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The Soviet Perception of The Carter Administration, January-October 1977

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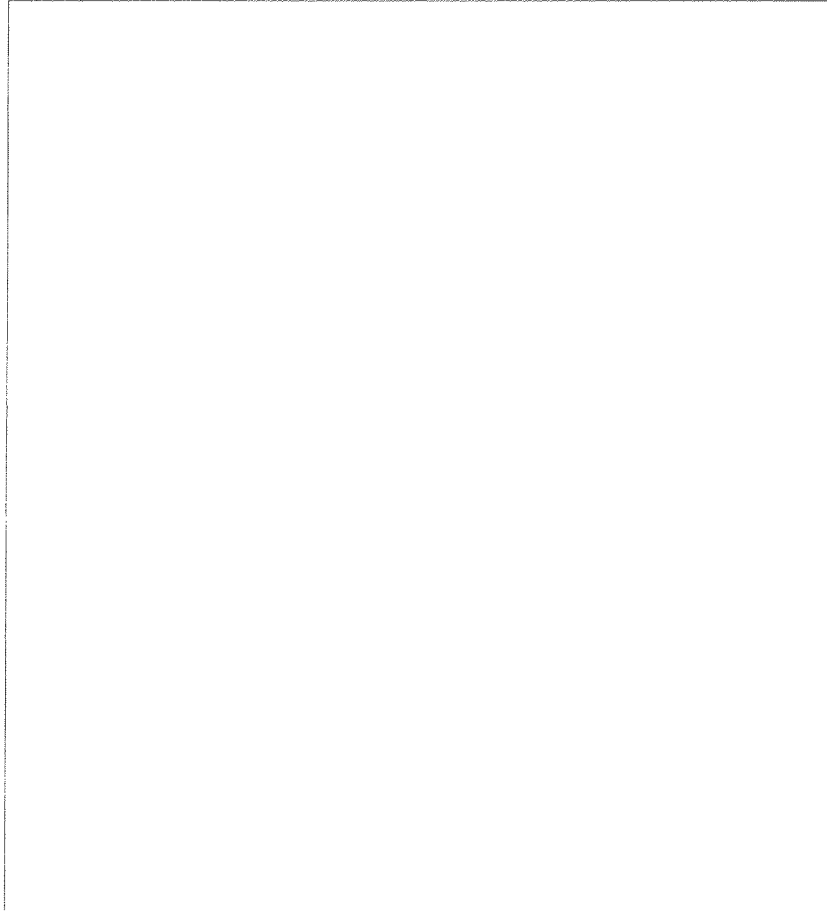
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PREFACE

During the first eight months of the Carter administration, the US-Soviet relationship was dominated by a process of wary mutual adjustment, involving intense efforts on each side to assess and influence the behavior and intentions of the other. This paper examines a key part of the Soviet side of that process: the broad changes in Moscow's reading of and reactions to the new US administration. The paper does not attempt to paint a comprehensive picture of the bilateral relationship. For example, it does not deal with all areas of bilateral friction nor with details of arms control issues that were important parts of the interaction. Rather, it focuses on the major Soviet concerns about and perceptions of the course of US policy through early October 1977, especially regarding human rights and the strategic arms limitations talks (SALT).

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The Soviet Perception of the Carter Administration, January - October 1977

*Central Intelligence Agency
National Foreign Assessment Center*

January 1978

Summary

In the short history of the Soviet Union's dealings with the Carter administration, the tone of the relationship has been most strongly influenced by the interaction over strategic arms control and human rights. While Moscow has viewed the former as the focus around which US-Soviet relations should be structured, it has seen the latter as a somewhat confusing and possibly insidious attempt to alter that relationship to US advantage by putting the Soviet Union on the defensive in the ideological sphere while pursuing essentially competitive political and military objectives.

When the new administration came to office, the Soviets were vaguely hopeful it would seek to improve the troubled US-Soviet relationship, which had been in a general state of atrophy since the stalemate over the Vladivostok accord. At the same time, however, Moscow was uneasy at the prospect of dealing with a "political unknown" in the White House. The Soviets also professed to be apprehensive that various alleged "enemies of detente" in the United States had profited from the stagnation in bilateral relations and might compel President Carter to take a hard line toward the Soviet Union.

Human Rights and SALT

In the Soviet view of the bilateral relationship, SALT was the number-one priority, and Moscow was anxious to preserve an atmosphere conducive

to an early SALT agreement. It appears that the Soviets believed that a draft treaty, based on the Vladivostok accord, could be concluded with the new American administration prior to the October 1977 expiration of SALT I, perhaps as early as June. Moscow hoped that this would restore continuity to the Soviet-American dialogue and impart new momentum to detente. To Moscow, however, the human rights initiative of the new administration suggested that:

- The Carter administration might not regard SALT as having greater importance for Soviet-American relations than human rights.
- The new US leadership was, at the least, willing to incur the risk of jeopardizing the general atmosphere in US-Soviet relations over the human rights issue.
- President Carter, as the man the Kremlin would ultimately have to deal with, might prove to be a more formidable adversary than initially assumed.

The specific fear that the US President was committed to a policy of confrontation with the Soviet Union on the human rights issue was heightened by the White House reception of exiled Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky on 1 March. After that date, President Carter became the object of increasingly explicit personal criticism in Soviet media, although in private

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Soviet officials sought to reassure their American interlocutors that Moscow wished to continue the dialogue at SALT with a minimum of acrimony.

The impasse at SALT that developed in March was the result of differing goals and expectations surrounding the visit of the US Secretary of State to Moscow, as well as disagreement on specific technical issues. While Secretary Vance spoke of the necessity of arriving at a "framework" for a SALT II agreement, the Soviets spoke of "finalizing" or "concluding" an agreement already reached in principle. While the US side was seeking to engage the Soviets in a conceptual reassessment of the arms control process, the Soviets were resolved to stick to their insistence on the realization of the Vladivostok formula as interpreted by Moscow.

Although it is probably true that Moscow saw the substance of the US March proposals as asymmetrical or "one-sided," the Soviets also perceived that the United States was taking the propaganda initiative away from Moscow in the field of disarmament. The Soviets recognized that the March proposals, by appealing to the widespread desire for significant mutual strategic arms reductions, were likely to gain the United States considerable prestige in terms of international public opinion while casting the USSR in an unfavorable light. In response to this perception, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko called an unprecedented press conference in which he denounced the US proposals and sought to dispel the image of the Soviet Union as the intransigent partner in SALT.

The Gromyko statement, which was repeated in its essentials in a *Pravda* editorial on 14 April, set the tone for a generally negative Soviet public assessment of the Carter administration. Nevertheless, in private, the Soviets again sought to reassure Washington that Moscow was not as discouraged as its public posture indicated, and focused, instead, on the specific points of divergence between the US and Soviet positions at SALT.

The overall Soviet relationship with the new US administration probably reached its lowest

point in the immediate aftermath of the next round of high-level discussions on SALT, held between Secretary Vance and Gromyko in the third week of May. It was at about this time that the Soviet Central Committee disseminated a secret decree to all party and government institutions demanding greatly increased "vigilance" in response to what was depicted as stepped-up Western espionage and subversion against the Soviet Union. At the same time that the regime began to tighten these screws internally, the Soviet press became increasingly vehement in its criticism of the US administration, and the Soviets began to advertise both in public and in private a stronger perception of deteriorating bilateral relations.

It would probably be misleading, however, to link this Soviet behavior solely or even mainly to the results of the May Vance-Gromyko meeting. The cumulative effects of long-growing Soviet concerns about Western subversion and the ultimate objectives of the US human rights pressure were probably more important. Moreover, the Soviet perception of this Vance-Gromyko meeting was almost certainly not wholly negative. The Soviets may have extracted some solace from the May talks to the extent that they perceived what they considered a more "businesslike" US approach to the continuing arms dialogue than they had seen in March. The Soviets by this time had probably also become resigned to the fact that a SALT II agreement would eventually require their acceptance of some modification of the Vladivostok guidelines.

Nevertheless, they considered even the May US SALT position far removed from what they felt acceptable to their interests. Whether or not they genuinely believed that the United States in May was continuing to seek unilateral advantage in SALT, they evidently felt it desirable to continue to say so, in order to maintain pressure on the United States for concessions. This Soviet propaganda interest in maintaining a harsh picture of the US attitude on arms control thus reinforced the growing Soviet alarm over the implications of the US attitude on human rights.

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Throughout June, Soviet propaganda began to draw a more explicit connection between US arms policies and the Carter administration's pronouncements on human rights. About this same time, Soviet Embassies abroad were informed that Moscow had decided to resume a strong press campaign against the United States, focusing on such issues as the neutron bomb and American policy in the Middle East. In private, American Embassy officials were told that the Soviet leadership had overestimated the ability of "responsible" and "moderate" administration officials to withstand conservative pressures on the White House.

The Charleston Address as Turning Point

Against this background, President Carter's address in Charleston, South Carolina, on 21 July seems to have been a turning point, providing renewed impetus to a somewhat less pessimistic Soviet appraisal of the main trends of US policy. Such a modest upturn in the Soviet view of the administration was reflected in Brezhnev's assessment of the state of US-Soviet relations in a Kremlin speech on 16 August in which the General Secretary made reference to the recent "positive" statements of the US President. The substantive basis for the somewhat less gloomy Soviet outlook apparently stemmed specifically from:

- The nonpolemical stance taken by the United States at the preliminary talks for the CSCE¹ Review Conference in Belgrade from 15 June until 8 August.
- A perceived willingness of the United States to tone down its human rights policy, or at least to reduce the likelihood of public overtures at the highest level on behalf of dissidents in the USSR.

It would also appear that the basis for the modified Soviet assessment of the United States was related to anxiety over the pending expiration of the SALT I Interim Agreement on 3 October and to encouragement drawn from the

¹ CSCE—Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki accord).

US negotiating posture at SALT itself. From the time the Carter administration took office, the Soviets had consistently looked to the strategic arms talks as the most reliable barometer of American motives and intentions. Although the US SALT proposals conveyed by Secretary Vance in March had evoked suspicions and doubts within the Kremlin, Moscow by the end of the summer had grudgingly accepted the premise that the new administration was seeking renegotiation rather than confrontation on the issue of strategic arms control.

The Gromyko visit to Washington in September served to confirm this impression of US policy and evidently gave Moscow greater reassurance as to the priorities of US policy. Much of Moscow's confusion and uncertainty had been provoked by what it had perceived as vacillations in Washington's policy, exacerbated by the introduction of new issues into the Soviet-American dialogue. But particularly after the mutual concessions registered during the Gromyko talks in September, the Soviets became more confident that the essential structure of that dialogue would be preserved:

- The Soviets perceived that what they had regarded as an initial US penchant for "public" diplomacy on bilateral issues had been replaced by reliance on more confidential exchanges. This had the effect of persuading Moscow that the United States would not allow competition with the USSR to obstruct negotiations.
- Soviet suspicions that US human rights policy was essentially an anti-Soviet device, while by no means dispelled, were offset to some degree by the perception that the United States would not risk a general deterioration of relations over this issue.
- Most important, even though ultimate agreement had not been reached, the Soviets were reassured as to the centrality of the SALT process in US policy toward the Soviet Union.

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CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS IN US-SOVIET RELATIONS:
NOVEMBER 1976 - OCTOBER 1977

1976

30 November Brezhnev receives Treasury Secretary Simon in Moscow.
 11 December Arbatov *Pravda* article on "Soviet-American Relations Today."
 23 December Secretary-designate Vance meets with expelled Soviet dissident Andrei Amalrik.
 30 December *Pravda* carries Brezhnev interview with American correspondent J. Kingsbury-Smith.

1977

18 January Brezhnev speech in Tula gives Soviet definition of detente.
 20 January Inauguration of President Carter.
 26 January State Department issues statement of concern about the fate of signatories of the Czechoslovak "Charter 77" manifesto.
 27 January United States issues statement of concern about Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov.
 5 February Arbatov *Pravda* article on "The Great Lie of the Opponents of Detente."
 12 February Major *Pravda* article against US human rights policy.
 1 March President Carter receives Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky in the White House.
 2 March *Pravda* publishes lampoon: "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?"
 4 March *Izvestiya* article accuses prominent dissidents, including Anatoly Shcharansky, of connections with US intelligence.
 14 March Shcharansky arrested.
 17 March President Carter addresses UN.
 21 March Brezhnev delivers major speech to Trade Union Congress in Moscow.
 26-30 March Secretary Vance visits Moscow.
 31 March Foreign Minister Gromyko gives press conference.
 10 May SALT delegations resume talks in Geneva.
 18-20 May Vance-Gromyko Geneva meeting.
 22 May President Carter speaks at Notre Dame University.
 15 June Preliminary CSCE Review Conference opens in Belgrade.
 30 June President Carter announces B-1 decision.
 9-13 July Dartmouth Conference of unofficial US and Soviet representatives holds its 11th session in Latvia.
 21 July President Carter speaks on US-Soviet relations at Charleston, South Carolina.
 3 August Arbatov *Pravda* article on "Soviet-US Relations Today."
 16 August Brezhnev toast welcoming Tito to Moscow responds to Charleston speech.
 9 September Brezhnev receives Chief Justice Burger.
 22 September Gromyko arrives in Washington.
 3 October SALT I Interim Agreement on offensive weapons formally expires.
 4 October Full-dress CSCE Review Conference opens in Belgrade.

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The Soviet Perception of the Carter Administration, January - October 1977

I. The Initial Assessment of the New Administration

A. A Background of Uncertainty

The initial Soviet reaction to the prospect of the new American administration was marked by considerable uncertainty. Not only was President-elect Carter a relatively unknown quantity to the Soviet leadership, but also relations between the US and the Soviet Union had been in a general state of atrophy even before the Presidential campaign as a consequence of the stalemate over the Vladivostok accord, US reaction to Soviet activities in Angola, and the ramifications of the Jackson-Vanik and Stevenson amendments on trade and credits.

The prevailing Soviet interpretation of the US elections was that the confluence of electoral politics with an unsteady domestic political and economic situation in the United States had created a unique opportunity for the forces opposed to detente with the Soviet Union. From the Soviet perspective, the Presidential campaign had given impetus to the more "reactionary" elements in the United States, hostile toward the Soviet Union, which the Soviets depicted as symbolized by the Presidential candidacies of Ronald Reagan and Henry Jackson.

As described in *Pravda* by Georgy Arbatov, a leading Kremlin consultant on US affairs: "The opponents of detente had been waiting for a long time for a suitable opportunity to start a counter-attack. Such an opportunity was provided precisely by the preelection campaign. This was helped considerably by the inconsistency of government policy itself"—a reference to the Ford administration's alleged concessions to rightwing circles.

Moscow subsequently ascribed the defeat of President Ford in part to his attempt to appease "anti-Soviet" sentiment for the sake of political expediency. Although this was perhaps more an expression of faith than conviction, it is also a reflection of the rigid, and somewhat simplistic, conception of causality that dominates the Soviet perception of the dynamics of American domestic politics and the exaggerated importance assigned to detente as a domestic political issue.

The Carter victory, however, gave little real comfort to the Soviets. Rather, the Soviet leadership and its analysts of the American scene, who much prefer to calculate with known quantities, were nervous at the prospect of dealing with a "political unknown." One of the earliest assessments of Carter to appear in the Soviet press described him as an "outsider within his own party who never belonged to the circle of its most influential leaders." But immediately after his election in November, a *Pravda* commentary evidently felt constrained for the purposes of domestic consumption to state that "Carter is by no means a political novice, nor has he been a loner in the struggle for power . . . many prominent figures in the Democratic Party and such powerful 'party machines' as the one in Chicago headed by Mayor R. Daley flocked to his colors . . ." Clearly, the Soviets were grasping for points of reference for the Carter phenomenon.

Perhaps more than any other factor, the relative anonymity of the new President of the United States was the cause of misgivings by the Soviets. This fear of the unknown, in turn, probably explains the generally receptive attitude taken by the Soviet media toward President-elect Carter's appointment of well-known figures as his principal advisers. Before the inauguration, Zbig-

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niew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance were described by Soviet propaganda as one-time supporters of the Cold War who had "partially revised their opinions in the spirit of realism." The appointment of Harold Brown was similarly depicted as a welcome alternative to James Schlesinger, whom the Soviets tendentiously portrayed as an "arch-hawk" who, it had been rumored, had been one of those considered for Secretary of Defense.

Privately, there was a more mixed picture prior to the inauguration. Some individual Soviets, like the propaganda, indicated that President Carter's choice of experienced figures for key foreign policy posts, notably Cyrus Vance, encouraged Moscow to believe that the Carter administration would pursue continuity in the Soviet-American relationship. Yet there were also indications that other Soviets were concerned that within the incoming administration some officials, Dr. Brzezinski in particular, might have what the Soviets considered a negative influence. Even before Dr. Brzezinski's appointment as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, a Soviet academician at the USA Institute in Moscow told a US Embassy officer that some Soviet leaders would view such an appointment as a concession to "right-wing" pressure.

The possibility of pressure on the fledgling Carter administration from the right was, in fact, a major Soviet concern. The principal fear was that the rejuvenated "enemies of detente" would compel the President to take a hard line in dealings with the Soviet Union before his administration could establish its own priorities. Moreover, the Soviets apparently believed that it would take some time before the new administration could consolidate its authority.



Soviet sensitivity to conservative pressure on the Carter administration was expressed frequently both in public and in private. The apparition behind this pressure was described as a combination of forces—"the Pentagon, the CIA, the military-industrial complex, Zionist circles, and senators and congressmen of the Jackson type." But Mr. Carter himself was dissociated from these forces, and the distinct impression was given in Soviet media that the new President was personally in favor of pursuing detente and arms control with the Soviet Union.

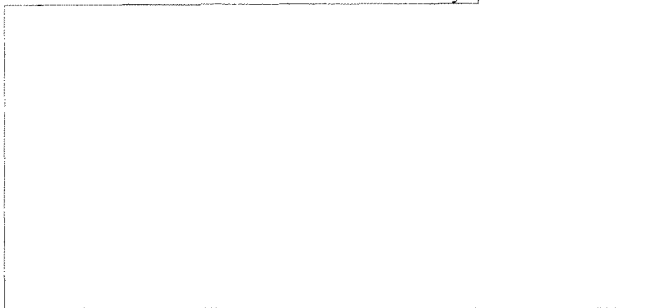
B. The Desire for Continuity

Throughout the transition period, the Soviets sought to plumb the opinion of the incoming administration and set forth Soviet priorities for the diplomatic agenda. Privately, Brezhnev indicated to then-Secretary of the Treasury Simon, during the latter's visit to Moscow in November 1976, that the Soviet Union would not engage in a test of nerves with the new administration. Publicly, both on the occasion of the Simon visit and in a subsequent interview with American correspondent J. Kingsbury-Smith, Brezhnev stressed the importance of concluding a SALT II agreement as soon as possible within the framework set down at Vladivostok in November 1974.

The timing of a new SALT agreement was a key factor for the Soviets because of their desire both to reestablish continuity and to impart new momentum to US-Soviet detente. Brezhnev and others made this clear on several occasions. The Soviets apparently believed prior to the inauguration that the Vladivostok agreement could be transformed into a draft treaty for signature before the October 1977 expiration date of SALT I. There were even indications that Brezhnev hoped for a summit meeting with President Carter, at which the new SALT agreement would presumably be signed, before the CSCE review conference in June 1977.

Nevertheless, President Carter's statements on arms control and Soviet-American relations were seen by Moscow from the start as somewhat

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equivocal. Soviet officials admitted privately that they had carefully searched campaign speeches and press conferences for clues to President Carter's future policy, but had drawn ambivalent conclusions and were still uncertain about the administration's likely course of action. Soviet President Podgorny conveyed a similar message to an American official in late November, adding that "it is future actions that count."

The Soviets, nevertheless, chose to emphasize the more positive statements by the incoming administration, particularly on SALT, and to play down the negative. Thus the Soviets noted that Carter and Vance had both spoken of the preeminence of strategic arms control in Soviet-US relations. The Soviets also drew encouragement from President Carter's stated reservations on the B-1 bomber and his campaign proposal for a substantial cut in the defense budget. Through informal channels, Soviet representatives quietly but actively explored his proposals relating to nuclear proliferation, the comprehensive test ban, and a US-Soviet "freeze" on strategic weapons.

The less encouraging aspects of President Carter's past statements, from the Soviet perspective, were his references to the need for more reciprocity in detente and greater US firmness in future negotiations with the USSR, and also his apparent intention to seek a modification of the Vladivostok accord.

Moscow was also predictably disturbed by President Carter's assertion that he would not have signed the Helsinki Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Soviet weekly *New Times* singled out Secretary-designate Vance for criticism because of his statement that the Carter administration would keep close watch on Soviet observance of the human rights and civil liberties provisions of Helsinki's "Basket III." On the other hand, Vance's 23 December meeting with expelled Soviet dissident Andrei Amalrik was ignored by the Soviet press in accordance with an apparent Soviet decision to avoid comment on former dissidents now abroad to minimize potential repercussions at home. It seems unlikely that the Soviets anticipated the direct overtures of the Carter administration to dissi-

dents in the USSR, even though Mr. Carter, while a Presidential candidate, had cabled a letter of concern to dissident Vladimir Slepak.

C. Brezhnev's Tula Message

Two days before the inauguration of the new American President, Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev gave a major speech in the city of Tula. Brezhnev asserted that the USSR was ready to work with the new US administration and reiterated the importance of an early SALT agreement. He stated, "I repeat that time will not wait, and the conclusion of the agreement must not be postponed." He further cautioned that, in light of the October expiration date of the SALT I Interim Agreement, the Vladivostok accord must not be revised. In an apparent reference to suggestions that the Carter administration might seek to conclude a SALT II agreement by leaving out the controversial Backfire and cruise missile issues, Brezhnev declared that "by adding new questions to those that are being currently discussed, we will only further complicate and delay the solution of the task in general." Overall, Brezhnev professed to see a growing influence of "hawks" in the United States, but expressed the hope that a "sober approach" would prevail in US policymaking circles.

Without specifically mentioning human rights or Basket III, Brezhnev criticized the Western states for focusing on "individual elements" of the Helsinki agreement in order to put pressure on the USSR. He went on to reject as "futile" attempts "to teach us to live according to rules that are incompatible with socialist democracy."

The Tula speech, however, was more interesting for its attempt to communicate with the incoming US administration and rebut the charges that the Soviet Union was seeking unilateral advantages in detente. Brezhnev, in fact, provided a definition of detente from the Soviet perspective—an unusual move that seemed to be a direct response to a statement made by Cyrus Vance to *Newsweek* that the Carter administration intended to seek a more precise definition of detente from the Soviets. In amplification of Brezhnev's speech, the Soviet journal *New Times* in fact made specific reference to Vance's re-

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marks and pointed to Brezhnev's explanation as a response.

"What is detente or relaxation of tensions?" Brezhnev asked rhetorically. "Detente means a willingness to resolve differences and disputes not by force, not by threats and saber rattling, but by peaceful means at a conference table. Detente means a certain trust and ability to take into consideration each other's legitimate interests."

In general, the Tula speech indicates that the Soviets preferred to get off to a good start with the Carter administration if this were found consistent with the Soviet view of their other, competitive interests. The speech also suggests that along with their uncertainties, the Soviets harbored some hope that agreement on SALT, in particular, could be achieved in the early months of the Carter Presidency.

II. The US Human Rights Initiative

A. The Sources of Soviet Concern

The initial statements of the Carter administration on human rights came as a surprise to Moscow as much because of the manner in which the new administration had addressed the issue as because of the substance of US pronouncements.

It is possible that the Soviets anticipated a human rights initiative by the United States, given the importance of the issue during the Presidential campaign and the President's personal communication of concern to the Soviets during the first week of his administration. If so, however, it is likely that Moscow expected such a move to be related to pending US diplomatic initiatives over the Basket III provisions of the Helsinki accord. The Soviets were not prepared for a US approach that injected the human rights issue into the broader context of US-Soviet relations and were clearly alarmed that such concern should be personally voiced by the President and his Secretary of State.

To Moscow, the statements by the new American administration suggested that the Carter administration might not regard SALT as more important for Soviet-American relations than human rights. In addition, the Soviets now began to

wonder if SALT were perceived by the US administration as subordinate to a more comprehensive disarmament approach as enunciated by the new President during the campaign and transition period. At the same time, the Soviets apparently began to suspect that President Carter might prove to be a more formidable adversary than Moscow had initially assumed.

Soviet sensitivity to US pronouncements on human rights was further heightened by a growing sense of vulnerability on the issue. Dissident activity had been on the rise since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975. West European Communist parties had become increasingly critical of Soviet intolerance of internal dissent, and East European regimes were experiencing growing problems with their own dissidents. Equally ominous to the Kremlin were indications that hitherto disparate expressions of dissent were assuming the character of a more cohesive "movement," as exemplified by the group founded in May 1975 by Yury Orlov to monitor Soviet compliance with the Helsinki accord. Throughout 1976, cells of the "Orlov group" had proliferated in the Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia, and elsewhere.

B. Initial Soviet Restraint

On 26 January 1977, the US State Department issued the first of several statements concerning human rights violations in the Soviet Union and East Europe. This US statement protested the arrest and harassment by the government of Czechoslovakia of the signatories of a human rights manifesto known as Charter 77. It was followed on 27 January by a US declaration of concern over the fate of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. Although President Carter and Secretary Vance subsequently denied any advance notice about the statement on Sakharov, Vance assumed ultimate responsibility for the US statement, and President Carter stated that it reflected his own views. Vance added, however, that the United States did not intend to be "strident or polemical" on the human rights issue and specifically denied that the United States intended to link human rights and SALT.

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The statement about Sakharov was not reported in Soviet domestic media, although an international broadcast to North America denounced the State Department's message as an "unprecedented act of interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union." TASS, on its international service in English, noted that there was some question as to the authority of the State Department's announcement, but did not specifically mention the semidisclaimers of the President and Secretary of State. The relative restraint in the Soviet reaction to the Sakharov episode probably reflected uncertainty as to the firmness of the US human rights stand and consequently, a Soviet desire not to prejudice the general state of relations with the United States by an unnecessarily harsh and precipitate response.

A lengthy *Pravda* editorial on 12 February set forth the Soviet position on the human rights question. Under the title, "What Is Hidden Behind the Noise About Human Rights," *Pravda* told its readers (without specific reference to the United States) that the human rights policy of the West was a "smokescreen" behind which the "enemies of detente" were waging a "propaganda campaign" against the USSR and its allies with the objective of interfering in their internal affairs.

Pravda also linked the human rights initiative with resurgent criticism in the West of Soviet military programs and activities—"the so-called Soviet threat"—and concluded that this new situation represented a coordinated campaign of "slander" and "thoroughly thought-out diversion" against the socialist countries.

The editorial was careful, however, to distinguish between the "enemies of detente" who were supposedly behind this campaign and those who were seeking to improve East-West relations in spite of such pressures. In an apparent reference to President Carter, *Pravda* alluded to "those figures in the governments of Western countries who, displaying political realism, express readiness to deepen relations of peaceful coexistence and businesslike cooperation with the socialist states." On the other hand, the "organizers of the attacks on socialism," according to *Pravda*, were trying to "tie the hands" of such political realists.

The editorial in *Pravda* and subsequent elaboration in Soviet internal propaganda indicate that the Soviets were willing to give the Carter administration the benefit of the doubt in spite of uncertainties about the thrust of American policy. President Carter, himself, was therefore not at that time singled out for criticism. Rather, the Soviet press continued to portray the President as reacting to intense pressure from US conservatives in adopting his initial actions on human rights.

The primacy of SALT continued to be emphasized in Soviet media and reiterated in private. Politburo member and KGB chief Andropov, for example, was reported to be "puzzled" by the Carter administration's recent human rights statements, but was nevertheless "very positive" on the United States, particularly on the prospects for further arms control measures and on the Carter administration's approach to SALT II. Elsewhere, senior Soviet military officers, including Army General Yepishev, head of the Main Political Administration of the Soviet armed forces, informed US diplomats in Moscow that the human rights controversy did not present an obstacle to a SALT II agreement from the Soviet perspective: "If the US wants progress in disarmament, we will have progress."

Red Star, however, was obliquely critical of President Carter, asserting that in the United States there had been "an increasing involvement of official—and at times extremely highly placed organs and persons—in the unseemly campaign unleashed by anti-Soviet propaganda centers . . ." Elsewhere, via diplomatic and other contacts, the Soviets warned that Moscow's "tolerance" of US "interference in Soviet internal affairs" was "limited" and intimated that President Carter should not further complicate matters by going ahead with his planned meeting with expelled Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky on 1 March.

C. Reaction to the Bukovsky Reception

President Carter's reception of Bukovsky resulted in an immediate escalation of Moscow's public condemnation of the US stand on human rights, including thinly veiled but unmistakable criticism of President Carter. The day after the

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Bukovsky-Carter meeting, *Pravda* published the most vituperative condemnation of the President to date. The article, entitled "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" described a racist Southern family hosting a Soviet dissident for dinner. The master of the house was pictured as a fascist Ku Klux Klansman who was relieved to find out that his guest was a dissident and not a black. Although President Carter was not mentioned by name, the allusion was obvious.

A separate article in the weekly *Za Rubezhom* on 4 March contained a more direct parody of the Bukovsky reception. *Za Rubezhom* reprinted an article from the Czechoslovak daily *Rude Pravo* entitled, "Apparition in the White House," in which Bukovsky was pictured as a ghost guilty of criminal actions. The article asked: "Is the American President really that naive and does he realize what a dangcrous game he is playing? Under the influence of his evil advisers, the President evidently wishes to turn human rights as interpreted by Bukovsky into an instrument for interfering in the internal affairs of other countries."

The heightened denunciation of US human rights policy was accompanied by an escalation of the charges against Soviet dissidents. An *Izvestiya* article of 4 March accused prominent dissidents, including Anatoly Shcharansky, of being in league with American intelligence agents posing as US diplomats and correspondents. On 14 March, Shcharansky was arrested.

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In private, however, the Soviets at this stage still tended to be more circumspect in their criticism of US policy, suggesting that the assertiveness of the new President on human rights could be attributed to the domestic political necessity of proving his "toughness" with the Russians. Over time, it was claimed, the new President would realize the necessity of balance in international affairs and would adjust his foreign policy accordingly.

On several occasions, Soviet officials told US and Western diplomats that Moscow was as yet somewhat less disturbed about human rights than its public posture indicated. *Pravda's* American desk editor told the US press attache in Moscow that the Soviet response to the "US human rights campaign" had been "restrained," but he repeated the warning that Soviet patience was limited.

Such alleged Soviet "restraint," however, appears to have been chiefly reflected in the absence at this time of an explicit attack on the underlying motives behind the President's stand on human rights and of public expressions of the fears they evidently had about the US attitude toward SALT. Even before Secretary Vance's March visit to Moscow, the Soviets had apparently begun to suspect that the hostile intentions they assumed to underlie the US human rights policy might also be reflected in an equally unwelcome US approach to SALT. Consequently, despite the fact that the Soviets did not wish the US to link SALT to the human rights controversy, they from time to time sought to soften the US attitude on both issues by privately implying the possibility that they themselves might establish such a linkage. Thus, there were resurgent fears of a US policy of linkage and warnings to US officials that if the human rights "campaign" persisted, it could affect Moscow's attitude on SALT and other bilateral issues.

Brezhnev underscored these warnings in a somber speech on 21 March, in which he said: "Washington's claims to teach others how to live, I believe, cannot be accepted by any sovereign state . . . We will not tolerate interference in our internal affairs by anyone and under any pretext. A normal development of relations on such a basis is, of course, unthinkable." But on the subject of Secretary Vance's approaching visit to Moscow to discuss SALT, Brezhnev reflected the more guarded Soviet expectations from the new administration. "Mr. Vance is coming shortly to Moscow for negotiations," Brezhnev said. "We will see what he will bring with him."

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III. The Vance Trip

A. The Search for a New Arms Control Framework

By the time Secretary Vance arrived in Moscow on 26 March, the US Government had already made public the essential shape of its two-package approach to the forthcoming SALT discussions. The Soviet reaction was initially both cautious and cool. *Pravda*, in reporting President Carter's speech before the United Nations on 18 March, charged that the US position on SALT, as outlined by the President, "virtually called into question the Vladivostok agreement."

Presumably, the Soviets still hoped that, in spite of the Carter administration's interpretation of the Vladivostok accord, a new SALT agreement would nevertheless follow the basic guidelines of Vladivostok. The impasse on SALT that developed in March was thus not only the result of disagreement on specific technical issues but also of differing goals and expectations from the Vance trip. While Secretary Vance spoke of the necessity of arriving at "a framework" for a SALT II agreement, the Soviets spoke of "finalizing" or "concluding" an agreement already reached in principle. While the US side was seeking to engage the Soviets in a conceptual reassessment of the arms control process, the Soviets were resolved to insist on the realization of the Vladivostok accord as interpreted by Moscow.

The US approach to the March negotiations created several difficulties for Moscow. First, since the US two-package approach had not been privately discussed with the Soviets before the Vance visit, the initial Soviet reaction was one of surprise and confusion. Second, the radical nature of the "comprehensive" package juxtaposed to the more limited package of the Vladivostok agreement minus Backfire and cruise missiles appears to have created doubts among some in the Soviet leadership about the motives of the Carter administration's arms control policy. Third, the public diplomacy of President Carter and Secretary Vance not only ran against the Soviet passion for secrecy but, in light of the

administration's "comprehensive" approach, had the practical effect of putting Moscow on the defensive in relation to its own more limited arms control strategy.

This latter point is of particular significance because of the propaganda advantages, both domestic and international, which Moscow perceives in its self-proclaimed status as the champion of world disarmament. The American challenge to this image accounts in large measure for the extraordinary press conference held on 31 March by Foreign Minister Gromyko following the Soviet rejection of the US SALT proposals.

B. Gromyko's Press Conference

This public performance by Gromyko came one day after Secretary Vance's own public assessment of the Moscow talks. The Secretary had asserted that progress had been made in the talks and expressed the hope that the Soviets, despite their categorical rejection, would continue to study the US "comprehensive" proposal—characterized by Vance as "a proposal that would have really made substantive progress towards true arms control." Gromyko himself had noted on 30 March, before the Vance statement, that the Soviet Union was "prepared to go further, not only to maintain the present level of our relationships, but to raise that level to a new height on the basis of equality and equal security."

What apparently prompted the Gromyko press conference on the following day was the cumulative impact of the Vance comments on 30 March and President Carter's assessment given that same evening. The President suggested that the US proposals had been "so substantive" and "radical" that the Soviet leadership needed more time to consider them. But he also stated that if the Soviets were not actually negotiating in good faith, he would be forced to consider the development and deployment of additional strategic weapons.

Essentially, the Soviets perceived themselves as being publicly outmaneuvered by the United States on the issue of strategic arms control. Although it is probably true that Moscow saw the

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US proposals as asymmetrical or "one-sided," the Soviets also believed that the United States was taking the initiative away from Moscow in the field of disarmament. The United States stood to gain considerable international prestige while casting the USSR in an unfavorable light. It was in response to these pressures that Gromyko called his press conference.

Gromyko's 31 March statement was both a point-by-point rebuttal of the US SALT proposals and a wide-ranging defense of Soviet disarmament initiatives. He attacked the US proposals as an attempt to seek "unilateral advantages" and sought to dispel the image of the Soviet Union as the intransigent partner in SALT:

A version is now being circulated in the USA that the US representatives at the Moscow talks proposed some broad program for disarmament, but that the Soviet leadership did not accept this program. I must say that this version does not accord with reality. This version is essentially false. Nobody proposed such a program to us.

Gromyko also gave evidence of Soviet concerns about what the Soviets saw as the Carter administration's rejection of continuity:

What will happen if the arrival of a new leadership in some country will scrap all the constructive things that were achieved in relations with other countries? What stability can be talked about in relations between the USA and the USSR in this case?

The Soviet Foreign Minister, however, was not entirely negative and reiterated that the Vance visit was "necessary and indeed useful." He left the door open for continued discussions, but clearly sought to put the United States on notice that Moscow considered itself the aggrieved party and that further progress in detente depended on the extent to which the United States would be willing to moderate both its rhetoric and its negotiating position at SALT.

C. Private Reassurances

The Gromyko statement, which was repeated in its essentials in a *Pravda* editorial on 14 April, set the tone for the increasingly critical Soviet public commentary on the Carter administration. In private, however, the Soviets sought to reassure the United States that Moscow was not quite as discouraged as its public posture indicated. Instead, they focused on the specific points of divergence between the US and Soviet SALT positions.

Immediately after the Vance trip, a Soviet Foreign Ministry official with a background in SALT matters, who claimed to be acting on official instructions, told an American official that the Soviet Government had perhaps expressed its negative reaction to the US SALT proposals too strongly and cited Foreign Minister Gromyko's press conference as a specific example. He added that the American tactic of revealing radically new arms limitation proposals to the press almost simultaneously with the presentation of these proposals to the Soviet Government had created serious problems for the Soviet side. The Soviets preferred, he said, to maintain confidentiality, particularly in the early stages of negotiation, and were also frankly concerned that they had been put in the position, in the eyes of the world, of appearing negative in the face of positive American proposals. On the substantive side, the essence of Moscow's concern, the Soviet official claimed, was the alleged American unwillingness to include cruise missiles in SALT II.

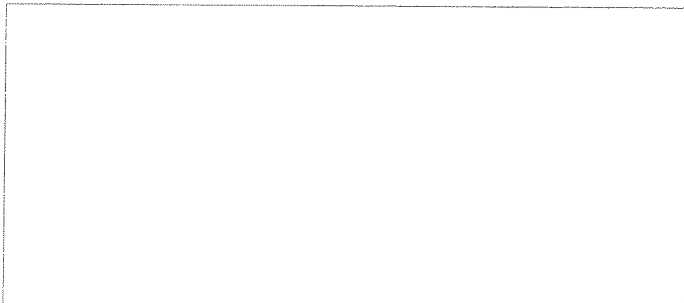
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the Soviet leadership found the US SALT proposals grossly inequitable and a surprising departure from the anticipated American position.

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The Soviets nonetheless continued to convey the impression in private that, despite the differences over human rights, negotiations at SALT should proceed with a minimum of acrimony.

The point of contact between the public and private Soviet positions may well have been the assessment that conservative forces in the US were indeed exercising a dominant influence over US policy toward the Soviet Union. Thus *Literaturnaya Gazeta* asserted in the wake of the March negotiations that "extreme reactionary forces" in the United States, led by Senator Jackson, had been able "to blackmail the White House" on its Soviet policy.

D. Continuing Soviet Uncertainty

The predominant Soviet impression in the spring of 1977 apparently remained one of confusion about both the President and the nature of American policy. Commenting on US-Soviet relations following the Vance visit, a prominent USA Institute staffer, G. A. Trofimenko, accused President Carter of having "messianic ideas" and expressed concern over the extent to which such ideas served as the basis for the "ideological counterattack" against the socialist countries by "US Government circles."

This assessment of President Carter found expression in Soviet media in the form of increased criticism of the Carter administration's foreign and domestic policies. The Soviets played upon the themes of alleged gaps between the administration's words and deeds. In an apparent reflection of Moscow's own sentiments, Soviet propaganda professed sympathy for unfulfilled expectations of the American electorate. At times the Soviet press attacks included *ad hominem* criticism of the President's motivations and convictions.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, the Soviets did not comment extensively on either the Vance-Gromyko talks in Geneva in mid-May or President Carter's Notre Dame speech on 22 May, in which he reaffirmed the US commitment to human rights as an essential pillar of his administration's foreign policy. Indeed, the selective use of Soviet propaganda, together with the divergence in public and private communications, suggested that Moscow's response to the administration's arms control policies would be a combination of public pressure and private negotiations designed to push the United States back toward the Vladivostok formula. On human rights, the Soviets would be equally selective, minimizing the threat of retaliation at SALT and other bilateral forums, while assuming the propaganda offensive against the "social evils of capitalism" and the "hypocritical" Western stance on human rights.



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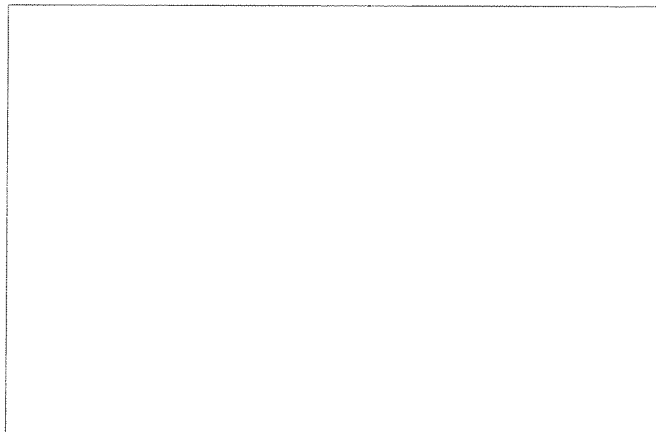
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IV. A Soviet Reassessment

The next round of high-level discussions on SALT, held between Secretary Vance and Gromyko in the third week of May, was immediately followed by a particularly cool period in Soviet-US relations. It was at about this time that the Soviet Central Committee disseminated a secret decree throughout all party and government institutions demanding greatly increased "vigilance" in response to what was depicted as stepped-up Western espionage and subversion against the Soviet Union. At the same time that the regime began to tighten the screws internally, the Soviet press became increasingly vehement in its criticism of the US administration, and the Soviets began to advertise both in public and in private a stronger perception of deteriorating bilateral relations.

It would probably be misleading to link this Soviet behavior solely or even mainly to the results of the May Vance-Gromyko meeting. The cumulative effects of long-growing Soviet concerns about Western subversion and the ultimate objectives of the US human rights pressure were probably more important. Moreover, the Soviet perception of the Vance-Gromyko meeting was almost certainly not wholly negative. To the extent that they perceived what they considered a more "businesslike" US approach to the continuing arms dialogue than they had seen in March, the Soviets may have extracted some solace from the May talks. By this time they had probably also become resigned to the fact that a SALT II agreement would eventually require their acceptance of some modification of the Vladivostok guidelines. Nevertheless, they considered even the May US SALT position far removed from what they felt was acceptable to their interests. Whether or not they genuinely believed that the United States in May was continuing to seek unilateral advantage at SALT, they evidently felt it desirable to continue to say so in order to maintain pressure on the United States for concessions. This Soviet propaganda interest in maintaining a dark picture of the US attitude on arms control thus reinforced the growing Soviet alarm over the implications of the US attitude on human rights.

A. The Attacks on US Motives



In late June, the American desk editor of *Pravda*, Sergei Vishnevsky, similarly told US Embassy officers that the Soviet leadership had made a misjudgment in being initially optimistic about a Carter Presidency and implied that Moscow had overestimated the ability of "responsible" and "moderate" administration officials to withstand conservative pressure on the White House. Vishnevsky also said that Soviet leaders were "impatient" with the new administration in Washington, seeing no indications that it was moving toward a more "realistic" policy toward the Soviet Union.

This private trumpeting of Soviet impatience with the Carter administration was accompanied by particularly harsh media criticism following the President's transmittal to a Congressional monitoring group of his semiannual executive assessment of Soviet and East European compliance with the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act. The Soviet reaction to this report again indicated that it was the personal involvement of the President in criticizing Soviet human rights violations that was a special focus of Soviet concern. Soviet commentary ignored the fact that the Presidential report was required by law.

By now, Soviet propaganda was seeking, more and more explicitly, to draw a connection between US arms policies and the Carter administration's pronouncements on human rights. The rights issue was ambiguously tied to Soviet fears and complaints about US testing of cruise missiles and contemplated steps to modernize the US

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nuclear arsenal, such as the initial deployment of the Mk 12A warhead on Minuteman III ICBMs, the potential deployment of the B-1 bomber, and the pending development of neutron warheads for US tactical nuclear weaponry in Western Europe. International comentator Valentin Zorin, for example, charged that the US administration's human rights initiatives were somehow linked to its "fresh efforts to gain military superiority over the Soviet Union."

During a visit to France in late June, Soviet leader Brezhnev once again returned to the theme of the difficulties the Soviets found in trying to understand and deal with the new US administration. While in Paris, Brezhnev told

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[redacted] that he did not know what President Carter wanted, expressed astonishment at the US attitude on a number of questions, especially human rights, and generally gave the impression that US-Soviet relations were headed for hard times. Brezhnev also said he did not believe that President Carter had fully established himself politically or developed a "seasoned attitude" toward foreign affairs. And in a meeting with US Ambassador Toon in Moscow on 5 July, Brezhnev yet again underscored Soviet displeasure with the Carter administration's policies on SALT and human rights. The Soviet leader also rejected apparent US overtures for a Carter-Brezhnev summit as premature in light of the lack of progress on outstanding bilateral issues.

Meanwhile, President Carter's announcement on 30 June that the United States would not proceed with the production of the B-1 bomber but would deploy air-launched cruise missiles on existing B-52 strategic aircraft had produced a fresh wave of Soviet criticism of US foreign and military policy. Soviet propaganda denied that the decision to forgo B-1 production was in any way a US concession or evidence of US strategic restraint. Rather, the Soviets focused on the cruise missile, charging that it represented a new element making for further US-Soviet competition in the arms field. In the immediate aftermath of the announcement, at the Dartmouth Conference on Soviet-American affairs held in Latvia on 9-13 July, the Soviet representatives were found to be

much more polemical and less constructive than in past conferences. Arbatov, a cochairman of the Soviet delegation, reportedly stated in private conversations that the Soviets did not understand President Carter and that he remained a mystery to Moscow. He went as far as to allege that the President was trying to use the human rights issue to renew the Cold War and to increase appropriations for the Department of Defense. Other Soviet delegates echoed Arbatov's professed confusion over alleged US "vacillations" and complained that they missed a single point of authority for US policy such as Dr. Kissinger had provided. 25X1

B. The *New Times* Anomaly and the Charleston Speech

On the eve of President Carter's 21 July Charleston address, however, the Soviet weekly *New Times* published an editorial urging that US-Soviet differences "should not be dramatized" and that "it is essential to display restraint and patience." The editorial went on to state that "Moscow has not lost hope" and argued that "the realities and imperatives of the nuclear age will in the final analysis have to be reckoned with by all realistic-minded politicians if they do not wish to become political bankrupts." Coming against a background of extensive negative commentary in the Soviet media on the Carter administration, the *New Times* editorial appears to have been directed toward an internal as well as an external audience.

Fragmentary evidence suggests that there may possibly have been differences of opinion in Moscow in this period over how to appraise the administration's motives and that such differences may have been intensified by the Charleston speech. In this speech, the President pointed

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to the necessity of "confirming, then building upon the Vladivostok accord" in SALT and noted the desirability of increased US-Soviet trade in the interest of furthering a broader cooperative relationship. In addition, he reiterated that the US human rights policy was neither directed against any one country nor designed to heat up the arms race. It is noteworthy that after the Charleston address, a certain degree of ambiguity became noticeable in the Soviet media assessment of the likely course of events. Amidst continuing negative and skeptical commentary, a few cautiously phrased references to the "positive" aspects of the Charleston speech began to appear.

The central press uniformly reported the Charleston address in a relatively straightforward manner, quoting some of the more encouraging passages, while criticizing the President for side-stepping the cruise missile and neutron bomb issues. Occasional comment, however, such as that found in the foreign press weekly *Za Rubezhom*, was more categorical in its rejection of the Charleston message—asserting that the President's speech was an attempt to "camouflage" the "adopted policy line" of his administration which, it asserted, consisted mainly of arms programs "imposed by the US military-industrial complex."

In another, semiauthoritative account, Georgy Arbatov took a more moderate tack in recounting the basis for continuing Soviet concerns about the Carter administration. Writing in *Pravda* on 3 August, Arbatov noted that the political atmosphere of US-Soviet relations had "changed for the worse." Arbatov went on to indict the United States for the failure to make progress in detente, citing the growing influence of "militaristic, anti-Soviet" forces in the United States. Among the factors he mentioned, Arbatov was perhaps most concerned about the reemergence in the United States of the "fairy tale" that Washington could deal with Moscow "from a position of strength" because of a perceived favorable shift in the international "correlation of forces." He questioned the motives behind the Carter administration's policy and asserted that "the attempts to correct detente have deeper roots than the inexperience of the new administration... or the

features of the President's political style." Yet Arbatov was careful not to associate President Carter directly with the "antidetente forces," and unlike *Za Rubezhom* held forth the hope that the US administration might soon "begin to act more thoughtfully." In reference to President Carter's Charleston speech, Arbatov noted that "certain propositions" were "positive," but asked how evidence of increased hostility toward the Soviet Union, such as the decisions on the cruise missile and neutron bomb, as well as the "propaganda campaign" concerning human rights, could be reconciled with the President's professed desire for progress in SALT and further US-Soviet cooperation. Arbatov reiterated these concerns in private to US Ambassador Toon, emphasizing that President Carter could not "appease" Senator Jackson and seek detente simultaneously.

In a separate assessment of the Charleston speech, a more openly optimistic note was struck by N. V. Mostovets, head of the North American sector in the Central Committee's International Department. Speaking on domestic radio on 12 August, Mostovets criticized the US position on SALT, but emphasized the "positive" aspects of the Charleston speech: "It makes it possible to think that positive changes are taking place in the US administration's stance capable of bringing about favorable results." Mostovets' comments are all the more interesting because they came amidst the massive Soviet propaganda campaign against the neutron bomb.

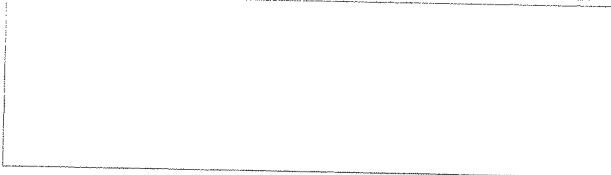
Finally, Brezhnev gave his own assessment of the post-Charleston state of US-Soviet relations in a Kremlin speech on 16 August. Brezhnev was at times highly critical of US policy and charged that "a hostile propaganda campaign" against the USSR was being "used as a smokescreen for another round of the arms race." Brezhnev was careful, however, to attribute this hostility to "certain imperialist circles" and did not directly associate President Carter with the negative aspects of US policy. Furthermore, Brezhnev made a few somewhat more optimistic references similar to those of Arbatov and Mostovets. "Compared with the previous moves by the US administration," Brezhnev noted, President Carter's statements "sounded positive." The General Sec-

retary went on to insist, however, that the United States would have to translate such words "into the language of practical deeds" if detente were to continue.

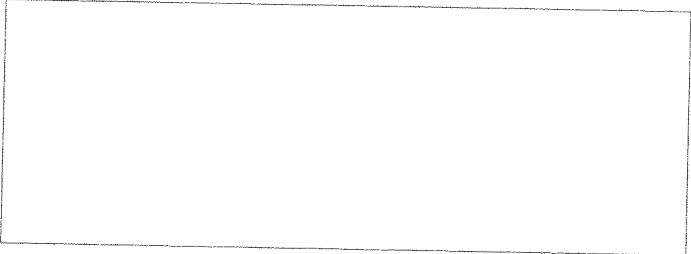
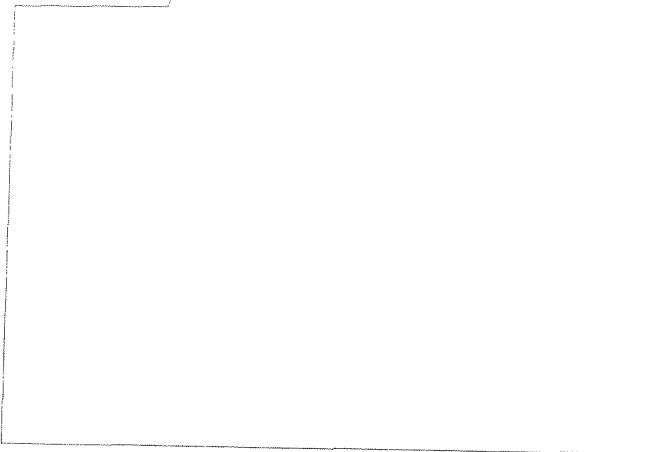
C. The New Soviet Appraisal

In retrospect, the Soviet leadership by the end of the summer seems to have come to a somewhat tentative, and perhaps less than unanimous, conclusion that it might prove possible for Moscow to do business with the new administration in the most important bilateral areas. The substantive basis for the more optimistic side of the Soviet assessment seemed to be a perception of a modest shift in US policy. The most important factors leading Moscow to believe that such a shift was taking place were:

- Soviet perception of a relatively nonpolemical stance taken by the United States at the preliminary talks for the CSCE Review Conference held in Belgrade from 15 June until 8 August. In his August speech, Brezhnev pointed to the results of the CSCE talks as an encouraging aspect of East-West relations.



- Soviet perception of some US willingness to modify its human rights policy, at least to the extent of refraining from further high-level public overtures on behalf of dissidents in the USSR.



V. The Gromyko September Visit

A. "Hawks" and "Realists" in Washington

Brezhnev's August speech presaged a moderation in Soviet propaganda directed against the Carter administration. Subsequently, the Soviet media began to reflect the carefully balanced, but slightly more encouraging tone set by Brezhnev, although specific criticism of US policies regarding the cruise missile and neutron bomb continued unabated. The "hawks" versus the "realists" theme also became a more explicit dichotomy in Soviet propaganda: certain figures labeled by Moscow as representative of the Pentagon and the "military-industrial complex" were castigated as "enemies of detente," while more "sober-minded" and "realistic" views were more and more ascribed to the President.

Secretary of Defense Brown and National Security Adviser Brzezinski were now openly singled out as alleged sources of the more hostile aspects of US policy. Secretary Brown was accused of "fabricating" a "mythical Soviet threat" in order to justify the Pentagon's "militarist" programs. Dr. Brzezinski was characterized in *Pravda* as having a philosophy "more suitable for the era of the Cold War," while *New Times* charged that he was seeking to provoke discord within the Communist movement by encouraging Eurocommunist differences with Moscow.

In contrast to the accusations that continued to be hurled at his advisers, the Soviet media now noted "the positive impact of US President Carter's recent statements about the desirability of developing Soviet-American relations." In a conversation with US officials in Moscow, USA Institute director Arbatov expressed agreement with the proposition that President Carter's Charleston speech and Brezhnev's 16 August remarks represented "an exchange of positive signals."

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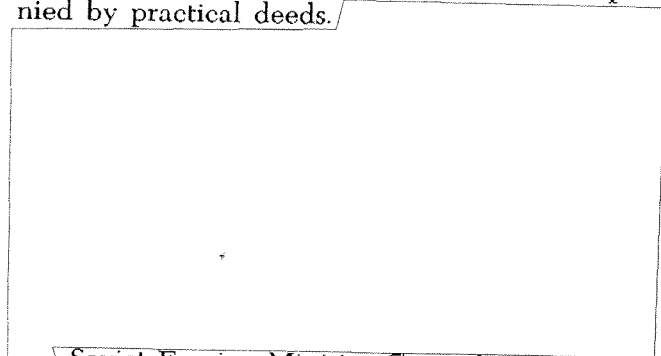
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B. Resumption of the Dialogue

It would appear that the changing emphasis in the Soviet assessment of the state of relations with the United States was partly related to anxiety over the pending expiration of the SALT I Interim Agreement on 3 October. The US cancellation of the scheduled 7-9 September meeting on SALT between Secretary Vance and Foreign Minister Gromyko apparently caused some initial consternation within the Soviet leadership, but passed with little public Soviet comment. On 6 September, in the aftermath of the cancellation, Gromyko was quoted in *Pravda* as saying that the Soviets were "firmly convinced that success at the talks on strategic arms is fully attainable." General Secretary Brezhnev, in turn, suggested in a conversation with US Chief Justice Burger on 9 September that the postponement of the Vance-Gromyko meeting was an indication that the United States was not ready for a constructive discussion of US-Soviet problems. Reading from a prepared text, Brezhnev blamed the United States for the "recession" in US-Soviet relations, but concluded by stating that Moscow was prepared to go halfway if the recent "positive" statements by the US President were accompanied by practical deeds.

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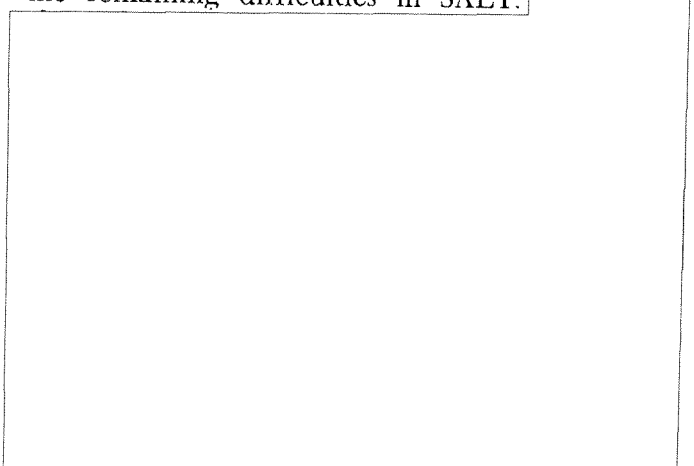
Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko arrived in Washington on 22 September to resume discussions on SALT and the general state of relations with Secretary of State Vance and President Carter. Gromyko was the first Politburo member to meet the new US President, and his personal assessment may well have had a significant impact on Moscow's conduct of the September negotiations.

The Soviets were presumably as anxious as the United States to extend the 1972 Interim Agree-

ment on a voluntary basis. Beyond that, the Soviets probably not only hoped to narrow their difference with the United States on SALT, but also apparently had decided to pursue solutions in other areas in their arms control dialogue with the United States, perhaps with the intention of promoting an atmosphere more conducive to progress on the remaining points of contention on SALT. Thus Gromyko, in his address to the UN General Assembly on 27 September, chose to emphasize the Soviet desire to conclude a Comprehensive Test Ban, offering to agree to a limited moratorium on nuclear weapons testing without participation by the People's Republic of China and France (a position offered privately in July). In addition, Soviet diplomats indicated in late September that Moscow might be willing to cooperate more closely with the United States on the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons—possibly having drawn encouragement from the US reaction to a Soviet warning in early August that South Africa was preparing for a nuclear test.

It is clear that the Soviets were pleased with the results of the Gromyko visit. Although Moscow sought to maintain restraint in its public treatment of Gromyko's discussions with Secretary Vance and President Carter, in private channels certain Soviets were less inhibited. Arbatov, in a conversation with a US arms control specialist, described Gromyko's talks in Washington as a "turning point in US-Soviet relations," in spite of the remaining difficulties in SALT.

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The Gromyko visit to Washington, therefore, engendered renewed optimism in Moscow about

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the likely course of US-Soviet dealings in the single most important aspect of the relationship, SALT. In this respect, the Soviets were increasingly reassured as to the priorities of US policy. Much of Moscow's past uncertainty on this score had been provoked by a perception of vacillation in Washington's policy, exacerbated by the introduction of new issues into the Soviet-American dialogue. But after the initial period of suspicion and doubt, the Soviets became more confident that the essential structure of that dialogue would be preserved:

- The Soviets perceived that what they had regarded as an initial US penchant for "public" diplomacy on bilateral issues had been

replaced by a more confidential approach. This had the effect of reassuring Moscow that the US would not allow its competition with the USSR to obstruct negotiations.

- Soviet suspicions that US human rights policy was essentially an anti-Soviet device, while by no means dispelled, were offset to some degree by the perception that the US would not risk a general deterioration of relations over this issue.
- Most important, even though ultimate agreement had not been reached, the Soviets were reassured as to the centrality of the SALT process in US policy toward the Soviet Union.

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*The author of this paper is [redacted] 25X1
USSR Division, Office of Regional and Political
Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome*

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