pushback from Congress, it is conceivable that Ford's focus on creating a lasting global benefit through nuclear arms reductions and his assumptions of congressional support for foreign treaties may have combined to convince Ford of natural support for a SALT II treaty. Such a notion would have made Ford's presentation of the summit and the potential treaty merit-based, rather than an attempt to systematically counter concerns forming in Congress and the general public.

Whether the administration's lack of strategic response to the resistance to SALT II was due to incompetence, inability to respond effectively to criticism, a lack of political will, or a combination of those factors, the response was inadequate to deal with the pressure the Vladivostok Accords faced. The administration did not appease any of the three groups that organized resistance to SALT II, so that even when some Senators responded favorably to the accords, public opinion remained largely unchanged.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, by not selling the American people on the prospects of a treaty that would help reign in the Soviet advantage in nuclear arms, the administration could not count on a groundswell of political support for the treaty. Since it did not address these issues, the

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<sup>12</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "3 Senators Back Soviet Arms Deal," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1974, pp. 9.

administration was effectively politically isolated while it fought for the SALT II treaty. A combination of expert opinion, public confusion, and political insecurity created a perfect storm against Ford's provisions from Vladivostok that Ford's ineffective leadership could not counter.

By discussing the difficult political climate surrounding Ford's presidency, his actions in preparation for his first major foreign policy initiative, his presence in an international summit, and his inability to sell the Vladivostok Accords, one can see the many accomplishments and failures of Ford's first foreign policy agenda. Although Ford was able to create significant policy proposals concerning SALT II with the Soviets, his administration could not promote enough domestic support for these proposals nor could they finalize the negotiations. By lacking in these final two steps, the administration failed to produce the components necessary to create a treaty. Although Ford's limited ability to maneuver politically at home severely hampered SALT II negotiations with the Soviets, the Ford-Brezhnev relationship seemed to remain intact, as they were able to agree on the provisions in CSCE and continued a cooperative, diplomatic relationship throughout Ford's term. Those who critique Ford's relatively few tangible foreign policy results often fail to recognize that Ford was able both to continue a foreign policy platform consistent with his own beliefs and craft a positive, stable relationship with the USSR despite considerable political tensions within the United States. The mixed results both domestically and internationally with the Vladivostok summit and the SALT II treaty point to the mixed legacy of Ford's administration. Although Ford was unable to sway political opinion in America in favor of the SALT II treaty and he was unable to

bridge the gaps in negotiations with the Soviets, his efforts kept the prospect of a nuclear arms reduction agreement open for his successor and hopes for détente alive.





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