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Future U.S. Peacetime Policy Toward Russia

Exploring the Benefits and Costs
of a Less-Hardline Approach



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About This Report

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 and subsequent behavior in prosecuting the war have led the United States to adopt a wartime policy of supporting Ukraine and sanctioning Russia. As of this writing in March 2023, it seems likely that the United States will sustain a hardline policy toward Russia even after the conflict ends. However, over the long term, the United States will retain at least some structural incentives to pursue a relationship with Russia that has lower costs and risks; among these incentives are the need to focus on China and on U.S. domestic challenges. Policymakers might therefore eventually decide to explore alternative approaches to dealing with Russia. This report evaluates the trade-offs that might be associated with a less-hardline approach to Russia in peacetime using a series of historical case studies. The report is intended to inform U.S. policymakers who might consider such a course in the future. The report does not consider wartime policy or war termination and therefore is not intended to inform discussions regarding U.S. policy towards Russia during the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The research for this report was completed in January 2022. However, the analysis has been updated to address Russia's invasion of Ukraine and discuss the longer-term applicability of our findings.

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Summary

Issue

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, ongoing as of March 2023, the United States has adopted a wartime policy of providing support to Ukraine and imposing costs on Russia. The duration and intensity of the conflict have exceeded prewar predictions and complicate any attempts to forecast when and how the war will eventually end. Once the fighting does stop, however, the United States will need to consider how to approach peacetime relations with Russia.

Given widespread antipathy toward Russia for its initiation and conduct of the war, the United States appears likely to maintain a hardline policy toward Russia for the foreseeable future after the war. Yet a multitude of factors—including a desire to concentrate resources on the threat posed by China—may prompt the United States to consider different approaches to Russia at some later point in time. Historically, states facing resource challenges or other constraints have sometimes adopted a less-hardline approach toward at least one rival even after years of intense competition. A *less-hardline approach* is a policy that seeks to promote a state's own interests by addressing a rival's interests and concerns.

To inform future U.S. policy debates about peacetime policy toward Russia, we assessed historical cases of states adopting less-hardline approaches towards their rivals. Debates about the benefits, costs, and risks of less-hardline approaches toward Russia are perennial. In the past, those who proposed less-hardline policies argued that they could reduce Russian insecurity and aggression. Skeptics worried that a less-hardline approach would embolden Russia to become more demanding or aggressive. We evaluate these competing claims and assess the trade-offs that might be associated with the United States adopting a less-hardline approach toward Russia in a future period of peace. This report is not intended to inform discussions regarding U.S. policy towards Russia during the current conflict in Ukraine.

Approach

As of this writing, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is ongoing and the shape of longer-term U.S.-Russia relations remains uncertain. Still, the analysis we conducted in 2021 (which draws on lessons from history) offers insights about less-hardline approaches that could apply in some future postwar trajectories of this relationship.

We identify historical case studies that had strategic similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship as of mid-2021. In particular, we assess case studies for which there was an asymmetric distribution of power, geographic separation and pronounced mistrust existed between the parties, and a globally stronger state adopted more-conciliatory policies toward a weaker

rival. We prefer case studies in which the weaker state sought more territory or greater influence in the domestic affairs of its neighbors, both states had nuclear weapons, and the stronger state had allies with a stake in the rivalry.

We examine four case studies that met most or all of these criteria: Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia (1899–1913), U.S.-Soviet negotiations after the end of World War II in Europe (1945–1946), U.S.-Soviet détente (1969–1975), and the U.S.-Russia reset (2009–2013). In each case study, we assess how such policies affected the weaker state’s perceptions and behavior and, ultimately, the course of the relationship of the two countries. We also consider how hardline elements of the stronger state’s approach interacted with and mediated the effects of the less-hardline elements.

To apply lessons from these cases to future U.S.-Russia relations, we consider similarities and differences between our historical case studies and possible postwar policy challenges. The ongoing war in Ukraine makes the postwar setting uncertain, complicating this analysis. Still, we discuss some of the possible differences between our cases and the likely postwar environment even though we cannot anticipate every way that the postwar setting could evolve. We then consider how these differences might affect the applicability of our findings, and we make predictions about how a peacetime less-hardline U.S. approach to Russia would affect (1) Russian perceptions and behavior and (2) the trajectory of the U.S.-Russia relationship in the coming years.

Key Findings

Given Russia’s aggression toward Ukraine, the United States is unlikely to adopt a less-hardline approach toward Russia for the foreseeable future after the war. Moreover, Russia’s mistrust of the United States and its allies could make it less receptive to such an approach in the short term. In the longer term, however, U.S. policymakers might decide to consider alternative approaches for managing the relationship. Even if the United States were to adopt a less-hardline approach to Russia in some areas, it is likely that suspicions of Russia, domestic politics, and alliance considerations would lead the United States to sustain hardline policies in other areas. Our analysis of similar historical case studies and consideration of unique aspects of the U.S.-Russia relationship lead to predictions about the effects of a limited accommodation of this kind as described here. Some prospects for stabilizing the U.S.-Russia relationship and advancing U.S. interests are as follows:

- Limited less-hardline approaches that do not address core Russian concerns are unlikely to stabilize the U.S.-Russia relationship in the medium to long term.
- A less-hardline U.S. approach to Russia of limited scope could lead to limited but durable gains.
- In a peacetime context, there appears to be little evidence that negotiating with Russia or making limited concessions will embolden Moscow to become more demanding or aggressive.

- Attempting to implement less-hardline approaches could create domestic constituencies in both the United States and Russia that are committed to the success of such approaches.

Some factors that could affect Russian response to a less-hardline U.S. approach are as follows:

- Russia may be more willing to reciprocate U.S. offers of negotiation during periods when Moscow perceives that international trends are moving against it.
- The combination of antagonistic U.S.-China relations and close Russia-China relations will decrease Russian willingness to make concessions in negotiations with the United States.

Recommendations

We make the following recommendations for policymakers weighing the costs and benefits of future less-hardline approaches during peacetime and for analysts who wish to build on our findings:

- If the United States wishes to adopt a less-hardline approach to Russia as a means of stabilizing the relationship, then Washington might need to engage in negotiations over core Russian security concerns, including the security order in Europe.
- If the United States adopts a limited less-hardline approach to achieve narrower goals, it should remain alert that the relationship will likely deteriorate over unresolved issues.
- The best timing for U.S. outreach to Russia might be during a more constructive period in U.S.-China relations or when there are tensions in the China-Russia relationship.
- As policymakers evaluate less-hardline approaches, they should consider the entire picture, including the effects of any hardline policies that they sustain simultaneously.
- Analysts should generate and compare options for less-hardline U.S. approaches to Russia.
- Scholars should determine whether there are conditions under which less-hardline approaches embolden rivals.

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Introduction

As of this writing in March 2023, the United States is carrying out a wartime policy of punishment against Russia and providing support to Ukraine. When this war eventually ends, the United States will face choices about its peacetime policy. U.S. policy toward Russia prior to the war sought to balance efforts to hold Russia accountable for several transgressions—election interference, human rights abuses, Russia’s prior interventions in Ukraine—with attempts to enhance the predictability and stability of the relationship through such policies as arms control. These latter efforts were partly driven by a desire to shift U.S. attention and resources to the Indo-Pacific.

Whenever and however the Ukraine conflict ultimately ends, the U.S.-Russia relationship will likely remain hostile and competitive in the aftermath. Given Russia’s wanton aggression, any positive change in this relationship appears far off at best. However, history shows us that relations between even bitter rivals can shift over time. Changes in the international system, competing policy priorities, or shifts in Russian behavior could create incentives at some later date for the United States to consider a different approach to relations with Moscow. In particular, the growing threat posed by China’s rise will increase U.S. incentives to reduce the costs and risks it faces elsewhere in the world, notably in Europe. This report is intended to inform future discussions about the trade-offs associated with one approach that the United States might take to accomplish that reduction some time after the war: adopting a *less-hardline approach* toward Russia—that is, a policy that aims to advance U.S. interests by proactively addressing Russia’s interests and concerns—as unlikely as such an approach might seem as of this writing.

Prior to Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, debates about U.S. policy toward Russia were perennial and featured similar arguments and counterarguments. Some U.S. policymakers and analysts argued against making concessions on the core issues that divide the United States and Russia (e.g., Ukraine, missile defense, U.S. posture in Europe). These skeptics generally dismissed less-hardline approaches to potential adversaries—from incremental cooperative gestures to grand bargains intended to address root causes of antagonism—as dangerous appeasement that would make the United States appear weak and irresolute, emboldening adversaries or competitors to harden their positions or even take more-aggressive action.¹

¹ Oleksiy Goncharenko, “The Lesson of Crimea: Appeasement Never Works,” Atlantic Council, February 27, 2020; Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova, “Don’t Rehabilitate Obama on Russia,” Brookings

Prior to the 2022 conflict, other commentators contended that hardline U.S. policies had out-sized costs and risks and that a less antagonistic approach addressing some of Russia's genuine security concerns could enhance stability and ultimately serve U.S. interests.²

There is a wider literature on the effects of concessions to rivals that assesses some of these claims, but it has limitations for informing debates about a more cooperative U.S. policy toward Russia in the future. First, this literature tends to focus on the effects of making concessions under duress in the midst of a crisis rather than on proactive shifts in the overall approach toward a rival during peacetime, which is our focus in this report. Second, the findings from that literature can be contradictory, so it is difficult to identify clear policy implications. One possible explanation for disputes in the literature is that the impact of less-hardline policies can depend on the context in which they are employed and might not be generalizable to all cases.³ Therefore, in this report we evaluate the trade-offs that might be associated with less-hardline approaches for a particular set of circumstances: the future peacetime U.S.-Russia relationship. Specifically, we ask:

1. Would a peacetime less-hardline approach have the potential to resolve or improve the management of any of the long-standing conflicts of interest between the United States and Russia, reducing the risk of direct conflict or the costs of competition?
2. Would a peacetime less-hardline approach make Russia less aggressive by addressing some of its demands?
3. Would a peacetime less-hardline approach make Russia more aggressive by emboldening it to increase its demands?

To answer these questions, we begin by examining the effects of less-hardline approaches in historical case studies that have broad similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship as it stood just before the crisis that emerged over Ukraine in late 2021. We then consider how any remaining differences between these case studies and the situations that the United States could face in the coming years might affect the applicability of lessons from this history.

Institution, March 5, 2018; Kurt Volker, "No More Resets with Russia," *Foreign Policy*, August 11, 2020.

² John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, 2014; Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2015.

³ For example, Weisiger and Yarhi-Milo find that countries that have recently backed down are more likely to be targeted in a crisis, especially if the circumstances of the crisis are similar (Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 69, No. 2, 2015); Clare and Danilovic find that interests shape state behavior and that past action plays, at most, an indirect role (Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic, "Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2012). For exceptions to the focus on concessions in crisis that examine broader conciliatory shifts in approach toward a rival, see Miranda Priebe, *Fear and Frustration: Rising State Perceptions of Threats and Opportunities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2015; and Stephen R. Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics*, Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000.

What Is a Less-Hardline Approach?

States are rivals when they have significant conflicts of interest and a mutual perception that those conflicts of interest have the potential lead to armed conflict between them. Broadly, states can choose either a hardline or a less-hardline approach toward each conflict of interest with a rival. A state adopts a hardline approach when it tries to achieve its goals by outmaneuvering or coercing a rival and does not seek a resolution that accounts for the rival's interests. Hardline approaches adopt a logic of force or coercion, using one's military capabilities or other forms of leverage to advance state interests. We also refer to such policies as *competitive*. Examples of hardline policies include increasing force levels to coerce or intimidate a rival, the use of force against a rival or its proxies, or more generally pursuing advantages involving a conflict of interest without consideration for the interests of the rival.

In contrast, a state adopts a *less-hardline approach* when it seeks to advance its own interests by proactively addressing what it perceives to be the rival's interests or concerns. Less-hardline approaches adopt a logic of cooperation or exchange, considering how mutual agreements or concessions could be used to shift the behavior of the rival in ways that help a state advance its interests. Throughout the report, we also refer to these policies as *accommodationist*, *conciliatory*, or *cooperative*.⁴

In the popular discourse, some hardline approaches are treated as being less-hardline if they are comparatively less competitive than other hardline approaches. For example, a U.S. policy of placing qualitative caps on weapons sales to an ally or partner may be seen as less competitive toward a rival than a policy for a larger program that included more-advanced weapons. Although such distinctions of degree are certainly important to assess, we focus on less-hardline approaches that adopt a fundamentally cooperative logic rather than those that reflect only a lesser degree of competitive behavior.

Examples of less-hardline approaches under our definition would include

- negotiations with the rival to resolve or manage a conflict of interest, undertaken with a willingness to meaningfully account for the rival's interests or concerns (This does not include engaging in negotiations for show without a genuine intention of making any concessions, nor does it include negotiations brought about through acute coercion or pressure.)
- unilateral concessions to the rival
- encouraging allies to engage in negotiations or take unilateral steps that address the adversary's interests or concerns

⁴ Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 51; Priebe, 2015, p. 22. Our definition of a less-hardline approach has some similarities to Kennedy's definition of *appeasement*. We do not use his term because, as he notes, it now has a negative connotation rather than being simply descriptive (Paul M. Kennedy, "The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy 1865–1939," *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3, October 1976).

- reductions in military forces near the adversary's homeland or in other areas where the two countries have a conflict of interest
- tacit or explicit acceptance of the other side's aggression (e.g., territorial expansion, interference in another state's affairs) in an area where both countries have an interest.

We do not focus on *policy coordination* in nonsecurity areas where the two states' interests align and the outcome itself is less important than the fact that both states agree to behave in the same way (e.g., on air traffic control measures). We also do not focus on unilateral steps to support an adversary's interest in cases where there is no conflict of interest between the two sides (e.g., providing humanitarian aid after a disaster).⁵

In this report, we focus on less-hardline approaches adopted in *peacetime*, or a period when rivals are not directly fighting or engaging in a proxy war.⁶ Less hardline approaches adopted in peacetime may have distinct effects compared with decisions to make concessions as part of negotiations to end a war or during a crisis in response to acute, explicit threats of force. Although negotiations that result from such hardline, coercive pressure can also lead to concessions, the way such concessions were induced involves very different state motivations and approaches to the relationship, which, in turn, would lead us to different outcomes and related costs and benefits. State concerns about an adversary's capabilities and intent are always present and can provide an important motivation for a state's decision to try to reduce the future costs and risks of conflict by pursuing less-hardline approaches. But a willingness to grant concessions to avoid an acute threat of the use of force against oneself or one's allies would not necessarily reflect any willingness to shift the terms of the relationship in a more cooperative direction and likely reflects a different set of dynamics and considerations than we focus on in this report.

Less-hardline approaches can vary in breadth and depth. A state could shift toward a more conciliatory policy in one area even as it sustains hardline policies in others. Less-hardline approaches can also range from small compromises on peripheral issues to larger concessions on more-fundamental conflicts of interest. Therefore, when we say that a country adopted a less-hardline approach, this does not necessarily mean that the stronger state's policies are conciliatory on every dimension or involved major concessions. Moreover, a less-hardline approach could still involve a tough stance during negotiations. The defining feature of a less-

⁵ For this distinction between coordination and cooperation, see, for example, Robert O. Keohane and David G. Victor, "Cooperation and Discord in Global Climate Policy," *Nature Climate Change*, Vol. 6, No. 6, June 2016, p. 570.

⁶ Most of the case studies we consider take place during peacetime, so we cannot extend our analysis to a wartime context, which may follow a different logic. One of our cases, the U.S.-Soviet détente, does take place during the Vietnam War, when the Soviets were supporting North Vietnam forces fighting against U.S. forces. We did not exclude such cases from our analysis. However, since it is the only wartime case, and because the state most actively involved in the conflict—the United States—was the stronger state and the analysis in this report focuses on understanding the behavior of the weaker state, we do not attempt to draw implications for the use of less-hardline approaches during wartime generally.

hardline approach is a willingness to address the other side's concerns as a means of achieving one's own goals, not abandoning a country's own interests.

We assess the effects of policy changes that the initiating state *believed* were less-hardline. In other words, we looked for case studies where a state thought it was accounting for the interests of its rival. This does not necessarily mean that the other state perceived the policy change in the same way, as we discuss throughout.

Claims About the Potential Benefits of Less-Hardline Approaches

Scholars and policymakers have made numerous claims about the potential benefits of cooperative approaches. To review these, we draw on two sources: the academic literature on cooperation between states generally and arguments put forward by those who have advocated a more conciliatory approach to Russia in the past. There are, of course, potential benefits outside the relationship with a rival that we do not consider in detail here. For example, adopting a less-hardline approach might garner support from domestic groups and allied countries that worry about the costs and risks of a more competitive approach. Here, we focus on claims about the potential benefits of less-hardline approaches in the bilateral relationship with the rival. We then describe the conditions that make a state more likely to achieve these benefits.

Potential Benefits of Less-Hardline Approaches in the Relationship with the Adversary

The existing literature suggests the following potential benefits of less-hardline approaches:

The rival could agree to concessions and side payments. When the less-hardline approach involves a negotiation, both sides make concessions or offer side payments to one another to reach a deal. A unilateral concession by one state might also invite concessions by the other. The most direct benefit of a less-hardline approach is therefore any issue on which the rival concedes or offers an incentive.⁷ In 2015, for instance, the United States (along with China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom) reached an accord with Iran in which it agreed to limits on its nuclear program in exchange for incremental sanctions relief. The United States had long worried about Iran developing a nuclear weapon, so these limits had value to the United States, even if they were not as strict as the United States would have liked.

Resolution or improved management of a conflict of interest could reduce the associated costs of competition and risk of war over the issue and free up resources for other domestic or international priorities. An ongoing conflict of interest with another country

⁷ See this logic, for example, in Nini Arshakuni, Angelina Flood, and Natasha Yefimova-Trilling, "Why the 'Reset' Didn't Last," *Russia Matters*, March 8, 2019; and Alexander Vershbow and Daniel Fried, "How the West Should Deal with Russia," Atlantic Council, November 23, 2020.

might require spending on such measures as arms, sustaining a forward military presence, or maintaining readiness for war. These costs might be reduced or eliminated if the dispute can be addressed. This might be particularly important when resources are needed for more-pressing international or domestic challenges.⁸ A less-hardline approach could settle an issue entirely (e.g., establish an agreed-on border in disputed territory) or at least improve its management (e.g., arms control agreements).⁹ In either case, a state might benefit from lower costs of peacetime competition over the issue.

Resolving one or more conflicts of interest can also reduce the risk of peacetime competition escalating to war. For example, after a war scare in 1841, the United States and Britain began negotiations to resolve several conflicts of interest, culminating in the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty that addressed some of the territorial and other disputes that had previously brought the countries close to war.¹⁰

Addressing the rival's insecurity could increase incentives for additional cooperation and reduce incentives for security-motivated aggression and arming. A more cooperative approach may reduce a rival's *threat perceptions* or *insecurity*, the extent to which one state believes the other has aggressive intentions or is concerned that a dispute will escalate to war, intentionally or otherwise. If a less-hardline approach reduces a state's threat perceptions, that state might be less likely to undertake security-motivated aggression or arming. Moreover, when a state's threat perceptions are reduced, that state might be more willing to take risks involved in cooperation on other issues.¹¹ For example, Britain agreed to U.S. requests in 1818 to demilitarize the Great Lakes, where both the United States and Great Britain had constructed fleets during the War of 1812. Britain agreed to do so in an attempt to address U.S. threat perceptions and improve relations. The resulting Rush-Bagot Treaty ended the arms race on the lakes, reduced U.S. threat perceptions, and encouraged cooperation on other issues.¹²

⁸ Treisman formalizes the logic of adopting a less-hardline approach toward one adversary when a state faces multiple threats (Daniel Treisman, "Rational Appeasement," *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2, Spring 2004). For a discussion of Britain's decisions to settle disputes with other powers in order to focus on the larger threat from Germany, see Chapter Two of this report.

⁹ See this logic in, for example, Thomas Graham and Dmitri Trenin, "Towards a New Model for US-Russian Relations," *Survival*, Vol. 62, No. 4, 2020.

¹⁰ The next war scare concerned a dispute that the treaty did not resolve: the division of the Oregon Territory (Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American relations, 1783-1843*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

¹¹ Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1997; Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4, July 1992; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976, Ch. 3.

¹² Office of the Historian, "Rush-Bagot Pact, 1817 and Convention of 1818," U.S. Department of State webpage, undated; Christopher Mark Radojewski, "The Rush-Bagot Agreement: Canada-US Relations in Transition," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2017.

In the extreme, a country might adopt a less-hardline approach in the hope of turning a rival into a security partner. For example, President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger sought to normalize ties with China as a way to gain cooperation against the Soviet Union. Some analysts have advocated what they term a “reverse Kissinger,” arguing that the United States could and should settle disagreements with Russia to gain support against China.¹³

How Circumstances Might Affect the Benefits of Less-Hardline Approaches

Scholars have suggested multiple reasons why these benefits might not always be realized in practice or could be smaller than hoped by a state adopting a less-hardline approach. As we describe later in this chapter, identifying these conditions then helps us select historical case studies that have relevant similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship today. Here, we list the arguments that scholars have made about how circumstances might affect the likelihood or size of the benefits from conciliatory policies.

When states are deeply insecure or mistrustful, cooperation is difficult and less likely to alter threat perceptions. Insecurity makes states worry more that concessions might add to their rivals’ power or diminish their own and thus make their rivals better able to compete or use force in the future.¹⁴ Therefore, insecure states might be less likely to adopt a cooperative approach or reciprocate an offer to negotiate. Even if they do negotiate, insecure states might have a smaller set of options they would consider, making it difficult to reach an agreement that both states will accept.

Related to insecurity, states can also be mistrustful and might believe that their rival could defect on any agreement between them.¹⁵ These conditions can make it more difficult to reach agreements that require the parties to make commitments about future behavior, especially agreements involving behavior that is hard to monitor.¹⁶

In addition to affecting the prospects for negotiated outcomes, insecurity and mistrust can also affect the way that states interpret cooperative gestures. In particular, an insecure

¹³ See, for example, Robert D. Blackwill, *Implementing Grand Strategy Towards China: Twenty-Two U.S. Policy Prescriptions*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Council Special Report No. 85, January, 2020, pp. 35–36; Blake Franko, “The ‘Reverse Kissinger,’” *American Conservative*, January 10, 2017.

¹⁴ For the general logic of this argument, see Robert Powell, “Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, 1991. For the general argument that a high cost of defection from an agreement impedes cooperation, see Kenneth A. Oye, “Explaining Cooperation Under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies,” in Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation Under Anarchy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.

¹⁵ Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018.

¹⁶ James D. Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 1998.

rival might be more cautious about updating its perceptions of the other state's intentions or the risk of war. Letting down its guard prematurely could leave a state unprepared for conflict. An insecure state might be even more likely to see a conciliatory gesture as a trick intended to lull the state into a false sense of security. In other words, a rival might see a gesture that is intended to be cooperative as competitive, or a rival might believe that a cooperative gesture is genuine but remain skeptical about the permanence of the change in the other state's intentions or how much any agreement will reduce the threat of war.¹⁷

The mix of policies that a state adopts could affect whether less-hardline policies reduce the rival's threat perceptions. Powerful states, such as the United States and Russia, often interact across a variety of issues and regions. States might adopt a less-hardline policy on one issue or region while sustaining a hardline policy on others. The mix of a state's policies—whether it is purely accommodating, purely hardline, or somewhere along the spectrum of mixed options in between—might determine the effect on the rival's perceptions and behavior. Continued competition in one area may affirm the rival's suspicions such that there is no positive change in its threat perceptions or behavior from the cooperative elements of the other state's policies.

Uncertainty and incentives to overstate resolve can prevent states from finding a mutually acceptable agreement. States have limited information about others in the international system. States know their own capabilities and intent but have imperfect information about their potential competitor's. States also have incentives to deceive each other. For example, by misrepresenting the strength of their *resolve* (or willingness to bear costs to achieve their aims) on a given issue, states can press for a bargain that is aligned more with their own preferences than those of their competitor. These incentives mean that states are suspicious about what their rivals claim, making it difficult for the two sides to find a mutually acceptable agreement.¹⁸

Scholars have argued that these problems are worse for states that have opaque decision-making processes than they are for states that engage in open debate about foreign policy. For example, when a state's rival can see that both the government and its opposition support a foreign policy option, that rival can more reliably conclude that the state would be willing to pay a high cost to achieve its aims.¹⁹ Conversely, the lack of open debate and a credible opposition makes information about a closed state's preferences more difficult to discern and cooperative outcomes more difficult to achieve.

¹⁷ Beyond rational reasons for caution, preexisting perceptions can color how states perceive new signals from other states for psychological reasons. See Jack S. Levy, "Political Psychology and Foreign Policy," in Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁸ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3, Summer 1995; William Reed, "Information, Power, and War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4, 2003.

¹⁹ Kristopher W. Ramsay, "Politics at the Water's Edge: Crisis Bargaining and Electoral Competition," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2004; Kenneth A. Schultz, "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4, 1998.

Bureaucratic and alliance politics could make it more difficult to reassure a rival.

When a nation's leaders adopt a strategy, there remains a risk that lower-level officials within the bureaucracy will adopt policies that unintentionally or intentionally run counter to that strategy. Momentum on existing policies, misinterpretation of a new strategy toward a rival, or other factors could lead to divergence.²⁰ In the extreme, lower-level officials could even try to sabotage a new strategy toward a rival to achieve their preferred outcome.²¹ Similar dynamics might also cause allies to adopt policies contrary to the goals of the state that is initiating a less-hardline approach. An ally's hardline policies could, in turn, undermine a state's attempts to reassure its rival.

Claims About the Costs and Risks of Less-Hardline Approaches

Although there are many reasons why states might consider a less-hardline approach, states are often hesitant to choose such policies because of the potential costs and risks. This view was prominent in the Donald Trump administration. The 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy, for example, argues that engagement with potential adversaries has largely failed to change their behavior and goes on to argue that “just as American weakness invites challenge, American strength and confidence deters war and promotes peace.”²²

As with the benefits, there are some potential costs of less-hardline approaches outside the bilateral relationship that we do not focus on here. For example, a leader that adopts a less-hardline approach could face domestic blowback from foreign policy hawks that oppose a more conciliatory approach toward a rival. A more cooperative approach also might strain relations with allies who prefer a hardline approach.²³ We focus here on claims about the potential costs and risks of less-hardline approaches in the relationship with the rival.

²⁰ Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014, pp. 12–15; Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, “Introduction: Debating America's Future,” in Richard Fontaine and Kristin M. Lord, eds., *America's Path: Grand Strategy for the Next Administration*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, May 2012, p. 10; Andrew Monaghan, *Power in Modern Russia: Strategy and Mobilization*, Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2017, pp. 30–31, 42–46.

²¹ Daniel W. Drezner, “Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Crafting of Foreign Policy,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 4, October 2000. See, for example, Drezner, 2000; and Vincent Arel-Bundock, James Atkinson, and Rachel Augustine Potter, “The Limits of Foreign Aid Diplomacy: How Bureaucratic Design Shapes Aid Distribution,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2015.

²² White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 3.

²³ Robert Kagan, “A Hollow Reset with Russia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 25, 2010a; Douglas J. Feith and Seth Cropsey, “How the Russian ‘Reset’ Explains Obama's Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, October 16, 2012. States often fear that their allies will abandon them and therefore can be more fearful for their security when their partners conciliate the adversary. For the classic discussion of this

Potential Costs and Risks in the Relationship with the Adversary

There is a cost for concessions and side-payments to the rival. The most direct cost of a less-hardline approach are the concessions or incentives a state offers its rival. These could result from unilateral concessions or as part of a negotiation.²⁴ For example, the United States eased sanctions on Iran as part of the nuclear agreement in 2015. The United States saw this as a cost because it would strengthen Iran's economy and potentially make Iran a more capable competitor in the future.

There is a risk that concessions will embolden the rival to make more demands. A common concern is that less-hardline approaches will convince the adversary that the United States is *weak-willed* or *irresolute*, meaning it is not willing to bear significant costs to defend its interests. This in turn, could cause the adversary to become more demanding in negotiations or to launch military action (with the expectation that it will not meet resistance).²⁵ In such cases, we say that the adversary has been *emboldened*. This concern arises from the purported lessons of the ineffectual 1938 British, French, and Italian agreement with Adolf Hitler at Munich.²⁶ Many U.S. policymakers and commentators point to Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 or China's increasing militarization of the South China Sea as evidence that the United States had been too soft on its rivals.²⁷

How Circumstances Might Affect the Costs and Risks of Less-Hardline Approaches

Just as the potential benefits of conciliation might depend on the circumstances, so too might the costs. Here we consider factors that the existing literature suggests could affect the costs and risks of less-hardline approaches:

The distribution of power could affect whether a rival is emboldened by a less-hardline approach. Generally, the distribution of power is thought to affect a state's perceptions and

dynamic, see Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July 1984.

²⁴ For a commentary that highlights the costs of past U.S. concessions in one area to gain cooperation in another, see Mitchel A. Orenstein, "Russia's Desperate Measures," *Foreign Affairs*, September 20, 2015.

²⁵ For a discussion of this general logic, see Jervis, 1976. Ch. 3. For examples of this logic applied to Russia, see Feith and Cropsey, 2021; Haddad and Polyakova, 2018; Charles Krauthammer, "Why Putin Is an Obama Fan," *Business Insider*, August 28, 2015; Lilia Shevtsova, "A Second Act for US Foreign Policy," *American Interest*, April 8, 2014; and Simon Shuster, "A Failed Russia 'Reset' Haunts Obama in Europe," *TIME*, June 3, 2018.

²⁶ Fredrik Logevall and Kenneth Osgood, "The Ghost of Munich: America's Appeasement Complex," *World Affairs*, Vol. 173, No. 2, July/August 2010; Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2002.

²⁷ Haddad and Polyakova, 2018.

behavior.²⁸ Of relevance for the costs of a less-hardline approach, a relatively weaker state might be less likely to be emboldened by a conciliatory policy. If a weaker state undertakes aggression, incorrectly believing that the stronger state is weak-willed, the weaker state could find itself in a conflict in which the stronger state can bring all of its material advantages to bear. This prospect should induce greater caution among weaker states, making them less likely to take the risk that a conciliatory policy over a single issue is an indication that the stronger state will concede in the face of aggression on other issues in the future.²⁹

Weaker state's ambitions and motivations could affect whether it is likely to be emboldened. Some scholars have argued that a state's ambitions—whether it is happy with the status quo or is revisionist and seeks to change it—can affect whether a state is emboldened by conciliatory gestures.³⁰ Other scholars contend that it is a state's motivation for revisionism that really matters: States that seek changes to borders and other arrangements to address their insecurities may be less prone to emboldenment than those that are motivated by ideology or the quest for economic gain.³¹ Scholars debate how to categorize states by ambition and motivation and have not assessed whether these theoretical arguments are correct.³² Moreover, some scholars have argued that most states have a mix of ambitions and motivations, complicating any categorization.³³ Still, these ideas about state type remain prominent in the literature, so we consider the possibility that a state's ambitions and motivations might condition the effect of less-hardline approaches.

U.S. Willingness to Adopt a Less-Hardline Approach Toward Russia

Before beginning our assessment of these competing claims, it is important to acknowledge that U.S. willingness to consider peacetime less-hardline approaches toward Russia in the immediate aftermath of the war in Ukraine is in substantial doubt. However, U.S. behavior in the aftermath of prior conflicts involving Russia underscores the variability in U.S. policy toward that country and suggests that the United States might still choose to consider,

²⁸ Glaser, 1997; Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979.

²⁹ Priebe, 2015.

³⁰ Jervis, 1976, Ch. 3.

³¹ These are referred to as *security-motivated* versus *greedy states*; Glaser, 2010.

³² For alternative views on defining revisionism, see Glaser, 2010, p. 35; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Spring 2003; Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1996, p. 92. For additional sources, see Priebe, 2015, p. 15.

³³ See, for example, James D. Fearon, "Two States, Two Types, Two Actions," *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2011; Priebe, 2015.

and even to pursue, less-hardline approaches in the future. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War led to a deep crisis in relations and raised the possibility of direct conflict. Nonetheless, the Barack Obama administration, which took office less than six months later, famously sought a “reset” in relations following the war and attempted to balance a mix of hardline and less-hardline policies. (This history is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.) Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine led to another collapse in relations, which improved little (and perhaps not at all) in subsequent years. In 2021, the Joe Biden administration initially continued to pursue some hardline policies toward Russia, including imposing new sanctions, continuing to arm and train the Ukrainian military, and vowing to take additional actions in response to Russian cyberattacks.³⁴ But the administration also sought “a stable, predictable relationship” with Russia, in part to free up senior leaders’ time and government resources to address the China challenge.³⁵ This included extending the New START arms agreement for five years and opening a strategic stability dialogue.³⁶

At some point after the current war, the United States may reconsider a less-hardline approach. We cannot predict the timing of such a change (months, years, or decades); it could depend heavily on the course of the war and how it ultimately concludes. But there are already indications of what might prompt the United States to alter its approach toward Russia. The urgency of other global priorities—most notably, the continued rise of China—will create incentives for the United States to develop a less-costly and less-risky relationship with Russia. Historically, states that face multiple threats often choose to accommodate one rival to focus on another.³⁷ For example, in the early 1900s, Germany threatened both the British navy and homeland, which led Britain to settle disputes with both France and Russia (see Chapter Two). U.S. fiscal and domestic challenges are likely to compound this incentive, forcing the United States to further prioritize in the face of limited resources. In addition, there are issues for which U.S. interests would more likely or more easily be advanced by cooperation with Russia, such as the containment of Iran or progress on addressing climate

³⁴ “Biden Vows US Action over Russian Cyber-Attacks,” BBC News, July 9, 2021; Amy Mackinnon, “What to Expect from the Biden-Putin Summit in Geneva,” *Foreign Policy*, June 11, 2021; Anton Troianovski and David E. Sanger, “Rivals on World Stage, Russia and U.S. Quietly Seek Areas of Accord,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2021; White House, “Fact Sheet: Imposing Costs for Harmful Activities by the Russian Government,” April 15, 2021.

³⁵ Franco Ordóñez, “The White House Wants to Focus on China, but Russia Continues to be a Distraction,” *National Public Radio*, December 21, 2021; White House, 2021.

³⁶ Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, signed in Prague, Czech Republic, February 5, 2011 (New START Treaty); David M. Herszenhorn, “Putin and Biden Confirm Extension of New START Treaty,” *Politico*, January 27, 2021; Donald N. Jensen, “Despite Moscow’s Brinkmanship, U.S. and Russia Explore Deeper Relations,” U.S. Institute of Peace, November 10, 2021; Troianovski and Sanger, 2021; Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference,” speech from Geneva, Switzerland, White House, June 16, 2021a; Joe Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on Russia,” Washington, D.C.: White House, June 16, 2021b.

³⁷ Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, “Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment,” *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2011.

change. Finally, given the deep mistrust of Russian President Vladimir Putin that is held by many U.S. leaders, the United States might be more likely to adopt a less-hardline approach after a change in Russian leadership.

A “stable, predictable” U.S. relationship with Russia that frees up attention and resources for other challenges could become a priority again at some point in the future. This report therefore seeks to answer the question of whether, or under what circumstances, a less-hardline approach might be an effective policy tool in future pursuit of this goal.

Methodology

To assess the possible benefits and risks of the United States adopting a less-hardline approach toward Russia in the future, we select historical case studies with broad strategic similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship before Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine (Table 1.1). We then assess claims about the benefits and costs of accommodation in four historical case studies. Finally, we apply the findings to the future U.S.-Russia relationship by considering the importance of any remaining differences between these case studies and the way that U.S.-Russia relations might evolve in the years ahead.

Selecting Historical Case Studies

To draw lessons for future policy questions, we first identify historical case studies that share broad strategic similarities to U.S.-Russia relations as they were prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Ideally, we would have case studies that share similarities with the U.S.-Russia relationship as it will likely evolve after this war. Unfortunately, much remains uncertain about the war and its impacts, as noted. Nonetheless, the preconflict strategic setting still offers a useful starting point because many long-standing aspects of the U.S.-Russia relationship (such as an asymmetric distribution of power and deep Russian insecurity) seem likely to endure.

The case studies we consider are Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia (1899–1914), U.S. Soviet negotiations over the post–World War II order (mid-1945–early 1946), U.S.-Soviet détente (1969–1975), and the U.S.-Russia reset (2009–2013).³⁸ The remainder of this section explains the criteria we used to generate this list and how well each case fits along each dimension (Table 1.1).

³⁸ Using the criteria discussed in this section, we considered but ruled out several cases of a stronger power adopting a less-hardline approach toward a weaker power. We assessed that the circumstances surrounding the following cases were poorer analogues to the U.S.-Russia relationship in 2022: U.S. attempts at negotiations with the Soviet Union around 1955 and 1963, the Nixon administration’s attempts to normalize relations with China in the 1970s, Anglo-German arms control negotiations prior to World War I, Anglo-French entente, U.S.-North Korea agreed framework, and Anglo-American negotiations in the 19th century.

TABLE 1.1**Similarities Between Historical Case Studies and U.S.-Russia Relations in Mid-2021**

Characteristic	Anglo-Russian Negotiations in Central Asia (1899–1914)	U.S.-Soviet Post–World War II Negotiations (1945–1946)	U.S.-Soviet Détente (1969–1975)	U.S.-Russia Reset (2009–2013)
Stronger state is globally more powerful	X	X	X	X
Weaker state has advantage in the local distribution of power	X	X	X	X
Geographic separation between the rivals	X	X	X	X
Weaker state has recently pursued or is pursuing revisionist aims	X	X	X	X
Weaker state is motivated significantly by security concerns but also has nonsecurity motives		X	X	X
Rivals both have a secure second-strike capability			X	X
Stronger state has allies or partners bordering the weaker state	X	X	X	X

NOTE: An X indicates a broad similarity to the U.S.-Russia in 2021. Blank boxes reflect key differences.

Distribution of Power

Because the distribution of power can affect state perceptions and behavior, we sought examples in which the distribution of power between the two states aligns broadly with that between the United States and Russia in 2021. In particular, the United States was the more powerful country globally but faced local disadvantages on Russia’s periphery. Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine has highlighted unexpected shortcomings in the Russian military (e.g., ineffective logistics), raising questions about Russia’s actual advantages in regional contingencies.³⁹ Still, prior to the war, Russia had significant capabilities that it could employ on its periphery and U.S. analysts generally agreed that the United States faced relative disadvantages there.⁴⁰ We therefore looked for historical case studies with a similar distribution of

³⁹ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Julian E. Barnes, “As Russia’s Military Stumbles, Its Adversaries Take Note,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2022.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Scott Boston, Michael Johnson, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Yvonne K. Crane, *Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe: Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2402, 2018; and David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1253-A, 2016.

power in which a globally stronger state had a rival with some local advantages. In Chapter Six, we discuss the implications of the way that this aspect of the U.S.-Russia relationship might evolve as a result of the 2022 war.

All four of our case studies meet this criterion. In the early 1900s, Britain was stronger globally, but was aware of local Russian advantages in Central Asia. In 1945, the Soviet Union faced a powerful United States that had escaped devastation on its homeland. Still, the Soviet army remained mobilized and deployed throughout key areas of Europe. The 2009 reset is arguably closest to the distribution of power between the United States and Russia in mid-2021; Russia had significant capability to project power against states on its periphery, including U.S. allies and partners, while the United States was more powerful globally (Table 1.2).

In the *détente* case study, the distribution of power between the United States and Soviet Union was closer to parity than between the United States and Russia in 2021. This is because the Soviets had significant capabilities in Europe and had achieved nuclear parity in this period, as we discuss in Chapter Four. Still, the Soviets saw the United States as economically stronger and expected it to remain so over the longer term. The case therefore is broadly similar to conditions in 2021, even if less so than the other three.

Stronger State's Approach

Given the focus of our study, we looked for examples in which a stronger state *believed* it was pursuing a less-hardline approach toward a weaker rival. We analyzed whether the weaker state perceived those policies to be accommodating at the time and, if so, how the policies affected behavior. States do not face a binary choice between hardline and less-hardline approaches. Rather, as already discussed, less-hardline approaches can vary in the issues they cover and the size of concessions that the stronger state is willing to make. The nature of any future less-hardline approach that the United States might adopt is uncertain, so we considered a variety of examples: Some addressed a very limited set of issues; others were more comprehensive.

In three of our four case studies, the accommodations addressed at least one core area of disagreement. In the early 1900s, Russia and Britain negotiated an agreement that covered three areas in Central Asia where the countries were engaged in a fierce competition: Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. In 1945, the United States and Soviet Union negotiated over the future of Europe, the core area of their competition. And during *détente*, the two countries addressed the nuclear arms race, trade and economic cooperation, and European security. In all three of these case studies, other conflicts of interest remained unresolved, but there was progress on at least one core dispute between the two countries. The 2009 reset is the exception and represents the most limited example of a less-hardline approach because the United States was not willing to negotiate on core conflicts of interest, such as the European security order.

TABLE 1.2
Stronger and Weaker States in our Case Studies

Case	Stronger State	Weaker State
Anglo-Russian relations in Central Asia (1899–1914)	Britain	Russian Empire
United States, Soviet Union, and the post–World War II order (1945–1946)	United States	Soviet Union
U.S.-Soviet détente (1969–1975)	United States	Soviet Union
U.S.-Russia reset (2009–2013)	United States	Russian Federation

Geographic Separation

Russia and the United States are separated by large oceans. Scholars have found that this type of separation, all other things being equal, makes conflict less likely.⁴¹ Geography is also a component of how states assess the threats they face.⁴² Therefore, we preferred examples in which the rivals were not neighbors. We did not intentionally limit our case studies to the Russian Federation and its predecessors, the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire. However, our resulting list of case studies does have the advantage of sharing similarities in terms of the geographic sources of each state's insecurity and its interaction with other great powers in so many regions on its periphery.

Weaker State's Ambitions

As already discussed, some scholars say a state's ambitions affect how it is likely to respond to less-hardline approaches. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, part of Ukraine, a case of territorial revisionism. Russia continued to support separatist proxies within Ukraine in the years after Crimea and before the 2022 war. Therefore, we sought examples in which the weaker state, like contemporary Russia, had recently or was actively pursuing revisionist aims.

In all four of our case studies, the weaker state was seeking to change the territorial status quo or to expand its influence over the domestic politics of other states, although the nature and scope of this revisionist ambition did vary. In the mid- to late 1800s and the early 1900s, the Russian Empire sought to expand its influence in Central Asia, primarily in Afghanistan and Persia, as the culmination of a long-term process of imperial expansion. In 1945, the Soviets sought international recognition of their right to influence the domestic politics of states on their periphery, especially in Eastern Europe, and access to the Turkish Straits over Turkish objections.⁴³ They further sought greater consideration of their interests in Asia and

⁴¹ Harvey Starr, "'Opportunity' and 'Willingness' as Ordering Concepts in the Study of War," *International Interactions*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1978; Stuart A Bremer, "Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816–1965," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 36, No. 2, June 1992.

⁴² Walt, 1987.

⁴³ We discuss this in more detail in Chapter Three.

the Middle East, leading to tensions with the United States and its allies. During the détente, the Soviets sought to expand their influence in the global south, including by providing military assistance to revolutionary movements, while continuing to hold the official position that they represented the vanguard of a global movement of revolution that would eventually sweep away all capitalist regimes. In 2008, just prior to the reset, Russia had fought a war against Georgia supporting the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and then recognized the regions' independence from Georgia. Although Russia's ambitions in 2021 were certainly more geographically constrained than those of the Soviet Union in our 1945 and détente case studies, they were still sufficient to clearly classify Russia as a revisionist state with broad similarities to other weaker states that we considered.

Weaker State's Motivations

Scholars have theorized that a state's motivations might affect how it responds to less-hardline approaches. As we detail here, we assess that Russian motives are mixed—Russian foreign policy is motivated by deep insecurity and by some nonsecurity concerns—and we sought examples in which the weaker state had similar motives.

Contemporary Russian Motivations

Prior to the 2022 war in Ukraine, analysts argued that homeland and regime security were prominent drivers of its foreign policy but not necessarily the only ones.⁴⁴ Russia sees the United States as a threat to its regime because of (both real and imagined) past U.S. policy and links that Russia believes exist to create domestic unrest inside Russia. For example, Russian leaders interpreted the U.S. invasion of Iraq as evidence that the United States was willing to use military force to oust unfriendly regimes. Likewise, Russian leaders believed that the United States played a role in the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in the early 2000s, which brought the specter of mass unrest culminating in regime change to the Russian doorstep.⁴⁵ These events led to Russian fears that the United States could employ a combination of domestic subversion and military force to produce the same outcome in Russia. Russian fears increased further due to U.S. support—primarily rhetorical—of popu-

⁴⁴ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, London, United Kingdom: Routledge/IISS, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2014; Dmitri Trenin, "What Putin Really Wants in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, December 28, 2021. For arguments that Russian ambitions extend beyond what it needs for security, see Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, *Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019; and Alexander Motyl, "Putin May Want to Be an Emperor, but Russia Isn't an Imperial Power," *Foreign Policy*, October 28, 2019.

⁴⁵ Dmitry Gorenburg, "Countering Color Revolutions: Russia's New Security Strategy and Its Implications for U.S. Policy," *PONARS Eurasia: New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia*, Policy Memo No. 342, September 2014; Olga Oliker, Keith Crane, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Catherine Yusupov, *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-768-AF, 2009; Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014.

lar uprisings during the Arab Spring, which saw additional authoritarian regimes fall, and perceived U.S. support for protests in Russia following the flawed parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011–2012.⁴⁶

In addition to regime change concerns, Russia has interpreted the possibility of further North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement to its immediate neighbors as a threat to its security and has long decried NATO force posture enhancements along the eastern flank.⁴⁷ Although Russia had not historically opposed the European Union (EU) to the same extent that it did NATO, Russia still put pressure on Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Ukraine not to pursue deep integration with the bloc.⁴⁸

Although the evidence for heightened contemporary Russian insecurity and threat perceptions is strong, that evidence is also limited. As discussed and cited earlier, scholars have compiled extensive evidence from Russian sources regarding the sincerity of Russian concerns about U.S. and NATO actions and intentions, including official documents, statements from senior leaders, and Russian-language writings of military and security officials.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a recent RAND Corporation study has demonstrated that public Russian statements of strategy have generally been accurate predictors of Russian behavior.⁵⁰ Decision-making is highly centralized in Russia, so direct evidence from internal deliberations among Russian leaders (and, especially, private statements from Putin) that confirm this interpretation and preclude alternative interpretations of Russian motivations would be more definitive. However, this type of information is not available in the public domain for the contemporary period. Although we believe that Russian elites are deeply concerned for their country's security in the face of what they perceive to be growing threats from the United States, the EU, and NATO, it is also true that we make this assessment with lower confidence than we did for some of our historical case studies where more-direct evidence of leadership thinking has made its way into the public domain.

⁴⁶ Samuel Charap, Dara Massicot, Miranda Priebe, Alyssa Demus, Clint Reach, Mark Stalczynski, Eugeniu Han, and Lynn E. Davis, *Russian Grand Strategy: Rhetoric and Reality*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4238-A, 2021; David M. Herszenhorn and Ellen Barry, "Putin Contends Clinton Incited Unrest over Vote," *New York Times*, Vol. 8, 2011; Mikhail Zygar, "The Russian Reset That Never Was," *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2016.

⁴⁷ Bryan Frederick, Matthew Povlock, Stephen Watts, Miranda Priebe, and Edward Geist, *Assessing Russian Reactions to US and NATO Posture Enhancements*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1879-AF, 2017.

⁴⁸ Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017.

⁴⁹ There are also elite surveys that have highlighted heightened threat perceptions toward the United States. A Hamilton College–led study of elites showed that 88 percent of respondents in 2016 responded that the United States is either "fairly" or "very" hostile toward Russia. See Sharon Werning Rivera, Brisa Camacho-Lovell, Carlos Fineman, Nora Klemmer, and Emma Raynor, *The Russian Elite: Perspectives on Foreign and Domestic Policy*, Clinton, N.Y.: Hamilton College, 2016.

⁵⁰ Charap, Massicot, et al., 2021.

The argument that Russia is strongly motivated by insecurity does not imply that insecurity is its *only* motive. Multiple motivations can coexist simultaneously. According to President Putin's public rationale for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, for example, he acted because of both substantial insecurity and a particular strain of Russian nationalism. In a public speech immediately preceding the war, Putin highlighted several security concerns, including the prospects of Ukraine joining NATO or hosting U.S. military capabilities. But he also emphasized his belief that Ukraine is not, or should not be, a separate nation; rather, Russians and Ukrainians are one people, evidence of a commitment to a neoimperialist project that provides additional motivation for Russian revisionism in its near abroad.⁵¹

Weaker State Motives in Our Case Studies

As already discussed, a state's level of insecurity can affect the prospects for cooperation and how a state perceives the actions of its rival. Therefore, we sought examples in which the weaker state had deep concerns about the security of the homeland or regime (versus only an ally or colony), as Russia does today.⁵²

Three of our case studies strongly matched this criterion, with a fourth being a weaker fit. In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviets, which had suffered substantial human, material, and economic losses during the conflict, felt very vulnerable. They feared both the specter of German resurgence and the prospect of encirclement by "imperial powers," such as the United States. Sustained by Soviet leaders' adherence to an ideology positing that conflict between the communist and imperialist powers was inevitable (and by the ongoing U.S. arms buildup and significant overseas presence), this fear continued throughout the Cold War. Although the Soviet achievement of strategic parity in the late 1960s led Soviet leaders to believe that a U.S. attack could be deterred for the imminent future, they remained suspicious and fearful of U.S. intentions throughout the *détente*. Russian revisionism in its 2008 invasion of Georgia appears to have been greatly motivated by concerns about NATO enlargement on its periphery and specifically aimed at preventing Georgia from joining the alliance.⁵³

Despite these elevated threat perceptions in our case studies, Russian fears about the U.S. threat to its regime security are not replicated in any of our case studies. Moreover, in the Anglo-Russian case study, Russia did not fear a British threat to its homeland, only to its territorial expansion and political influence in Central Asia. We discuss the implications of these differences in Chapter Six.

⁵¹ Zack Beauchamp, "Why Is Putin Attacking Ukraine? He Told Us," *Vox*, February 23, 2022.

⁵² Robert E. Berls, Jr., "Survival of the Russian State: Protecting It from Foreign and Domestic Threats, Part II," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, July 13, 2021; Charap, Massicot, et al., 2021; Radin and Reach, 2017.

⁵³ Samuel Charap, Edward Geist, Bryan Frederick, John J. Drennan, Nathan Chandler, and Jennifer Kavanagh, *Russia's Military Interventions: Patterns, Drivers, and Signposts*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A444-3, 2021; Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2009.

As with contemporary Russia, security was not the only motivation for the weaker states in our historical case studies. As already noted, prior to 1907, Russian expansionism was less clearly driven by insecurity. Instead, Russia sought to grow the influence of its empire in Central Asia for political, strategic, and economic reasons and to put pressure on its main rival, Britain, in a region where Russia perceived itself as largely invulnerable and knew that British advancement was difficult and costly.⁵⁴ In 1945, security concerns—coming on the heels of the devastating Nazi invasion—played a key role in Soviet demands for a larger sphere of influence on its periphery, but so did a desire for greater international status and for opportunities to further Communist ideology.⁵⁵ During détente, the Soviets did have homeland security concerns but its activities in the global south were also driven by ideological factors, including a desire to encourage a global socialist transformation, a sense of obligation to support revolutionary brethren, and a desire to stave off criticism from China and other communist states that the Soviet leadership was insufficiently committed to furthering communism.⁵⁶

Related to a weaker state's *actual* motivations and ambitions are a stronger state's *beliefs* about the threat posed by the weaker state. These perceptions could affect the stronger state's willingness to adopt a less-hardline approach and the prospects for successful negotiations. Even before the war in Ukraine, the United States saw Russia as territorially aggressive and willing to interfere in the domestic politics of the United States and its allies. Therefore, we also prefer examples in which the stronger state had such concerns. For brevity here, we note that in all of our historical case studies, the stronger state saw the weaker state as revisionist—which, as noted above, was accurate in all case studies. As we discuss in Chapters Two through Five, these perceptions were often magnified beyond reality.

Nuclear Weapons

We also prefer examples in which the two countries had a nuclear relationship that mirrors today. In particular, the United States and Russia both have a *secure second-strike capability*, a situation in which a country can retaliate with nuclear weapons even after a massive first strike by the other side. However, some analysts argue that Russia is increasingly concerned that improved U.S. capabilities are undermining Russia's secure second-strike capability.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Dietrich Geyer, *Russian Imperialism: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policy, 1860–1914*, trans. Bruce Little, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987, pp. 95–98; David MacLaren McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia, 1900–1914*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 111; Jennifer Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia, and the Final Struggle for Central Asia*, New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2002, pp. 3, 47.

⁵⁵ We discuss this in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁵⁶ See Chapter Four for the sources we used for this assessment. For a more detailed discussion of the factors motivating Soviet interventions in the global south, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 67–72.

⁵⁷ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020.

Unfortunately, we were able to identify only two case studies (*détente* and the reset) that (1) had a secure second-strike capability for both the stronger and weaker states and (2) largely fit our other criteria. Therefore, two of our case studies have different nuclear arrangements. In the 1907 case study, nuclear weapons had not yet been developed; in 1945, the United States possessed a nuclear monopoly, though with a small arsenal.

Alliance Dynamics

One of the defining features of the contemporary setting is the vast U.S. network of alliances. U.S. allies have influence on U.S. policy and also make their own foreign policy choices. These realities can affect not only the types of policies that the United States can pursue but also how U.S. policies are interpreted by Russia. For example, Russia might doubt promises made by the United States if Russia believes that allies will lobby the United States to change its policies in the future. Conversely, Russia might wonder whether policies adopted by U.S. allies in Europe are truly independent or reflect coordination with the United States. Russia might, for example, interpret a U.S. ally's hardline policies as approved by the United States even if this is not the case. Because a stronger state's allies can affect the weaker state's perceptions, we looked for examples in which the stronger state had allies or partners with a key stake in the issues in dispute with the weaker state.

In all of our case studies, the stronger state had allies or partners that had a key stake in the stronger state's policies and the weaker state's responses. In the *détente* and reset case studies, the United States had NATO allies as it does today. In 1945, the United States had not yet formed NATO but coordinated on questions surrounding the postwar order with wartime allies Britain and France. In 1907, Britain had a formal alliance with Japan and a semi-colonial arrangement with Afghanistan whereby London controlled Afghanistan's foreign affairs. Britain had also recently improved relations with France, a close ally of Russia. These countries, to varying degrees, had an interest in Anglo-Russian relations and an influence on British policies toward Russia.

Effects of Less-Hardline Approaches

To assess the benefits, costs, and risks in our historical case studies, we ask how a less-hardline approach affected the following outcomes (dependent variables):

- **A weaker state's beliefs about a stronger state's resolve.** One of the core fears about less-hardline approaches is that making concessions will be seen as a signal of a lack of resolve. A change in belief about a stronger state's resolve could be evidenced in explicit statements; there also might be indications in the weaker state's behavior. For example, the weaker state might become more demanding in negotiations or less willing to compromise, or it might even undertake armed aggression in the expectation of being left unchecked. When we observe these behaviors in our case studies, we ask whether they reflect a lower assessment of the stronger state's resolve or if they were driven by other factors.

- **A weaker state's threat perceptions.** One of the purported benefits of a less-hardline approach is that it might reduce tensions on both sides and thus, potentially, reduce the intensity of arms racing or increase the prospects for cooperation. Therefore, we ask whether the weaker state's beliefs about the stronger state's commitments to negotiations, ambitions, or hostility change because of the less-hardline approach. Relatedly, we consider whether the weaker state's fear about the risk of war because of misperception, accident, or intentional act was lower. We consider whether these perceptions changed only on the narrow issue at stake and whether broader beliefs about the stronger state's ambitions and willingness to negotiate over other issues or over time were also affected.
- **Risk of war and intensity of competition over a conflict of interest.** In the best case scenario, a dispute between the two sides might be entirely resolved by an agreement, removing that issue from the areas of competition or potential flashpoints for war going forward. In making this assessment, we consider how durable such changes were over time and in the face of new stresses on the relationship.

How We Assess the Effects of Less-Hardline Approaches in Historical Case Studies

We evaluated the effects of less-hardline approaches in four historical case studies. Rather than simply looking for a conciliatory policy and then asking how the weaker state's behavior changed, we look carefully at the steps that led to any changes in the weaker state's behavior. We start, for example, with the stronger state's policy change, asking whether the adversary noticed the change in policy and, if so, whether the adversary considered the policy to be a conciliatory gesture. We then ask how the weaker state's perceptions about the stronger state changed and how those perceptions, in turn, affected the weaker state's behavior. There is variation across our case studies in the level of data available for this approach. To the extent possible with available data, we applied the logic depicted in Figure 1.1 to evaluate the claims about the benefits and costs of less-hardline approaches.⁵⁸

As we evaluate each of the connections depicted in Figure 1.1, we also consider alternative explanations for any observed changes in the weaker state's perceptions and behavior. This means considering the full set of the stronger state's policies (including hardline policies) and other key events, domestic politics, and relationships with other states that could affect the outcomes we care about. For example, when the United States was undertaking the 2009 reset in relations with Russia, we ask what other policies the United States was pursuing at the same time (e.g., changes in military posture, changes in economic policies) that might have affected Russian perceptions. We then consider how the full portfolio of policy

⁵⁸ For an overview of the method and best practices, see Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds., *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015; James Mahoney, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation," *Security Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2015.

FIGURE 1.1
How We Assessed the Effects of Less-Hardline Policies



changes affected the perceptions of key leaders, domestic political dynamics, and, ultimately, the adversary's behavior.

Applying the Lessons to Future U.S.-Russia Relations

As discussed, we selected these four historical cases for their similarities to the mid-2021 U.S.-Russia relationship (see Table 1.1). The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed many aspects of this relationship and has the potential to change others, depending on how the war progresses, while still other aspects are likely to remain consistent. The further the postwar U.S.-Russia relationship departs from the conditions we used to select case studies in mid-2021, the greater the risk to the continued relevance of our findings. At the time of this writing, the ultimate trajectory of the conflict is not knowable, but we would emphasize two points in this regard.

First, as summarized in Table 1.1, the majority of the conditions we used to select our cases are likely to persist following most plausible outcomes of the current conflict. The United States is likely to remain the stronger state overall and Russia the weaker. Both states are likely to retain secure second-strike nuclear capabilities. The United States will retain allies and partners on Russia's borders—indeed, these relationships may continue to strengthen over the course of the conflict. Russia is likely to continue to pursue revisionist aims. Many of the factors we used to select cases are therefore likely to remain intact going forward, which suggests that our findings are likely to continue to have relevance for future peacetime U.S.-Russia relations.

Second, however, other aspects of the U.S.-Russia relationship could change as a result of the conflict in ways that have the potential to undermine the near-term relevance of our findings to that relationship. Perhaps most notably, Russian behavior already has dramatically reduced U.S. interest in pursuing a less-hardline approach toward Russia after the war, as discussed above. Additional Russian atrocities against civilians in Ukraine, use of nuclear weapons, or other steps to intensify or escalate the conflict would make a postwar less-hardline U.S. approach even less likely. Such actions could well mean that, even years in the future, the United States and its allies would be uninterested in pursuing less-hardline approaches toward Russia or might consider such engagement only with a post-Putin Russian regime.

Beyond U.S. willingness to offer such approaches in the first place, Russia itself may be less likely to find any U.S. offers of a less-hardline approach credible, reducing its willingness to reciprocate and therefore the overall likelihood of success. Many of our case studies began

with substantial mistrust on both sides, but mistrust that was, in most of the cases, broken down over time. By contrast, the intensity of the suspicion between Russian and U.S. policymakers following the end of the war in Ukraine has the potential to exceed that in any of the cases we considered. In none of our cases did attempts at engagement occur directly after a war in which the two states found each other on opposite sides. It is possible that, even if the United States were to attempt a less-hardline approach to Russia, it may be more challenging to induce changes in Russian behavior for many years than it was in the cases we studied given the proximity and intensity of this conflict. But the simpler answer is that we do not know what the effects of the conflict might be, and, depending on how it progresses, our findings may have greater or lesser applicability to the postwar situation.

Report Organization

Chapters Two through Five present our analysis of our four case studies: Anglo-Russian negotiations over Central Asia (1899–1914), U.S.-Soviet negotiations on the post-World War II order (1945–1946), U.S.-Soviet détente (1969–1975), and the U.S.-Russia reset (2009–2013). Chapter Six summarizes our findings across these case studies and discusses their implications for future U.S.-Russia relations.

Anglo-Russian Negotiations over Central Asia (1899–1914)

This case examines efforts by Britain and Russia to achieve a rapprochement in Central Asia in the early 20th century. After years of negotiations, in August 1907, Britain and Russia concluded an agreement that formalized their spheres of influence in Central Asia and was intended to reduce tension in the region and free up resources for other uses.¹ The two great powers concluded the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 amid a fierce competition for territory and political influence in Central Asia that had lasted since the second half of the 19th century. The convention consisted of three distinct agreements concerning Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet that involved a series of compromises on both sides.

Our assessment, as described in this chapter, is that the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 had relatively limited benefits and costs for both sides—an unsurprising outcome given that the convention was a localized agreement focused on reducing the risk of war in Central Asia and was never intended by either side to turn the other into an ally or close partner. The actual benefits gained from the agreement were not as significant as each nation hoped, particularly in Britain's case. The convention mitigated Britain's fears of a Russian advance on India but did not actually reduce the military's requirements for, or expenditures on, India's defense. The agreement's benefits for Russia were more apparent. St. Petersburg's improved relations with London enabled Russia to obtain the international loans it needed to avoid bankruptcy and forestall worsening domestic instability. Russia also managed to secure Britain's support for the long-standing Russian foreign policy objective of revising the London Straits Convention of 1841 (hereafter the "Straits Convention"),² although other circumstances arose that prevented this goal from being realized. Perhaps most importantly, Russia and Britain did not fight a war over Central Asia that many late 19th-century observers had predicted would occur. In this sense, by reducing the risk of a future war, the agree-

¹ One key difference between today's international environment and that of the early 20th century is the end of colonization and accompanying changes in international norms regarding self-governance. The types of formalized spheres of influence that were part of the 1907 Convention are unlikely to feature in any agreements between rivals today.

² The Straits Convention of 1841 was an agreement among Russia, Britain, France, Austria, and Prussia that strengthened the Ottoman Empire by closing the Bosphorus and Dardanelles from all warships barring those of the Sultan's allies during wartime. This benefited British naval power at the expense of Russia.

ment prevented both sides from an even greater escalation of military costs in the region. Moreover, neither side incurred significant costs as a result of the agreement. From the British perspective, there is no evidence that the rapprochement led Russia to perceive Britain as weak-willed, and Russia did not become more aggressive in the region.

Ultimately, the agreement had a limited effect on improving relations between Russia and Britain because it left certain tensions in Central Asia only partially resolved. Moreover, after the conclusion of the agreement, local proxies in the region often pursued policies that challenged London's and St. Petersburg's adherence to the agreement. Each side continued its competitive behavior in Central Asia after the agreement was inked, which demonstrates that rapprochement was not always prioritized above other goals, despite a commitment to a less-hardline approach in some areas. Russia and Britain continued to pursue what were seen as significant interests in Central Asia, even though doing so injected tension into the relationship, until the outbreak of World War I.

The remainder of this chapter consists of seven sections. The first section describes the context of the relationship between Britain and Russia in the mid- to late 19th century, including each nation's perception of the other's intentions and both nations' perceptions of the risk of war; the second section describes the motivations each side had to pursue a more cooperative approach over this period. The subsequent three sections survey Britain's policies toward Russia over three historical periods: Britain's initial, unsuccessful attempts to achieve rapprochement with Russia in Central Asia until the start of the Russo-Japanese War (1899–1904); the negotiation of the Anglo-Russian Convention itself until its conclusion (1905–1907); and the implementation of the convention until the outbreak of World War I (1908–1914). Each historical period section assesses the effects of British policies on Russian perceptions and behavior. The last two sections examine the long-term implications of the convention, summarize the main costs and benefits for Britain and Russia of pursuing a less-hardline approach, and outline the key drivers of this outcome.

Context

Structural and Strategic Context

In the late 19th century, with the rise of such new powers as Japan, Germany, and the United States, the structure of world politics was shifting. Britain and Russia, however, remained vast imperial nations that were still acquiring new territories. The British Empire was larger and more widespread than any of the other European powers.³ Britain's economic and industrial power also dwarfed that of Russia, which was at that time still a primarily agrarian society. Nevertheless, Russia, with its size and population, had the potential to be Europe's most for-

³ Keith M. Wilson, *The Policy of Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904–1914*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 4.

midable land power and British leaders believed it posed a threat to the British Empire's overseas territories and interests.⁴

Throughout the 19th century, tensions between Russia and Britain increased in Central Asia. Britain expanded northward into the Indian subcontinent toward the Hindu Kush. At the same time, Russia advanced southward toward the Himalayan passes. As the distance that separated the territories under the two nations' control diminished, the competition for territory and influence, termed "the Great Game," intensified.⁵ Three territories were central in the Anglo-Russian competition over Central Asia: Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet (see Figure 2.1). These three territories were significant to Britain in that they provided a "buffer zone" for the protection of India. Russia shared a continental border with Persia and Afghanistan; Britain had access to the region only through the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.⁶

Relations with Persia and Afghanistan

Of the three countries, Persia and Afghanistan were the most competitive and important to the two great powers. Persia was particularly important to Russia for both strategic and commercial reasons. Strategically, the Persian Gulf was a maritime route to the Indian and Pacific oceans, and it offered the potential of a warmwater port that Russia had historically lacked.⁷ This strategic factor became more important for Russia as Japan emerged into a growing threat to Russia's access to Vladivostok and to the Manchurian ports, and as Germany became increasingly competitive in the Turkish Straits and eastward.⁸ Control of Persia, as a market for Russian goods, was also desirable. Russia sought to increase its influence through the extension of substantial loans to Persia, which the British refused to do because of concerns about Persia's ability to pay the loans back.⁹

From Britain's perspective, Persia was strategically important because it was adjacent to both British India and the southern Russian territories in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The Persian Gulf provided the "final and crucial" stage of securing the maritime route to India.¹⁰

But the more immediate Russian challenge to British India, from the British perspective, was through Afghanistan. Throughout the 19th century, Britain reacted aggressively to any hint of Russian interference in the areas on the frontiers of India, twice invading Afghanistan in reaction to the presence of Russian agents and nearly going to war with Russia when Rus-

⁴ Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia: 1894–1917*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 110–111; Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013.

⁵ Siegel, 2002, p. vii.

⁶ John Albert White, *Transition to Global Rivalry: Alliance Diplomacy and the Quadruple Entente, 1895–1907*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 44.

⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 10; White, 1995, p. 44.

⁸ White, 1995, p. 44.

⁹ Siegel, 2002, p. 10.

¹⁰ White, 1995, p. 44.

FIGURE 2.1
South and Central Asia in 1914



NOTE: International borders are approximate as of 1914, as reflected in Siegel, 2002, p. xiii.

sian troops clashed with Afghans in 1885.¹¹ Britain, which controlled Afghanistan's foreign policy as a result of the terms established at the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, chafed at Russia's ongoing attempts to establish direct communication with the Afghan Amir—a relationship that Russia saw as essential to the development of commerce and the construction of the Trans-Caspian railway but that Britain feared could be the prelude to expanded Russian political influence in Afghanistan and potential future annexation.¹²

Growing Russian Relations with Tibet

Finally, Britain was concerned by growing Russian relations with Tibet. British officials were worried that Tibet would fall into Russia's sphere of influence, expanding Russia's ability to apply pressure on India from multiple fronts. In 1903, Britain sent an exploratory mission, also referred to as the Younghusband expedition, to advance Britain relations with Tibet and "prevent any other power from gaining predominant influence there."¹³ Britain also supported China's desire to maintain suzerainty over Tibet because London believed that if China maintained its border with Russia, Russia would not pose a threat to India's northeast frontier. Britain feared that if China were to collapse, Tibet could fall under Russian influence and emerge as a serious zone of Anglo-Russian confrontation.¹⁴ Despite these British concerns, Tibet was arguably the area where Russian interests were least pronounced.¹⁵ Some officials in Russia harbored desires to place the Dalai Lama under Russian protection to prevent him from coming into the orbit of British policy. From Russia's perspective, a greater British presence in Tibet would impinge on Russia's prestige in Central Asia and undermine Russia's influence over China.¹⁶

¹¹ These conflicts were the first Afghan War of 1838–1842, the Second Afghan War of 1878–1880, and the Penjdeh Crisis in 1885. See Alexander Morrison, "Twin Imperial Disasters: The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British Official Mind," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2014, pp. 270, 280–281; Alexander Morrison, "Beyond the 'Great Game': The Russian Origins of the Second Anglo-Afghan War," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 2017, p. 686.

¹² Siegel, 2002, pp. 7–8.

¹³ Sergeev, 2013, p. 249. The expedition was so named because it was led by Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband.

¹⁴ Sergeev, 2013, p. 260. Britain knew that Russia couldn't get to India via Tibet but thought that if Britain allowed Russia to establish itself in Tibet, "those states dependent on us and bordering on Tibet would think that Russia was the 'real power in Asia.'" See Siegel, 2002, p. 13.

¹⁵ Nikolai S. Kuleshov, "Russia and Tibetan Crisis: Beginning at the 20th Century," *Tibetan Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Autumn 1996, p. 47.

¹⁶ Sergeev, 2013, pp. 250, 253.

Perceptual and Diplomatic Context

British Threat Perceptions

British threat perceptions in Central Asia centered on India. Britain saw Russia's deployed military forces, rapid territorial advance southward in Central Asia toward India, and construction of railways as evidence of aggressive intent. Thus, from Britain's perspective, Russia had reached an "invaluable bridgehead" in Central Asia from which to threaten India.¹⁷

The southward extension of Russian territory throughout the 19th century threatened Britain primarily because of the risk it posed to India—considered the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire. Primarily a naval power, Britain had acquired another land frontier with its colonial territory in India that London believed had to be defended. Immediately beyond this land frontier was Russia, a rival whose principal strength was a large land army.¹⁸ Britain was especially concerned about Russia's construction of railroads in Central Asia, which would leave the Royal Navy of limited value and, in London's view, all but ensure superior Russian military access to India.¹⁹ Russian railway systems in Central Asia were characterized by Britain's Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Hardinge, as the "sword of Damocles hanging over Britain's head."²⁰ British defense planners in the mid- to late 19th century had concluded that Britain could not by itself prevent a Russian attack on British territories, given Russia's geographic and manpower advantages.²¹ Britain thus believed that the defense of India could be assured only by the maintenance of the buffer zones between the Russian and British empires. As a result, any "Russianization" of Persia and Afghanistan was seen to threaten Britain's essential defensive positions and would have to be met by similar efforts to "Anglicize" these two countries.²²

The British "saw in every Russian move in Asia a threat to Britain's interest in India, no matter how far-fetched that might seem to be as an analysis of motives behind the Russian move in question."²³ For example, in addition to constant concern about Russian territorial gains near India, some officials in the Indian Office also feared the possibility of another large-scale Indian mutiny,²⁴ which London believed could be encouraged by the mere appear-

¹⁷ White, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁸ White, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁹ Neilson, 1996, p. 122.

²⁰ Wilson, 1985, p. 78.

²¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 136.

²² Neilson, 1996, p. 127.

²³ David Fromkin, "The Great Game in Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4, Spring 1979, p. 938.

²⁴ From 1857 to 1858, there was a widespread, though ultimately unsuccessful, mutiny against British rule in India. Relatedly, Sergeev notes that Britain worried that Russia might exploit grievances of Indian princes to subvert British influence there. See Sergeev, 2013, p. 220.

ance of a Russian military victory on or near the Indian frontier.²⁵ Relatedly, British diplomats worried that the “forward” policies they would have to pursue just to “stand still against Russia in Central Asia” might actually provoke Russia to become more interested in India.²⁶ For these reasons, concerns about Russia occupied a central position in British foreign policy and defense planning at the end of the 19th century.

In this case study, we focus primarily on Central Asia, but we note that the two countries also had conflicting interests in East Asia. From the British perspective, Russia’s expansion into China and the rapid growth of the Russian Pacific Fleet in the late 19th century (culminating in St. Petersburg’s taking of Port Arthur in 1897) threatened the balance of power in the region.²⁷ Britain’s perception of Russia’s aggressive posture in East Asia would push London to seek an alliance with Tokyo, a hardline approach that in turn would have ramifications for an Anglo-Russian rapprochement.

Russian Threat Perceptions

Britain’s policies in the mid- to late 19th century were perceived by Russia as seeking to thwart its great power status by limiting its influence beyond its own borders and containing it by strengthening the military potential of its neighbors.²⁸ Although Russia perceived threats from Britain and elsewhere, St. Petersburg was motivated more by opportunities for gains than by fear of British threats to the homeland.

Central Asia was seen in St. Petersburg as a place where Russia could compete with Britain at a relatively low cost and a known level of risk. Only in Central Asia could the Russian Army “experience a sense of success due in part to the fact that it could frustrate the ambitions and interests of the British Empire.”²⁹ Russia’s desire for equal status among the European powers could be best satisfied through expansion in Central Asia, where Russia perceived itself as largely invulnerable and knew that British advancement in the region was difficult and costly because of the region’s proximity to Russia and distance from Britain—and from the sea.³⁰ For example, the opportunities that Russia saw in Central Asia were detailed in a report from the Russian foreign minister (and approved by the tsar) in 1900. The report recommended that Russia try to put as much pressure as possible on the British Empire despite having been

²⁵ Robert Johnson, “Russians at the Gates of India? Planning the Defence of India, 1885–1900,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 3, July 2003, p. 698; White, 1995, p. 7; Wilson, 1985, p. 76.

²⁶ Wilson, 1985, p. 12.

²⁷ Neilson, 1996, pp. 116, 134. In addition, Germany obtained a lease at China’s Kiaochow Bay in 1897. With these two acquisitions in East Asia by European naval powers, Britain doubted its ability to maintain a “two-power standard” (several battleships at least equal to the combined strength of the next two largest navies) against any European combination.

²⁸ Marina Soroka, “Debating Russia’s Choice Between Great Britain and Germany: Count Benckendorff Versus Count Lamsdorff, 1902–1906,” *International History Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 2020, p. 2.

²⁹ Geyer, 1987, p. 98.

³⁰ Geyer, 1987, p. 95.

weakened in the Boer War.³¹ The letter noted that this should be done by “entering into diplomatic relations with Kabul and strengthening Russia’s military position in Central Asia. In Persia, Russia should strengthen her trade and economic position and use a loan to extract a commitment from the Shah not to grant railway concessions to non-Russia candidates.”³²

Moreover, Russia hoped to use its position in Central Asia as a bargaining chip. If St. Petersburg could threaten British interests in Central Asia, that might persuade Britain to support Russian interests elsewhere.³³ In particular, the closure of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits to Russian warships (as part of the 1841 Straits Convention, and then confirmed in the post–Crimean War 1856 Treaty of Paris) effectively stymied Russia’s traditional desire to expand through the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ After the negotiation of the Straits Convention, Russia believed that it could leverage the asymmetry of local power in Central Asia to put pressure on Britain to reverse this provision.

Although opportunism was the key driver of Russian policy in Central Asia in the short term, Russia did perceive threats in the region. Russia saw the British Empire in India as a greater threat than other local or tribal actors near the Russian southern border. Specifically, the Russians feared that India could, in the long term, become a base of operations from which the British could threaten the Russian frontier or block Russia’s southern advance.³⁵

Russian Perceptions of British Resolve

Despite the desire to poke Britain in Central Asia, Russia believed that Britain would respond with force if Russia’s expansionary policies went too far. The two countries almost went to war in Central Asia in 1885 during the Penjdeh Crisis, when Russian border patrols reached the Afghan frontier.³⁶ In the late 19th century, Russia’s foreign minister “worried constantly” that Russia’s unlimited expansion in Central Asia could lead to a dangerous conflict with the British.³⁷ He warned that Russian opportunism in Central Asia could provoke a “wealthy England” and create a “crushing burden” on the already poor state of Russia’s finances.³⁸ Russia was therefore aware that a conflict that began in Central Asia could escalate to general war, in which Britain would be not only capable of bringing its military power to bear against Russia in other regions but also willing to do so. Moreover, Russia would be much more vulnerable to British economic and maritime coercion in these other theaters.

³¹ All mentions of the Boer War in this report are referring to the Second Boer War (1899–1902).

³² Geyer, 1987, p. 201.

³³ McDonald, 1992, p. 111; Siegel, 2002, pp. 3, 47; Geyer, 1987, p. 95.

³⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 3.

³⁵ White, 1995, p. 7.

³⁶ Geyer, 1987, p. 114.

³⁷ Geyer, 1987, pp. 90, 96. Russia’s Foreign Minister at this time was Alexander Gorchakov.

³⁸ Geyer, 1987, p. 202.

Motives of Each Side

The threat perceptions—and opportunities—discussed in the previous section were key to establishing the context for some form of accommodation between Britain and Russia in the early 20th century. Table 2.1 lists the main motives each side had for pursuing a less-hardline approach, which we discuss in more detail in this section.

Stronger State: Britain

Britain had three main motivations to reach an accommodation with Russia in the early 1900s: economic challenges at home, imperial overextension, and perceptions of greater potential Russian receptivity following Russia's defeat in the 1904 Russo-Japanese War.

Economically, successive administrations in Britain at the turn of the 20th century were becoming increasingly reluctant to spend huge amounts of money on the defense of the British Empire.³⁹ Britain's economic growth rate was decreasing and its national debt increasing.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the costs of defending India appeared to be growing. In summer 1902,

TABLE 2.1

British and Russian Motives for Pursuing a Less-Hardline Approach

Motive	Description
Great Britain	
Address economic challenges at home	Britain was becoming increasingly reluctant to spend huge amounts of money on the defense of the British Empire.
Reduce imperial overextension and reduce burden of India's defense	Overextended after the Boer War, Britain believed that an agreement with Russia would remove perceived Russian designs on India, resulting in a less complex and overburdened foreign policy outlook.
Leverage potential Russian receptivity to an agreement following St. Petersburg military defeat against Japan	Britain perceived that Russia's catastrophic losses in the Russo-Japanese War presented an opportunity for rapprochement on terms favorable to London; Britain was also concerned that Russia's defeat could cause it to lash out at Britain in Central Asia.
Russia	
Prioritize internal stability	Following the Russo-Japanese War and in the wake of the Russian Revolution, Russia sought to limit the risk of future destabilizing conflict with a great power rival while it focused achieving internal order.
Obtain international loans	Russia needed international loan guarantees, primarily through France, to pursue domestic reconstruction necessary for stability.

³⁹ Wilson, 1985, p. 15; Siegel, 2002, p. 67.

⁴⁰ Siegel, 2002, p. 14.

British military advice called for an increased troop presence in India.⁴¹ One high-ranking British official in the Foreign Office accounted for rapprochement with Russia in the following way: “The reason is an obvious one—the process of working in constant antagonism is too expensive . . . [W]e could not really pursue a successful policy of antagonism toward Russia without sacrifices which the public and parliament would not agree to.”⁴²

Strategically, after the Boer War, Britain was increasingly aware that it faced an overextension of its empire. Britain believed that an agreement with Russia would remove what Britain perceived to be Russian designs on India, resulting in a less complex and overburdened foreign policy outlook. Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, noted that if rapprochement with Russia were to succeed, “India will be relieved from apprehension and strain . . . if it fails we shall at any rate have secured temporarily that Russia does not get ahold of parts of Persia.”⁴³ In contrast, failing to pursue a more conciliatory approach with Russia and adopting a forward policy in Central Asia instead would, from the British perspective, involve an unacceptable increase of military responsibilities for India and the Empire.⁴⁴

Thus, Britain’s desire to simplify its strategic landscape prompted London to act directly to alleviate its most pressing security concern, which was the Russian threat to the Central Asian approaches to India.⁴⁵ Even Russia’s war with Japan (which resulted in a serious weakening of Russia’s military) and St. Petersburg’s internal revolutionary struggles in the early years of the 20th century did not diminish Britain’s threat perception of Russia in Central Asia. Instead, Russia’s humiliating loss in Japan reinforced Britain’s concern that Russia might lash out at Britain in Central Asia.⁴⁶ Moreover, Britain assumed that Russia would recover after the war with Japan and reestablish itself as a naval power. Britain’s alliance with Japan—negotiated in 1902 and discussed later in this chapter—was not considered by British defense officials as sufficient to guard against a resurgent Russia.⁴⁷

Certain parts of the British government saw risks in taking a more cooperative approach to Russia in Central Asia. Conservatives warned that détente with Russia would amount to the sacrifice of Britain’s imperial position in Central and East Asia.⁴⁸ There were also some concerns about potential Russian duplicity, particularly from those who were stationed in India. For example, Lord Curzon, the Viceroy to India from 1899 to 1905 and a well-established

⁴¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 126.

⁴² Wilson, 1985, pp. 6–7. The quote is from Sir Thomas Sanderson, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office from 1895–1906.

⁴³ Wilson, 1985, p. 76.

⁴⁴ Wilson, 1985, p. 77.

⁴⁵ Siegel, 2002, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Wilson, 1985, p. 75.

⁴⁸ Wilson, 1985, p. 15.

Russophobe, argued that Russia would break an agreement “precisely when she chooses.”⁴⁹ Similarly, Lord Balfour, the Conservative prime minister of Britain from 1902 to 1905, argued that “little confidence can be placed in Russian assurances . . . Russia always thinks herself absolved from them if she can show, or assert without showing, that circumstances have changed since they were made.”⁵⁰ Others in the government—such as Lord Minto, the British viceroy of India from 1905 to 1910, and Sir Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, an influential British diplomat who served as the *Chargé d’Affaires* in St. Petersburg in 1903—were skeptical of rapprochement with Russia, arguing that “Russian and British interests in Persia are absolutely irreconcilable.”⁵¹ Spring Rice was also concerned that Russia would use rapprochement with Britain to pursue its old forward policies in Central Asia under a new cover.⁵²

On the left, some British officials were fervently anti-Tsarist and opposed rapprochement with Russia because they saw it as supporting a brutal Russian regime.⁵³ For example, the year before the Anglo-Russian Convention was concluded, the Radicals within Britain’s new Liberal government protested a proposed British naval visit to Russia because they felt the visit would be a “visible sign of support for the embattled Russian autocracy.”⁵⁴ These domestic sentiments had to be balanced by the British negotiators, but there is little evidence that they were serious impediments to pursuing a more cooperative approach.⁵⁵

Weaker State: Russia

Russian officials believed that accommodation with Britain would help them deal with internal instability that plagued the country in the early years of the 20th century. The Russo-Japanese War had left Russia weakened and defeated abroad, and the Russian Revolution of 1905 brought turmoil and unrest at home. St. Petersburg believed that an agreement with London would allow Russia—at least temporarily—to limit the risk of future destabilizing conflict with a great power rival while it focused on domestic reconstruction. The agreement also came to be seen as a necessary precondition to obtain international loans, which were vital for Russian domestic recovery. These two motivations are briefly discussed later in this chapter but primarily explored in the second historical period section of this chapter.

After the Russo-Japanese War, Russia’s paramount task was seen as restoring internal order at a time of extreme military weakness. Russia’s powerful minister of internal affairs,

⁴⁹ Neilson, 1996, pp. 207, 227; Siegel, 2002, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Neilson, 1996, p. 239.

⁵¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 282.

⁵² Siegel, 2002, pp. 23–24.

⁵³ Neilson, 1996, pp. 272, 274–275, 278, and 285. For socialist views, see White, 1995, p. 294.

⁵⁴ The Liberal Party was a British political party that emerged in the mid-19th century. The Radicals were a small grouping within the Liberal Party (Neilson, 1996, p. 278).

⁵⁵ Soroka, 2020, p. 2. The Anglo-Russian rapprochement, achieved despite some opposition in both countries, is sometimes seen as a diplomatic brainchild.

Pyotr Stolypin, believed that foreign policy concerns needed to be subordinated to domestic imperatives, including economic modernization and stabilization of the political situation. The dominant view in Russia after the war was that complications abroad threatened the domestic order. Alexander Izvolsky, Russia's foreign minister, and Alexander von Benckendorff, Russia's ambassador to Britain from 1903 to 1917, viewed rapprochement with Britain not just as a way to limit the risk of future destabilizing conflicts in Central Asia but also as a means through which Russia could recover its status as a great power, and that "the reward for a settlement between Britain and Russia over Asia would be the European implications, such as a reopening of the Straits question."⁵⁶

Russia's rapprochement with Britain went hand in hand with Russia's desire to maintain stable relations with Germany over the same period, until the outbreak of World War I. From St. Petersburg's perspective, good relations with Britain and Germany served to stabilize potential areas of complications on Russia's frontiers.⁵⁷

Russia also wanted to use the agreement with Britain to secure international loan guarantees. There was a distinct "financial dimension," in Russia's view, of a more conciliatory approach to Britain. The Russo-Japanese War and outbreak of the Revolution pushed Russia to the brink of financial collapse. Russia thus sought to negotiate international loan guarantees, primarily through France, Russia's ally and principal financial supporter.

Some parts of the Russian government believed that there were risks to a more cooperative policy toward Britain. Some officials worried that a closer relationship with Britain would sacrifice Russia's traditional, dynastic-based relations with Germany.⁵⁸ Many conservatives believed that Britain was trying to weaken Germany by pitting it against Russia and sought an alliance with Germany instead.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Russian general staff worried that an agreement with Britain would lead to conflict with Germany, Russia's main rival, on Russia's western border.⁶⁰ The general staff also distrusted England's ultimate intentions, given its traditional hostility to Russia.⁶¹ Vladimir Lamsdorff, Russia's foreign minister from 1900 to 1906, "believed that British and Russian interests were largely incompatible, but that there could be isolated cases of limited cooperation over specific issues, such as in Central Asia."⁶²

⁵⁶ Soroka, 2020, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁷ McDonald, 1992, p. 151.

⁵⁸ White, 1995, p. 241.

⁵⁹ McDonald, 1992, p. 156; White, 1995, p. 5.

⁶⁰ McDonald, 1992, p. 109.

⁶¹ McDonald, 1992, p. 109.

⁶² Soroka, 2020, pp. 3, 7.

Historical Period 1: 1899–1904

Stronger State's Policies Toward the Weaker State

In the view of British policymakers, there were two approaches to dealing with Russia: direct negotiations or forming an alliance or coalition to limit Russia's aims.⁶³ These policies can be seen as less-hardline and hardline approaches, respectively, and Britain pursued both options simultaneously. On the first track, Britain attempted to engage Russia in discussions regarding Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. On the second track, Britain negotiated alliances with Russian rival Japan in 1902 and with Russian ally France in 1904. The following section will trace each of these British policies.

Alliance with Japan

Britain's discussions about an alliance with Japan began in July 1901. In Britain's view, an Anglo-Japanese alliance could help address the threat posed by Russian expansionism in East Asia, where Russian troops had invaded and occupied Manchuria in 1900 and took the strategic Port Arthur in 1897, at which Russia based its growing Pacific Fleet. Both Britain and Japan wished to use the alliance to strengthen their resistance to any further Russian advance in China.⁶⁴ This alliance would also improve Britain's naval position vis-à-vis Germany in Europe by reducing the demand for British naval forces in Asia.⁶⁵ Although the strategic value of an alliance with Japan was therefore clear, Britain still wished to pursue that alliance without unduly antagonizing Russia, with whom Britain also wished to pursue an accommodation. Developments in Persia provided an opportunity to clarify British intentions.

Proposed British-Russian Loan to Persia

At the same time, Britain pursued a less-hardline approach on Persia. In fall 1901, Britain learned that Russia might be seeking a loan from France to shore up its own finances. Britain perceived that Russian financial weakness might be a sign that the moment was right to pursue diplomatic negotiations in earnest and that Russia might be interested in improving Anglo-Russian relations. In response, Lord Lansdowne, then Britain's foreign minister, took a "crucial policy initiative" in October 1901, conveying to Russia's ambassador to Britain that the "British government wished to deal frankly and directly with Russia over matters of mutual interest."⁶⁶ Specifically, as a first step, Britain proposed a joint British-Russian loan to Persia, which had already spent the entirety of a loan that Russia had provided in 1900. Britain was worried that Russia would provide another unilateral loan to Persia, thereby cementing its influence in the country (and on the Persian Gulf). Britain saw few ways to counter this

⁶³ Neilson, 1996, p. 216.

⁶⁴ White, 1995, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 219; Wilson, 1985, pp. 74–75.

⁶⁶ Neilson, 1996, p. 220.

aside from providing Persia an alternative loan from London. However, Lansdowne believed that the British government would be unhappy about providing such a risky loan amid the substantial resources being expended on the Boer War.⁶⁷ Thus, a joint loan was perceived by Britain as an element of a less-hardline approach that could reduce competition for influence in Persia by working with Russia.

Russia swiftly rejected the joint loan plan (discussed in more detail in the following section), and Britain decided to make its own loan offer to the Persian government. The British Foreign Office interpreted the Russian rejection of the British offer to mean that Britain was free to pursue the alliance with Japan unhindered by concerns about Russia's interests. Had Russia agreed to the British proposal, the British might have taken more steps to consider Russian views during the negotiations with Japan to sustain Russian support for the joint loan plan. In the end, the Anglo-Japanese alliance was signed in January 1902 and officially announced in February 1902 without input from Russia.⁶⁸

Attempted Engagement with Russia on Afghanistan

In February 1902, Britain again attempted to pursue a less-hardline approach toward Russia, this time on the issue of Afghanistan. The previous year, the Amir of Afghanistan unexpectedly died, and Britain worried that Russia would use his death as an opportunity to continue to push to open direct relations with Afghanistan instead of conducting them through the British, per the aforementioned terms of the settlement to the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Britain attempted to discuss Russia's attempts to enter into relations with Afghanistan, but Russia ignored the offer of high-level discussions until December 1902. That month, the British ambassador to Russia, Charles Scott, met with Benckendorff, the new Russian ambassador to Britain.⁶⁹ After the meeting, some British officials perceived an "apparent shift in the Russian attitude" and the possibility that these discussions may lead to a general Anglo-Russian settlement.⁷⁰

Attempted Discussion of Tibet

As discussions on Afghanistan proceeded with Russia in 1903, Britain also broached the topic of Tibet.⁷¹ Britain believed it was imperative to keep trying to engage Russia in negotiations on Central Asia generally because London perceived that time was on St. Petersburg's side: The longer the two governments delayed coming to an agreement, the worse the settlement would be for London. For example, British overtures to Russia about Tibet conveyed that

⁶⁷ Neilson, 1996, p. 220.

⁶⁸ Neilson, 1996, p. 221.

⁶⁹ Neilson, 1996, pp. 220, 223; White, 1995, pp. 31–32.

⁷⁰ White, 1995, p. 32. However, other British officials—such as Lord George Hamilton, Sir Arthur Godley, and Curzon—were more pessimistic about Russia's willingness to come to an agreement in Afghanistan given its established position along the border.

⁷¹ White, 1995, p. 34.

although Britain had no territorial ambitions in Tibet, any appointment of a Russian agent there would result in a similar move by Britain.⁷² Around the same time, Britain quashed a hardline proposal from Curzon, a Conservative, that advocated sending British troops to Tibet. The justification for doing so was twofold: The British Foreign Office did not see an urgent Russian threat to Tibet given the distances involved, and British officials believed that sending troops to Tibet would “unnecessarily irritate” Russia, which would make concluding the desired agreement over Central Asia much more difficult.⁷³

Negotiation of an Entente with France

By spring 1903, British officials expressed frustration at the slow pace and the “absence of frankness” on the part of the Russians in the talks.⁷⁴ Concurrently, Britain began to seek a settlement with France. In July 1903, Britain began negotiations with France that would culminate in the Anglo-French entente of 1904. This was a step that St. Petersburg likely did not perceive as accommodating but that London felt was probably a necessary precursor for reaching an accord with Russia. Britain feared that strained relations with France would make Russia more difficult to deal with given the long-standing Franco-Russian alliance and the fact that this alliance might give St. Petersburg greater confidence in risking war with Britain in pursuit of its interests in Asia.⁷⁵ Lansdowne believed that rapprochement between Britain and France could reduce Russian confidence that French assistance would be forthcoming in the event of a clash with Britain, thereby increasing Russian incentives to settle its disputes with Britain.⁷⁶ In October 1903, Britain explicitly asked French foreign minister Delcassé for assistance in spurring the slow-moving British-Russian negotiations.⁷⁷

This approach appeared to work. In response to French encouragement, Russia agreed to discussions with Britain on Central Asia. Lansdowne and Benckendorff met, and Britain put forward a comprehensive vision for an agreement with Russia on Central Asia.⁷⁸ For the first time, the British offered concrete proposals on several conflicts of interest between the two

⁷² Neilson, 1996, pp. 227–228.

⁷³ Neilson, 1996, p. 228.

⁷⁴ White, 1995, p. 36.

⁷⁵ White, 1995, p. 24; Sergeev, 2013, p. 221. In addition to the benefits it would provide vis-à-vis Russia, Britain also sought a settlement with France to (1) moderate the French-British naval rivalry in the Mediterranean and along the maritime route eastward from the Suez Canal and (2) resolve British-French disputes in Egypt and Morocco.

⁷⁶ During the negotiations with France, the French foreign minister, Théophile Delcassé, told Lansdowne that France would exercise a restraining influence on Russia and would say that—under certain conditions—Russia could not rely on French support in a fight with Britain. See Neilson, 1996, p. 231; Wilson, 1985, p. 60; and White, 1995, pp. 24–26, 35.

⁷⁷ White, 1995, p. 36.

⁷⁸ White, 1995, p. 37.

countries,⁷⁹ and discussions were fruitful. At the year's end, Lansdowne presented a draft that dealt with all the major topics that had been discussed over the past few months.⁸⁰ However, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904—in which Britain decided to remain neutral—caused a paralysis in Anglo-Russian relations and halted further discussions of an accommodation in Central Asia.⁸¹

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Over the course of this period, Russia rejected most of Britain's initiatives to come to terms over Central Asia. Although the two governments held sporadic discussions, Russia was ultimately not inclined to move closer to the British position, particularly on Persia: Russia was opposed to a partition of Persia and Afghanistan, where Russia had no intention of forswearing direct relations with the Amir. We did not find evidence in the historical record that Russia saw Britain as weak-willed for pursuing a less-hardline approach during this period.

Rejection of Joint Loan on Persia and Refusal to Hold Talks on Afghanistan

At the beginning of this period, in 1901, Russia rejected an offer from Britain of a joint loan to Persia. As noted earlier, a joint loan to Persia and working together might have reduced the intensity of competition between London and St. Petersburg for influence in Persia. Russia believed that plans for the development of the Russian oil industry depended on the construction of a pipeline to the Persian Gulf. Russia also felt it had a relative advantage over Britain in Persia to pursue its interests and was thus uninterested in a more accommodating posture, so St. Petersburg rejected London's offer in November 1901.⁸² Several months later, in February 1902, Russia also rebuffed Britain's offer to hold talks on Afghanistan.⁸³

Signs of Potential Receptivity to British Engagement

By late 1902, however, certain elements of the government in St. Petersburg began to show "early symptoms of receptivity" to British engagement.⁸⁴ Japan's new alliance with Britain suddenly underscored Russian isolation.⁸⁵ Russia's reaction to the signing of the Anglo-

⁷⁹ Neilson, 1996, p. 236. The proposal from Lansdowne to Benckendorff on November 25, 1903, included the first specific detailed British policy positions on Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. They included what Britain desired in each country and what they wanted from Russia.

⁸⁰ See Appendix 1 in White for the contents of the proposal, provided by Lansdowne on January 1, 1904 (White, 1995, p. 300).

⁸¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 249.

⁸² Neilson, 1996, p. 221.

⁸³ Neilson notes that Russia failed to respond to Britain regarding direct negotiations with Afghanistan, but the specific Russian reasons for rejecting the overture at this juncture are not clear (Neilson, 1996, p. 223).

⁸⁴ White, 1995, p. 30.

⁸⁵ Geyer, 1987, p. 208.

Japanese alliance in 1902 was one of anger and Anglophobia.⁸⁶ In the official response to the announcement of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in February 1902, Russian foreign minister Vladimir Lamsdorff stated that the “rapidity and secrecy” of the negotiations between Japan and Britain would “naturally confirm the Russian public in its long-standing opinion that Britain was Russia’s natural enemy.”⁸⁷ By late 1902, however, attitudes were changing. For example, Sergei Witte, Russia’s influential finance minister, was aware that the Anglo-Japanese alliance portended new external security conditions that would “render Russia less potent as an international force.”⁸⁸ A bad harvest the previous year had left the Russian economy reeling, which reinforced Witte’s view and made him wary of a Russian foreign policy that was “too abrasively carried out.”⁸⁹ However, this sentiment was not shared across the Russian foreign policy establishment: Witte was seen to be a moderating influence, but Lamsdorff and the minister of war, General Aleksey Kuropatkin, favored a more aggressive foreign policy.⁹⁰ The lack of consensus in the Russian government during this period was likely a factor in the slow pace of negotiation and Russia’s reluctance to engage with the British proposals.

Moreover, in late December 1902, Benckendorff took up Witte’s position. Benckendorff was old friends with Scott and began to consider Britain’s proposal from two months earlier for talks on the nature of Russia’s relations with Afghanistan. Benckendorff told the British that Russia had no intention of entering into any *new* relations with Afghanistan and understood London’s position with regard to the Amir.⁹¹ Although this statement did not represent a change in Russia’s position vis-à-vis Afghanistan, it was a sign that St. Petersburg was willing to discuss the matter. Discussions on Afghanistan continued through the beginning of 1903 but lapsed in the spring. In March, a new Russian statement that Russia should and could engage directly in communications with Afghanistan at any time in the future greatly diminished the prospects for an understanding on Central Asia at that time. Negotiations also stalled when Benckendorff returned to Russia because of a family illness.⁹²

Pursuit of an “Active Policy” in Manchuria

Russia’s reaction to Anglo-French negotiations that occurred over the course of 1903 was one of apprehension. Russia worried that an Anglo-French entente would lead to the revival of

⁸⁶ Sergeev, 2013, p. 269.

⁸⁷ Neilson, 1996, p. 224.

⁸⁸ White, 1995, p. 30.

⁸⁹ White, 1995, p. 30.

⁹⁰ White, 1995, p. 31.

⁹¹ White, 1995, pp. 31–32.

⁹² Neilson, 1996, p. 228.

the Crimean coalition of the 1850s that led to direct conflict on Russian territory.⁹³ Russia's French ally was interested in seeking rapprochement with London.⁹⁴ In response to French pressure, Benckendorff reached out to Lansdowne in late 1903 regarding Central Asia to "discuss frankly the various questions outstanding between Russia and Great Britain."⁹⁵ Benckendorff did not have any specific proposals to make to Britain but expressed Russia's position. First, Russia was unwilling to accept a partition of Persia: Northern Persia was already well under Russian domination and British approval would add nothing, so there was no advantage to accepting an agreement that granted the entire south to Britain. Second, Russia had no intention of forswearing direct relations with the Afghan Amir.⁹⁶ Finally, Russia was interested in ensuring that Britain would not press for a Russian evacuation of Manchuria.⁹⁷ During the next round of talks in late November, Benckendorff seemed willing to grant that Afghanistan and Tibet should be considered within Britain's spheres of influence but held firm that Russia should be able to resume relations with the Afghan Amir if it wanted. Persia continued to be a sticking point, with Benckendorff still refusing to agree to a division of north and south spheres.⁹⁸ By late 1903, there was still considerable daylight between Russian and British desires from the Russian perspective, particularly on Afghanistan and Persia.

Start of Russo-Japanese War

As already noted, talks stopped when Japan declared war on Russia in February 1904 over Russia's absorption of Manchuria. One immediate consequence of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War was the deterioration of Anglo-Russian relations. From Russia's perspective, Britain proclaimed neutrality in the conflict but encouraged the Japanese to reject Russia's terms and go to war instead.⁹⁹ Russia was deeply suspicious of the British because of London's earlier hardline approach on allying with Japan. Some in Russia believed that Britain had "enticed" Japan to attack Russia as a way of making it easier for Britain to annex Tibet.¹⁰⁰ Others were convinced that Japan would not have gone to war without the support of the alli-

⁹³ Sergeev, 2013, p. 226. Russia lost the Crimean War (1853–1856) to a coalition of France, Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and Serbia.

⁹⁴ Geyer, 1987, p. 208.

⁹⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 235; White, 1995, p. 36.

⁹⁶ White, 1995, p. 37.

⁹⁷ Russia had signed an agreement with China in April 1902 that provided for the phased withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria by October 1903. In early 1903, however, Russia decided to delay that withdrawal until China complied with several additional Russian demands, marking a significant shift in Russia's Far East policy. From this time forward, Russia would be committed to an "active policy" in Manchuria that would eventually culminate in the Russo-Japanese War (Neilson, 1996, pp. 224–228).

⁹⁸ White, 1995, pp. 38–39.

⁹⁹ Neilson, 1996, p. 246.

¹⁰⁰ White, 1995, p. 92.

ance with Britain. For example, Russian foreign minister Izvolsky asserted to Britain's King Edward that the Anglo-Japanese alliance was the principal cause of war with Japan.¹⁰¹

Thus, Britain's hand had been somewhat strengthened over the course of this period and Russia's had been weakened as a result of Japan's hostility in the Far East, the British alliances with France and Japan, and the slump in Russia's economy brought about by the unfavorable harvest. The Russo-Japanese War, which we will explore in greater detail in the next section, would serve to further weaken Russia and make accommodation with Britain more attractive.

Historical Period 2: 1905–1907

Stronger State's Policies Toward the Weaker State

At the beginning of this historical period, Russia was reeling from its military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (discussed in more detail in the following section). Moreover, Russia was facing domestic turbulence brought about by the 1905 Russian Revolution and accelerated by the loss in the war. Against this backdrop, British officials believed that Russia's leverage in potential negotiations had substantially declined.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Britain continued to worry about the threat that Russia posed in Central Asia generally and to India specifically. The British predicted that failure to achieve objectives in the Far East would cause Russia to try to fulfill its goals in Central Asia instead. From the British perspective, Russia's continued commitment to Central Asia was reinforced by the fact that St. Petersburg did not transfer a single battalion from Turkestan to the Japanese front, even in the face of significant losses in Manchuria.¹⁰³ During the Russo-Japanese War, a British military attaché to St. Petersburg suggested, "If matters go badly with Russia in the Far East . . . it is possible she will look southward to retrieve some of her lost prestige in what is regarded by many Russians as an easier and more profitable campaign toward India."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the British Cabinet contemplated how Britain should strike Russia should St. Petersburg attempt to offset any losses against Japan by threatening India.¹⁰⁵ The results of these deliberations were pessimistic, with British officials coming to the same conclusions as they had prior to the Russo-Japanese War: Britain was militarily vulnerable to Russia in Central Asia.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ White, 1995, p. 96.

¹⁰² Neilson, 1996, p. 260.

¹⁰³ Siegel, 2002, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ White, 1995, p. 95. The attaché is unnamed.

¹⁰⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ Specifically, at the conclusion of these deliberations, the British military commander Lord Roberts hoped "that no move will be made by Russia for some time to come, for we are certainly not prepared." Another official, Lord Selborne, noted the "great weakness which accrues to the British Empire from the

Renewal of Britain-Japan Alliance

Despite Russia's losses in the Russo-Japanese War, Britain remained keenly interested in reaching an understanding with Russia and alleviating what it still perceived to be a substantial threat to India. When Britain and Japan renewed their alliance in August 1905 amid Russo-Japanese peace talks, Britain decided to keep the renewal a secret until the conclusion of those talks so that London would not be blamed for any failure that might occur. In addition, Britain explicitly reached out to Russia afterward to assure St. Petersburg that the Anglo-Japanese agreement was purely defensive and did not contain any provisions that would prevent an Anglo-Russian understanding.¹⁰⁷

Algeciras Conference and Anglo-Russian Talks

In mid-1905, Britain again attempted to formally engage Russia in high-level discussions regarding Central Asia. Urged on by the French government, Lansdowne raised the subject of a possible agreement over Afghanistan with Benckendorff. Although Britain was initially rebuffed (a more detailed discussion of the Russian response to this first overture is provided later in this chapter), the groundwork had been laid for further discussions. The Liberal government—which came to power promising economic growth and retrenchment—took office in December 1905, and London's drive toward an accommodation with Russia picked up steam. Britain's new Foreign Secretary Grey regarded an Anglo-Russian agreement as the primary goal of short-term British foreign policy and had consistently advocated such an agreement since before the turn of the century.¹⁰⁸ In mid-December, Grey assured Benckendorff that Britain had “no intention of taking advantage of Russia's internal difficulties by advancing in Central Asia or elsewhere, provided that Russia did not do so first.”¹⁰⁹

Grey also expressed concern that Russia's domestic turmoil weakened France (which was allied with Russia) vis-à-vis Germany. The Algeciras Conference, which kicked off in January 1906 in Spain, drove these concerns home.¹¹⁰ The conference was convened to find a solution to the First Moroccan Crisis of 1905 between France and Germany. The entente between France and Britain had, among other things, provided for British support of French special interests in Morocco. When France attempted to implement a variety of economic and policy reforms in Morocco, Germany challenged France and proclaimed support for Morocco's independence and an “open door” policy for commerce and trade in the country.¹¹¹ The international Algeci-

fact that, whereas Russia can strike at us when she pleases through Afghanistan, we can apparently hit her back nowhere” (Neilson, 1996, p. 130).

¹⁰⁷ Neilson, 1996, p. 264.

¹⁰⁸ Siegel, 2002, p. 17; Wilson, 1985, p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ Neilson, 1996, p. 271.

¹¹⁰ Neilson, 1996, p. 271.

¹¹¹ White, 1995, pp. 157–203.

ras Conference was called to resolve the matter.¹¹² Contrary to German expectations, only Austria-Hungary supported Germany's views during the conference; Russia and Britain supported France, reinforcing the strength of the Anglo-French entente and the Franco-Russian alliance. Moreover, Germany's international prestige was badly damaged and its diplomatic efforts during the conference were perceived as inept.¹¹³ The Russian reaction to the Algeiras Conference is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Toward the end of the Algeiras Conference, in March 1906, Grey first suggested to Benckendorff a formal entente similar to the one between Britain and France, in which London and St. Petersburg would pledge to maintain the status quo in Asia.¹¹⁴ The negotiations would begin to gain momentum when Izvolsky replaced Lamsdorff as Russia's foreign minister in May 1906. In mid-May 1906, Grey proposed to Beckendorff that a joint Anglo-Russian loan might be offered to Persia to counter a proposed German loan.¹¹⁵ In late May 1906, Britain's new ambassador to Russia, Arthur Nicolson, met with Izvolsky for the first time and "broke ground as to future discussions"; in early June, the two opened talks on Tibet.¹¹⁶

Fears of Russian Instability Following Revolution

Despite the opening of discussions, progress was slow over the summer because of events in Russia. In July 1906, the Duma was dissolved, contributing to Britain's fears that Russia was on the verge of revolution, which hampered diplomatic progress as various factions in Britain became hesitant to commit to an unstable government.¹¹⁷ On July 25, in response to the ongoing violence in Russia, Lord Hardinge—then the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office—warned that "we fully realize that this [Russian] government is not one with which we could make an agreement and you had better go slowly with our negotiations."¹¹⁸ Grey agreed that the unrest in Russia necessitated a slowdown in negotiations, noting that "while Russia is on the brink of revolution, it is no good going faster in these matters than is necessary to keep the negotiations alive."¹¹⁹ The situation in Russia also raised public opposition in Britain from the left, which argued that Britain should not be entering into any agreement with a brutal autocracy. The negotiations stalled because the dissolution of the Duma and the modification of Russian electoral laws offended many in the Liberal Party. British Liberals

¹¹² White, 1995, pp. 187–88, 191.

¹¹³ White, 1995, pp. 202, 242.

¹¹⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 276.

¹¹⁶ Neilson, 1996, p. 276.

¹¹⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 18; Neilson, 1996, p. 277.

¹¹⁸ Neilson, 1996, p. 277.

¹¹⁹ Neilson, 1996, pp. 277–278.

also opposed providing a joint loan to Russia (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) on the grounds that it helped to “prop up” the Russian autocracy.¹²⁰

Evolution of Britain’s Position on Russian Use of the Turkish Straits

During fall 1906, the two countries also discussed the issue of the Turkish Straits. As noted earlier, Russia had sought changes to the Straits Convention for years. Britain traditionally exercised substantial influence over this issue given its naval power and historical relations with the Ottoman Empire. Britain had been Russia’s traditional opponent on the straits problem and had long sought to deny Russia access to the straits to protect British lines of communication to India.¹²¹ However, Britain’s position evolved in the 20th century. As early as February 1903, Britain’s Committee of Imperial Defense had concluded that even if Russia has possession of Constantinople and free use of the straits, “it would not fundamentally alter for Britain the present strategic position in the Mediterranean.”¹²² This finding took place at a time when Britain was trying to engage Russia in negotiations and London might have offered St. Petersburg a settlement regarding the straits, but the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War halted this line of effort. Thus, after the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the end of the Algeiras Conference, Britain was willing to engage the Russians on the issue of the straits when the Russian government raised the point.¹²³

Onset of Formal British-Russian Negotiations

The negotiations finally began in earnest in September. Persia, the first issue discussed, took priority because both sides saw value in acting to forestall increased German involvement in the country, including a German loan offer to Persia. Britain offered to provide both the Russian and British shares of a joint loan to Persia as a way to keep the Germans out. The two parties then opened discussions on Tibet, which were settled easily. Russia recognized that its interests in Tibet were not equivalent to Britain’s, despite the attachment to the Dalai Lama that many Russian subjects held. Instead, Russia sought simply to limit Britain from entirely absorbing Tibet. Throughout fall and winter 1906, the two parties continued to hammer out details on Persia and Afghanistan. In Persia, Britain’s primary objective was to get Russia to accept that the Sistan province—which represented the best point of departure for a Russian attack on India and the best position from which Britain could prevent such an attack—should fall in the British sphere. In exchange for this concession, Russia demanded that Britain renounce any intended railway construction in Afghanistan and insisted that Russia have

¹²⁰ Neilson, 1996, pp. 274, 278, 285.

¹²¹ Ronald Bobroff, “Behind the Balkan Wars: Russian Policy Toward Bulgaria and the Turkish Straits, 1912–13,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1, January 2000, p. 81.

¹²² White, 1995, p. 244.

¹²³ White, 1995, pp. 244–245.

equal access to Afghan trade.¹²⁴ Afghanistan proved to be the final sticking point in the negotiations. The essence of the disagreement was that the British proposal for Afghanistan enabled London to retain the ability to intervene in Afghanistan and ensure that British treaties with the Amir were observed whereas Russia would have to sacrifice the right to intervene in Afghanistan entirely. Russia feared that Britain would use this provision to annex Afghanistan; the British feared the same of the Russians if London's terms were not met.¹²⁵ As discussed in greater detail later, the majority of the British position was eventually accepted in the 1907 agreement.

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

The outbreak of revolution within Russia in January 1905 forced a speedy conclusion to the war with Japan, which Russia by then understood it was going to lose.¹²⁶ Russia's military defeat was humiliating and unexpected. Prior to the war, Russia believed it had total military and naval superiority and that Japan would be deterred from initiating war against Russia.¹²⁷ Japan initiated several rounds of negotiations with Russia, but negotiations broke down and Japan launched a successful surprise attack against the Russian naval base at Port Arthur on February 8, 1904. Russia suffered a string of military defeats, culminating in the complete destruction of its Baltic squadron. Internationally, the war undermined long-standing beliefs in European military dominance, brought about a major loss of prestige for Russia and a reorientation of Russia's foreign policy away from the Far East, and reinforced Japan's great power status.¹²⁸

Domestically, the shock of defeat in the Russo-Japanese War—which revealed Russia as unprepared, internally troubled, and diplomatically isolated—led to a complete reassessment of foreign policy. In contrast to the fear of some British officials that the loss in the Far East would encourage Russia to be more aggressive in Central Asia, “the war in Manchuria had shown that Russia was dangerously overextended and would be unable to commit the resources necessary to defend itself in the case of a two-front war in both Europe and Asia.”¹²⁹ Economically, the costs of the war with Japan surpassed St. Petersburg's estimates, and Russia's existing loans from France and Germany “did not even come close to covering Russia's expected financial requirements.”¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 18; Neilson, 1996, pp. 267–279, 283. Britain agreed to this term but pointed out that it, like Russia, would be subject to the whims of the Afghan Amir.

¹²⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 286.

¹²⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 16.

¹²⁷ Philip Streich and Jack S. Levy, “Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2016.

¹²⁸ Geyer, 1987, pp. 206–245; Streich and Levy, 2016.

¹²⁹ Siegel, 2002, p. 16.

¹³⁰ Geyer, 1987, pp. 231–232.

Russian Revolution and Subsequent Domestic Instability

The Russo-Japanese War also accelerated revolutionary discontent already underway in Russia.¹³¹ In January 1905, riots and demonstrations over attempted domestic reforms had erupted in Russia on Bloody Sunday, which triggered the outbreak of the 1905 Russian revolution.¹³² Beginning in early 1905 and lasting until summer 1906, Russia faced significant internal disorder.¹³³ This destabilization was the product of economic depression, increasing discontent and famine among Russia's rural population as a result of poor harvests, and the government's inability to push through the reforms necessary to shore up its declining legitimacy. These domestic events severely limited the Russian government's room to maneuver in the foreign policy sphere until spring 1906. Moreover, Russia desperately needed international loans to liquidate its war debt and support domestic spending, but the loans could not be secured as long as foreign countries believed Russia to be unstable.¹³⁴ At the same time, the Russian regime could not maintain order while financial collapse seemed imminent. Russia's powerful Minister of Internal Affairs Stolypin believed that Russia's foreign policy needed to be aimed at "ending possible complications abroad" to allow greater focus on economic modernization and stabilization at home.¹³⁵ This connection between international actions and domestic outcomes prompted the formation of institutional measures intended to minimize the risks of foreign conflicts, principally via the creation of the Council of Ministers as a "United Government" that would share the emperor's role in forming foreign policy.¹³⁶ This linking of war and domestic disorder dominated Russian foreign policymaking until 1914.¹³⁷ However, both Stolypin and Izvolsky believed that Russia's inward focus was only temporary and that Russia would be able to "regain its proper role in two to three years and be able to speak in European affairs with a very different voice from what was now the case."¹³⁸

End of Russo-Japanese War

On September 5, 1905, Russia and Japan ended their war by signing the Treaty of Portsmouth. However, as Geyer notes, "huge new sums of money were needed to combat the revolutionary ferment, and the return and demobilization of Russia's Far Eastern armies would not bring

¹³¹ Streich and Levy, 2016, p. 489; Geyer, 1987, pp. 220–245.

¹³² Neilson, 1996, pp. 259–260.

¹³³ After the events of Bloody Sunday, when Tsarist forces fired on hundreds of protesting workers, massive political and social unrest spread throughout Russia. The events led to political reform in Russia, including the establishment of the State Duma and Russian Constitution of 1906 (Geyer, 1987, p. 239; Neilson, 1996, p. 267).

¹³⁴ Geyer, 1987, pp. 220, 238–239.

¹³⁵ McDonald, 1992, p. 149.

¹³⁶ McDonald, 1992, pp. 124–126, 146–169.

¹³⁷ McDonald, 1992, p. 148.

¹³⁸ McDonald, 1992, p. 148.

the national Treasury any relief in the short term.¹³⁹ Thus, that same month, Russia began to agitate for negotiations for an international loan, despite the reluctance among lenders to risk investment in a situation prone to revolutionary upheaval.¹⁴⁰ Desperate for an infusion of funds for rehabilitation and stressing the dismal situation in the country, Russia beseeched foreign lenders to provide a loan without delay.¹⁴¹ France was Russia's main source for the international loans (although other countries would also be involved in the final loan).¹⁴²

Russia rebuffed Britain's offer of high-level discussions regarding Central Asia in mid-1905. Witte, then chairman of the Council of Ministers, assessed that "Russia, after that incautious war with Japan, should, in order to regain her status as a Great Power, have free hands and not bind herself with agreements."¹⁴³ Moreover, Russian foreign minister Vladimir Lamsdorff, completely focused on the loan negotiations while domestic unrest in Russia reached a fever pitch, made clear to Lansdowne in mid-October 1905 that no negotiations would be possible.¹⁴⁴

German Refusal to Participate in International Loan to Russia

The Algeciras Conference would have a substantial impact on Russian threat perceptions and shift Russian thinking about the wisdom of an alignment with Britain and France. The French government refused to let the loan negotiations with Russia go forward until the Algeciras Conference concluded to ensure that Russia supported France against Germany.¹⁴⁵ In March 1906, the German government announced its refusal to participate in the international loan to Russia, forbidding German banks to place the Russian loan on the German markets.¹⁴⁶ Germany's refusal to participate in the loan apparently resulted from the fact that the German Kaiser was deeply offended by Russian behavior over the Moroccan question and generally upset by Germany's failure at the Algeciras Conference.¹⁴⁷ This was seen by Russia, especially by Witte, as an "unwarranted insult," which made him "deeply embittered." Witte had come to see Germany's foreign policy as "so erratic, so impulsive, and so eminently selfish" that this provided

¹³⁹ Geyer, 1987, p. 239.

¹⁴⁰ White, 1995, p. 150.

¹⁴¹ White, 1995, p. 149.

¹⁴² Geyer, 1987, pp. 233, 239–242, 244. French policymakers had two main interests in this regard: Preventing the collapse of Russian securities held by Frenchman and maintaining imperial Russia as an ally. There was substantial interaction between private French banks and the French government during the loan negotiations with Russia, with the French cabinet providing the ultimate backing for the extensive financial deal.

¹⁴³ Siegel, 2002, p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ Neilson, 1996, p. 270.

¹⁴⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 273.

¹⁴⁶ Neilson, 1996, p. 274; White, 1995, p. 155.

¹⁴⁷ Geyer, 1987, p. 245; Neilson, 1996, p. 274.

additional reason to come to an agreement with Britain.¹⁴⁸ The German refusal was apparently instrumental in changing Witte from a supporter of Germany to a supporter of a closer Russian relationship with Britain. That same month, Lamsdorff published an article in the semiofficial *L'Etat Russe* denouncing German policy at the conference and upholding France's position.¹⁴⁹ In April 1906, Russia finally received the loan from a group of other countries,¹⁵⁰ but this did not end the paralysis in Anglo-Russian relations.¹⁵¹

Appointment of New Pro-British Russian Foreign Minister

In May 1906, one month after the end of the Algeciras Conference, Witte resigned, followed shortly by Lamsdorff. Significantly for Anglo-Russian relations, Lamsdorff was replaced as foreign minister by Izvolsky, who was pro-British and who, like Grey, was committed to the idea of an Anglo-Russian rapprochement.¹⁵² When Izvolsky became foreign minister, his first priority was to disentangle Russia from challenges in Asia by concluding agreements with Britain and Japan.¹⁵³ Izvolsky viewed external stability as a prerequisite for internal reconstruction, which was itself necessary for Russia to receive foreign loans. During negotiations, Izvolsky also had to persuade the military that without such stabilization, St. Petersburg would be left as a second-rate power without a position of authority in Europe.¹⁵⁴ Izvolsky believed that a diplomatic resolution of problems in Central Asia would give Russia a more neutral stance and allow it to concentrate its stretched resources elsewhere.¹⁵⁵ Despite goals that were substantially more compatible with British interests, Izvolsky was unable to

¹⁴⁸ White, 1995, p. 212.

¹⁴⁹ White, 1995, pp. 201–202.

¹⁵⁰ The Russian government received a credit of 2.25 billion francs (844 million rubles) at 5 percent interest spread over 40 years. French high finance covered more than half of this amount (1.20 billion francs) and the remainder came from banks in England (330 million), Austria (165 million), Holland (55 million), and inside Russia itself (500 million). Russia had to agree to not seek any new loans during the following two years and to use the loans only to cover budgetary deficits in 1905 and 1906. See Geyer, 1987, p. 244.

¹⁵¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 275. According to White, “Lamsdorff was most likely replaced because he was made to share with Witte the condemnation of Germany for his role in maintaining the independent Russian stance on the Bjorko issue and the pro-French position at the Algeciras conference. He also shared with Witte and others the blame for the Russo-Japanese War” (White, 1995, p. 205). Moreover, White continues, “the [Russian] emperor told [Izvolsky] that Count Lamsdorff would retire before the opening of the Duma and that he had him in mind as his successor. According to Count Witte, upon his return from the Portsmouth conference he heard of the plan to appoint Izvolsky in place of Lamsdorff and advised the latter to resign so that it would not appear that he had been dismissed” (White, 1995, p. 205). There is also evidence that Lamsdorff did not wish to serve the new Duma that had been created during Russia's 1906 reforms: “[H]aving been the servitor of autocracy for forty years he felt incapable of turning a new leaf in his career faced with a new regime” (McDonald, 1992, p. 93).

¹⁵² Siegel, 2002, p. 17.

¹⁵³ McDonald, 1992, p. 108.

¹⁵⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 18.

¹⁵⁵ White, 1995, p. 208.

make progress on negotiations or substantively respond to overtures made by Nicolson or Grey over the summer because of domestic instability in Russia. On July 21, 1906, the tsar dissolved the Duma and violence was ongoing throughout the country.¹⁵⁶

Concessions Sought in Negotiations with Britain

Once talks began in earnest, Izvolsky sought to link the problems of Russian access to the straits and a settlement in Central Asia. In fall 1906, Russian diplomats broached the issue of the Straits Convention with London. In March 1907, Benckendorff sought London's support on this issue.¹⁵⁷ Grey acknowledged the harm to Russia of England's opposition to the opening of the straits to Russian warships and took a positive position, saying that it would be regrettable to settle issues in Asia while leaving unresolved the issue of the straits that "had been the root of the difficulties between the two countries for two generations."¹⁵⁸ The British were prepared to make a concession to Russia by approving St. Petersburg's desire for a change in the straits regime, but London noted in a 1906 memo that the straits could not be resolved bilaterally because other nations also had interest in the straits.¹⁵⁹ Thus, although Britain had come to be more supportive of the Russian position on the straits, other great powers were now more opposed, particularly the new Ottoman government. This situation led Russia to conclude that it would need to wait for change on the issue until it was militarily strong enough to seize the straits.¹⁶⁰ In 1906, Russia accepted a British statement "that the closing of Straits is no longer a cardinal point of British policy," which satisfied St. Petersburg.¹⁶¹

As the negotiations concluded, the final sticking point was Afghanistan. Izvolsky was able to persuade the Russian military and government to accept Britain's guarantee to not annex any part of Afghanistan's territory in exchange for Russia forgoing any right to intervene in Afghanistan. Izvolsky persuaded the Council of Ministers to accept that "the importance of the agreement with England is so great that its achievement would even be worth partially forgoing strategic considerations related to the Afghan question."¹⁶² Furthermore, Izvolsky argued that "Russia should recognize that she had no real value in either Afghanistan or India and that they were useful only strategically for goading Britain. On the other hand,

¹⁵⁶ Neilson, 1996, p. 277.

¹⁵⁷ McDonald, 1992, p. 112; White, 1995, p. 245. "Benckendorff stated that Russia would like to have the straits opened to permit exit from the Black Sea if this privilege could be limited only to herself. If this were not possible, Russia would prefer that, in the view of her insufficient naval power, the question should not even be raised" (White, 1995, p. 245). In other words, as Bobroff notes, Russia's policy was the preservation of the status quo at the straits for as long as possible, until Russia would be able to take them over itself (Bobroff, 2000, p. 77).

¹⁵⁸ White, 1995, p. 245; McDonald, 1992, p. 112.

¹⁵⁹ White, 1995, p. 246.

¹⁶⁰ Bobroff, 2000, p. 78.

¹⁶¹ White, 1995, pp. 245–246.

¹⁶² Siegel, 2002, p. 18.

these places had real value for Britain, particularly India . . . Russia should recognize the fact that Afghanistan, so strategically important for Britain, was outside her own sphere of interest and within that of Britain.”¹⁶³ In return, Britain was willing to drop its requirement for a Russian pledge not to intervene in Afghanistan, and the Russians dropped their demand for consultation.¹⁶⁴

Signing of Anglo-Russian Convention

The Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in St. Petersburg in August 1907. It incorporated agreements on Persia, Tibet, and Afghanistan. In short, the agreement concluded that Persia would be divided into British and Russian spheres, with a neutral zone in the middle. In Afghanistan, Britain declared that it did not desire to change the political status of Afghanistan, while Russia recognized that Afghanistan was outside its sphere of influence and agreed to conduct relations through the British. In Tibet, both Britain and Russia recognized China’s suzerainty over Tibet; both nations renounced sending agents to Lhasa; and both agreed to not procure concessions for railways, roads, telegraphs, mining, or other rights.¹⁶⁵

Historical Period 3: End of Accommodation: 1907–1914

Stronger State’s Policies Toward the Weaker State

In the years following the conclusion of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, Britain remained openly and firmly committed to upholding its agreement with Russia over Central Asia, a continuation of its less-hardline approach. However, a series of issues in the region tested the limits of the agreement and posed challenges to Anglo-Russian rapprochement. The historically unstable region continued to concern both countries, tempting intervention in ways that were not permitted by the agreement. In the face of these challenges, Britain largely tried to make the agreement work, though it pushed for advantage at the margins. Simultaneously, Britain recognized that Russia was pushing for its own advantage—and, in Britain’s view, doing so more aggressively. A quote from Nicolson at the time is characteristic of the British attitude: Russia was “occasionally a somewhat difficult partner to work with, but we must submit to these little difficulties sooner than permit the dissolution of the partnership.”¹⁶⁶ In Britain’s view, to abandon the Anglo-Russian convention would be to terminate any British influence on Russian behavior in Central Asia. Doing so also could affect the situation in Europe, and Britain remained deeply concerned about Germany.¹⁶⁷ Despite

¹⁶³ White, 1995, p. 281.

¹⁶⁴ Neilson, 1996, p. 287.

¹⁶⁵ Siegel, 2002, p. 19; White, 1995, pp. 282, 313.

¹⁶⁶ Neilson, 1996, p. 325.

¹⁶⁷ Neilson, 1996, p. 325.

some inflamed public opinion about Russia in Britain, British negotiators (notably Grey) had substantial political stakes in the deal and wanted to see it succeed. This section will cover some key moments and disputes in the 1907–1913 period to explore how Britain simultaneously (1) tried to preserve the agreement by working with Russia to overcome challenges in the convention's implementation and (2) pursued hardline approaches in other areas when opportunities presented themselves.¹⁶⁸

Britain's Attempt to Solve Russo-Afghan Disputes Stymied by Afghan Amir

The first major challenge to the convention came almost immediately after its signing, in Afghanistan. In spite of British pressure, the Afghan Amir refused to recognize the portion of the agreement covering Afghanistan, which stated that all political relations with the government of Afghanistan were to be conducted through the British government.¹⁶⁹ Britain was extremely concerned that the Amir's refusal to consent to the convention would lead St. Petersburg to justify opening direct relations with Afghanistan. The British were also concerned that failure to secure the Amir's cooperation would tarnish Britain's prestige.¹⁷⁰

In 1907 and 1908, a refugee crisis on the Russo-Afghan border became a test case for whether the Afghanistan portion of the Anglo-Russian Convention could work without the explicit agreement of the Amir. A flow of Jamshedi tribesmen over the Afghan border into Russian territory alarmed Russian officials because of both the costs of hosting them and the fact that the tribesman began to launch raids back into Afghanistan, which risked an armed collision between Russian and Afghan forces. Britain tried desperately to solve the problem through the Amir, who continued to refuse to implement the agreement. The British acknowledged that if they were unable to obtain a response from the Amir on the issue, Russia might move to deal directly with the Afghan authorities in violation of the convention.¹⁷¹ Britain felt that Russia's apparent desire to see the convention implemented despite these challenges (not to mention Russian hesitancy to open direct relations with Afghanistan on the refugee crisis) was indicative of true Russian commitment to the agreement.¹⁷² Issues on the Russo-Afghan border—including the refugee issue and other challenges, such as plague, locusts, and irrigation—would persist until 1913, and Russia would continue to push for the establishment of direct relations because Britain could not influence the Amir to respond in a way that satisfied Russian grievances.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ For a more detailed account of challenges to implementation in the 1907 convention, see Siegel, 2002.

¹⁶⁹ The treaty was seen by some Afghan officials as a prelude to British control or to partition, while others saw the treaty as an opening for increased Russian interference (Siegel, 2002, pp. 25, 132; White, 1995, pp. 297, 299).

¹⁷⁰ Siegel, 2002, pp. 26–28.

¹⁷¹ Neilson, 1996, p. 297.

¹⁷² Siegel, 2002, p. 43.

¹⁷³ Siegel, 2002, pp. 146, 174.

Growing Concern About Unrest and Russian Presence in Northern Persia

Despite the troubles in Afghanistan, instability and unrest in Persia would pose the greatest difficulties between Britain and Russia during this period. The 1907 convention delineated the British and Russian position in Persia, but it had not stabilized the country. In 1905, revolution broke out, plunging Persia into chaos as the Shah and the Persian parliament (the Majlis) struggled for power. In 1906, the Shah capitulated and signed a constitution; however, he died one week later and his successor, Mohammed Ali Shah, promised to uphold the constitution but immediately began to undermine the Majlis and new constitutional order.¹⁷⁴ Although the convention prohibited Britain and Russia from interfering in Persia's domestic affairs, the nations were on opposite sides, with Russia upholding the Shah and Britain supporting the Majlis.¹⁷⁵

Unrest in Persia came to a head in 1908 and prompted constituencies in Russia to call for a military intervention to suppress the revolution. This reached a fever pitch in June 1908 when several Persian constitutionalists took refuge in the British legation during a fight with the Shah's forces.¹⁷⁶ Russia's ambassador to Britain, Nicholas Hartwig, and a Russian commander of a Persian Cossack Brigade conspired to prevent additional people from fleeing to the British legation and ordered the Cossack brigade to encircle the British legation and cut it off from the rest of the city.¹⁷⁷ British officials were angry that local Russian officials were complicit in a pseudo-military Russian intervention in Persia, contrary to the terms of the agreement.¹⁷⁸ However, British and Russian officials used the crisis as an opportunity to prove that the agreement was working.¹⁷⁹ Britain did not make a diplomatic incident out of the situation, choosing to blame the crisis on local Russian officials rather than officials in St. Petersburg. Russia and Britain both replaced their ministers in Iran with less-hardline officials, and Nicolson credited Iszvolsky's adherence to the convention with containing the crisis.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 31.

¹⁷⁵ Although the British sought to remain strictly neutral in Iran (per the terms of the convention), they would not have been prepared to see the Majlis suppressed. Russia, which was also bound by the convention to remain neutral, wanted to uphold the Shah as the "foundation stone of order" in Persia. The Russian ambassador to Persia, Nicholas Hartwig, wanted to use Russia's military to suppress the revolution (which would have been in violation of the convention) and also urged the Shah to quash the nascent democratic movement (Vanessa Martin, "Hartwig and Russia Policy in Iran in 1906–8," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1993, pp. 1–2; Siegel, 2002, p. 32).

¹⁷⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 39.

¹⁷⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 38. The commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade was Colonel Vladimir Platonovich Liakhov.

¹⁷⁸ Siegel, 2002, pp. 41–42.

¹⁷⁹ Siegel, 2002, p. 33.

¹⁸⁰ Siegel, 2002, p. 43.

Warning to Russia Regarding Mandate of Russian Troops in Persia

However, by 1909, Russia was becoming more concerned about how the unrest in Persia was affecting its commercial trading interests (described in more detail in the following section). When Russia intervened in Tabriz in April 1909 to restore order along the trade route, Britain was displeased and Grey was forced to respond to domestic criticism about aggressive Russian policies in Persia.¹⁸¹ Grey, firmly committed to limiting Russian involvement in Persia, warned that if Russian troops exceeded their mandate—which was limited to protecting trade routes and did not involve taking active measures against Persian constitutionalists, which would have represented active intervention prohibited by the convention—Britain might be forced to intervene on behalf of those struggling against the Shah.¹⁸² The Russian response, detailed in the next section, was to assure the British that Russian troops were there only for the purpose of protecting Russian subjects and trading interests. Still, Britain remained concerned about the Russian troop presence in northern Persia.¹⁸³ Some British officials called for a similar security regime in the British sphere (a hardline response) in part to protect British commercial interests. However, the British government was determined to uphold its less-hardline approach by standing “aloof from the internal affairs of Persia.”¹⁸⁴ British officials continued to call on Russia to withdraw its forces from northern Persia in 1909 and 1910 but remained committed to the convention’s requirement of neutrality.¹⁸⁵

Evolution of British Position on Russia’s Trans-Persian Railway

In 1910, Russia’s desired development of a trans-Persian railway created more tension in the relationship. Britain was reluctant to share the costs of a railway that would be almost two-thirds in Russia’s Persian sphere and lend Russia a trading advantage.¹⁸⁶ Britain was also concerned that a trans-Persian railway would negate the strategic benefits of India’s geographical isolation.¹⁸⁷ At the time, Britain was more concerned about the threat of Russia’s trans-Persian railway than the threat of Germany’s Baghdad railway, another planned railway in the region.¹⁸⁸ Concerned that closer Russo-German relations would impede Anglo-Russian

¹⁸¹ Siegel, 2002, p. 53.

¹⁸² Siegel, 2002, p. 55.

¹⁸³ Siegel, 2002, p. 63.

¹⁸⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 56.

¹⁸⁵ Siegel, 2002, p. 65.

¹⁸⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 68.

¹⁸⁷ In a report commissioned in June 1910, the British general staff submitted a study of the Persian railway that “considered any improvement in land communications toward India, particularly construction of Persian railway, to be extremely detrimental to Britain’s position.” See Siegel, 2002, pp. 85, 87, 159.

¹⁸⁸ Siegel, 2002, p. 85. The Baghdad railway was a German venture conceived in 1888. Planned railway construction would connect Berlin to the Ottoman city of Baghdad, and then eventually onto Basra and the Persian Gulf (Neilson, 1996, p. 309). However, Britain was also concerned about the Baghdad railway.

rapprochement, Britain began to reduce its opposition to Russia's trans-Persian railway when it discovered that Russia had met Germany at Potsdam in 1910 to discuss Berlin's Baghdad railway.¹⁸⁹ Britain's position reflected the fact that London was willing to soften its opposition to a Russian strategic venture if doing so would preserve the rapprochement with Russia.

"Shuster Affair" and Increased Strain on Relations Between Britain and Russia

In 1911, a crisis known as the "Shuster Affair" in Persia captured Russian and British attention for most of that year. That summer, the Persian parliament appointed a U.S. official, William Morgan Shuster, to help reform Persia's finances and reduce its economic dependence on London and St. Petersburg.¹⁹⁰ Both Russia and Britain agreed that Persia should not retain advisers from other great powers, but the Majlis ignored British and Russian counsel and invited seven Americans, with Shuster as the leader of the group.¹⁹¹ Both Britain and Russia feared that they could lose their exclusive rights in Persia as a result of the arrangement.¹⁹² Despite initial reservations, Britain would—with U.S. urging—ultimately support Shuster and his mandate in Persia. However, Shuster's tenure would cause numerous issues for the Anglo-Russian relationship over the course of 1911, with three main incidents of note.

First, Shuster proceeded to invite a staunchly anti-Russian British military attaché, Major Claude Bayfield Stokes, to lead a special police designed to improve the collection of taxes throughout the country.¹⁹³ Russia immediately protested this move, arguing that it was a violation of the convention. Britain was unwilling to imperil the Anglo-Russian Convention over the appointment, which it viewed as a trivial matter, and quashed Shuster's plan by forbidding the British attaché to resign his post.¹⁹⁴

A second, more serious threat to Anglo-Russian relations came in October, when Shuster ordered the seizure of property of the former Shah's brother.¹⁹⁵ As detailed in the following section, Russia immediately threatened to occupy northern Persia in retaliation. Grey warned Benckendorff that such a move would "annul the Convention and violate the independence of Persia."¹⁹⁶ At this point, Britain's support of Shuster began to wane as his disregard for Russian interests in Persia began to threaten the delicate Anglo-Russian relationship.¹⁹⁷

London feared increased German involvement in Persia would pose a threat to British supremacy in the Gulf and also viewed the Baghdad railway as a direct security threat to India (Siegel, 2002, p. 93).

¹⁸⁹ Siegel, 2002, p. 91; Neilson, 1996, pp. 314–317.

¹⁹⁰ Geyer, 1987, p. 337.

¹⁹¹ Siegel, 2002, p. 102.

¹⁹² Geyer, 1987, p. 337.

¹⁹³ Siegel, 2002, p. 103.

¹⁹⁴ Neilson, 1996, p. 321; Siegel, 2002, p. 106.

¹⁹⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 321.

¹⁹⁶ Neilson, 1996, pp. 231–232; Geyer, 1987, p. 337; Siegel, 2002, p. 109.

¹⁹⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 109.

Finally, when Shuster again attempted to appoint an anti-Russian official to his administration in November, Russia issued a series of escalating ultimatums (described in greater detail in the next section) and deployed troops to northern Persia. From Britain's perspective, Russia's escalation of demands to the Persian government was extremely concerning and a dangerous precedent that—along with any movement of Russian troops to Tehran—could destroy the Anglo-Russian relationship. At the last moment, the Majlis voted to accept Russia's ultimatum, Shuster was dismissed, and a potential collapse of the Anglo-Russian accord was narrowly averted. Shuster's tenure presented numerous instances that tempted Russian intervention in Persia in violation of the convention; the convention showed signs of breaking down several times under opposing desires of the British and the Russians.¹⁹⁸

Acceptance of Russia's Proposed Negotiations to Facilitate Ex-Shah's Departure from Persia

Throughout 1912, the increased tendency of local Russian officials in Persia to extend Russian involvement in Persia was a key element of Anglo-Russian relations. British officials were aware of the tendency of Russian consuls in Persia to exceed the directives of Russian ministers in St. Petersburg. This frustrated not only British officials but also officials in St. Petersburg, who at times struggled to reign in the local consuls. One issue that challenged British and Russian officials was what to do with the ex-Shah, Mohammed Ali, who was residing in Persia in exile, convinced that the Russians would intervene on his behalf. The British were strongly opposed to the ex-Shah's presence in Persia: Grey complained to Benckendorff in early 1912 that the continuing chaos throughout the country—including in Britain's southern zone—was a direct result of the ex-Shah's presence, and the only way to restore order in the country was to promote a strong central government. When Russia proposed negotiations between the ex-Shah and the Persian government as a way to resolve the dispute (described in more detail in the Russian section below), Britain was prepared to accept Russia's demands for Persia (outlined in more detail below) as long as the ex-Shah would be removed.¹⁹⁹ Despite the resolution of this issue, independent actions of local Russian officials continued to threaten the Anglo-Russian understanding in Persia, and British officials were never entirely sure whether the disorders were "willfully provoked" by Russian consuls "in order to provide an excuse for intervention."²⁰⁰ However, for the sake of preserving the agreement, Britain was willing to blame escalating interference in northern Persia on local Russian agents rather than on official Russian policy.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Siegel, 2002, pp. 110–116.

¹⁹⁹ Siegel, 2002, pp. 119–124.

²⁰⁰ Siegel, 2002, p. 128.

²⁰¹ Siegel, 2002, p. 128.

Hosting of Russian Foreign Minister at Balmoral for Wide-Ranging Discussions

In September 1912, Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Dmitryevich Sazonov, traveled to Balmoral in Britain and met for several days with King George V and Grey. The meeting which provided the two countries with an opportunity to try to reconcile the increasing difficulties they faced in Central Asia. The Russian proposals are discussed in more detail in the Russian section that follows. The first topic on the agenda was Persia. In response to the Russian proposal to provide Persia additional financial assistance, Grey agreed that a loan would be necessary for stability in Persia but did not want Britain and Russia to assume the entire financial burden. In response to Russia's proposal for a partition of Persia as a way of preventing a third country (e.g., Germany) from seeking railway concessions in Persia's neutral zone, Grey was opposed to a partition but offered a counterproposal to establish a Persian road guard in the neutral zone under British officers to increase stability there. When Russia pressed Britain for a commitment on the trans-Persian railway and conceded that Britain could control the timetable for construction, Grey expressed initial support, citing the railway's potential utility as a counterbalance to Germany's Baghdad railway. In Grey's view, railway construction was inevitable, and Britain would be better off if it could influence operations. In response to Russia's complaints about Afghanistan, Britain again warned that there was little chance of obtaining the Amir's recognition of the convention. Overall, Grey considered the meeting to be productive while remaining realistic about the extent of unresolved issues in Persia and Afghanistan.²⁰²

Britain's Agreement to Russia's Trans-Persian Railway Project

Two key challenges arose in Persia in 1913. Russia became more vocal about its unhappiness with the provisions of the convention related to Persia, and Britain started to consider whether the convention would need to be revised. The first challenge stemmed from the aforementioned trans-Persian railway. Although Grey and the Foreign Office were tentatively optimistic about Britain's participation in the railway, other parts of the British government began to voice their opposition in 1913. For example, the Committee on Imperial Defense (CID) and the India Office undertook and published a review of Britain's position on the trans-Persian railway. This review concluded that the project could not be justified on commercial and economic grounds alone; furthermore, from a defense standpoint, it would prevent Britain from hindering Russia's transportation in the buffer zone and thus pose a threat to India. Nevertheless, the Foreign Office's most pressing concern with regard to the trans-Persian railway was its importance for the maintenance of the Anglo-Russian relationship. Moreover, the British government feared that if Britain refused to participate, Russia would turn to Germany. This sentiment was outlined in all Foreign Office and CID memos from the beginning of 1913. By spring of that year, Britain perceived Russo-German rapprochement as a big enough threat that London sacrificed its financial and strategic concerns and openly committed to the trans-Persian railway. The details of the negotiations over the railway itself, though, proved to be another stumbling block

²⁰² Siegel, 2002, pp. 137–141.

for Anglo-Russian relations. Of note was a disagreement about the terminus of the railway, with Britain proposing a different terminus than Russia because of concerns about what would be realistically defensible by British naval power in the Gulf.²⁰³ The India Office, in particular, insisted that Britain refuse to give in to Russian demands on the railway, arguing that Britain would be conceding too much by doing so.²⁰⁴

Acceptance of Russia's Proposal for Partitioning Persia's Neutral Zone

The second issue of contention in Persia in 1913 was Britain's continued and increasing bitterness toward Russia's generally aggressive policies in northern Persia, which it believed continued to destabilize the Persian government. Although British officials had been more or less resigned a year earlier to put the blame on rogue local Russian consuls, this position was becoming untenable, and British officials could no longer believe that Russia's systematic absorption of northern Persia was not centrally directed. Britain also had to respond to Russia's request in May 1913 for more elbow room in Persia and to Russia's desire to revise the convention to divide the neutral zone (see the next section for the specific Russian proposal). Britain felt that Russia's request for more latitude in northern Persia would be in contravention to the 1907 agreement and would violate both countries' pledges to maintain Persian independence.²⁰⁵ Britain was also opposed to dividing the neutral zone; doing so would extend Britain's already overstretched imperial responsibilities and weaken the Persian government's position. Nevertheless, Britain did not feel that it had any other options in Persia—it could not stop Russia's absorption of the northern zone and London also worried that St. Petersburg would continue its penetration of Persia past the northern zone and into the neutral zone.²⁰⁶ Thus, in light of increased Russian influence in Persia and despite significant reservations, Britain believed it had little choice but to consider Sazonov's proposal.²⁰⁷

By spring 1914, Grey and the Foreign Office had officially shifted position regarding the Russian proposal on the neutral zone. This stemmed partly from the recognition that it would be the best way to salvage waning British influence in Persia and prevent further Russian encroachment, but recognition of the increased strategic importance of oil was the central factor that motivated Grey's acceptance that a revision was needed.²⁰⁸ Britain was seeking to modernize its navy, and one of the most notable reforms would be to convert its ships from

²⁰³ Siegel, 2002, pp. 159–162. Britain wanted the railway's terminus to be Bandar-e-Abbas.

²⁰⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 164.

²⁰⁵ Siegel, 2002, pp. 166–168.

²⁰⁶ Britain believed that it was incapable of preventing Russia's encroachment on Persia without "active measures to thwart Russian advances," which it judged would "derail British world strategy and endanger Indian security" (Siegel, 2002, p. 168).

²⁰⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 169.

²⁰⁸ Siegel, 2002, p. 178.

coal power to oil.²⁰⁹ To secure a reliable supply of oil to implement this change, Britain bought a controlling share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company that would allow it to exploit Persia's oil, which lay mostly in the neutral zone.²¹⁰ Russian advances in the neutral zone of Persia and increased involvement in Persia thus threatened what had become "the most significant element that Persia had to offer Britain—oil."²¹¹ Russia's negative reaction toward Britain's acquisition of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (described in the next section) made Britain fear that Russia would respond with its own advance into the neutral zone.²¹²

Conclusion

By 1914, the 1907 convention had become unacceptable to both Britain and Russia. In Persia, Britain had reluctantly come to the conclusion that a partition of the neutral zone was desirable to counter what seemed like an inevitable Russian encroachment and to ensure that British strategic interests in Persia's oil were safeguarded. In Afghanistan, Britain's inability to secure the Amir's consent essentially rendered that portion of the agreement moot.

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Like Britain, Russia remained openly committed to the convention. The officials who negotiated the agreement, notably Izvolsky, were personally invested in trying to demonstrate the agreement's worth in the face of escalating crises in the region. However, Russia continued to push into Central Asia and take advantage of opportunities, crises, and unrest as they presented themselves, which strained relations with Britain. St. Petersburg continued to advance its political, economic, and (at times) military influence in northern Persia. Russia also pushed Britain to either fix myriad Russian grievances on the Russo-Afghan border or let Russia open relations with Afghan officers and find its own solutions. This section will trace how, in response to the crises and flash points outlined in the previous section, Russia pushed strongly for advantage while still attempting to preserve the agreement, at least by letter if decreasingly in spirit. Although Russia became gradually more aggressive in asserting its interests in Central Asia (particularly in Persia), we will show how Russia's behavior had more to do with events on the ground and was not evidence of St. Petersburg being emboldened by Britain adopting a less-hardline approach. Although there are few Russian internal statements about British resolve in the historical record, the circumstances outlined here suggest that events on the ground increased threats to Russian interests, and those events (rather than a perception of weak will on the part of Britain) appear to have motivated Russian policies.

²⁰⁹ Maria S. Higgins, "Winston S. Churchill's Legacy to the Royal Navy," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 27, No. 6, November–December 1974, pp. 67–77.

²¹⁰ Higgins, 1974, p. 73; Siegel, 2002, pp. 180–182.

²¹¹ Siegel, 2002, p. 178.

²¹² Siegel, 2002, p. 185.

Russia's Continued Fidelity to Agreement Despite Afghan Amir's Refusal to Agree

In response to the Afghan Amir's initial refusal to recognize the agreement in the aftermath of its signing, Russia assured Britain in March 1908 that St. Petersburg would continue to adhere to the agreement as if the Amir had already consented.²¹³ As noted in an earlier section, Britain worried that this would aggravate Russia; instead, with this gesture of good faith, "Russia appeared more outwardly committed to the agreement than ever before."²¹⁴ At the end of the Jamshedi refugee crisis, Izvolsky expressed his satisfaction that the matter had been resolved without a British expedition to Kabul, which in his view would have reopened the Afghan question and rendered the agreement worthless. However, the realities of Russo-Afghan border relations meant that Russia continued to press Britain to allow Russia to normalize its relations with Afghanistan. There were frequent interactions between the local officials of both states on such issues as cross-border theft and raids; these interactions between Russian and Afghan officials in principle should have been conducted through Britain under the 1907 convention.²¹⁵ Russian officials, although frustrated with Britain's inability to get the Amir to consent to the agreement, believed that the British were operating in good faith. There is no evidence that Russia tried to take advantage of the fact that Britain could not get the Amir to consent to the agreement.

Russian Actions to Secure Roads and Protect Trade in Persia

There is no evidence that Britain's willingness to come to an agreement regarding Persia as part of the 1907 convention emboldened the Russians in Persia. Izvolsky declared his opposition to Russian military intervention in Persian internal affairs.²¹⁶ During the June 1908 incident at the British legation in Persia, Izvolsky reprimanded Hartwig (the Russian minister in Persia), and told Britain that local Russian officials acted without the knowledge or permission of the Russian government. He reminded Hartwig in a telegram that he was under strict instructions to "not interfere in the internal affairs of Persia and work amicably with his British counterpart."²¹⁷ Thus, like British leaders, Russian leaders took the crisis in Persia as an opportunity to prove that the agreement was working.²¹⁸

However, Russia was alarmed that domestic turmoil in Persia would damage St. Petersburg's attempts to expand commercial and trading interests in the northern sphere.²¹⁹ Thus, in 1909, the local political situation in Persia had deteriorated to such a degree that Russia felt

²¹³ Siegel, 2002, p. 26.

²¹⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 62.

²¹⁵ Siegel, 2002, pp. 37, 61.

²¹⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 32.

²¹⁷ Siegel, 2002, p. 39.

²¹⁸ Siegel, 2002, p. 33; White, 1995, p. 135.

²¹⁹ White, 1995, p. 135.

that it needed to take urgent action to secure the roads and protect its trade. As noted in the previous section, Russia dispatched troops in April 1909 to the northern Persian territory of Tabriz to safeguard its interests, which deeply upset the British. Izvolsky assured the British that the Russian troops had no intention of taking action against Persian constitutionalists (which would have been considered direct interference in Persian affairs and thus a violation of the convention) and were doing only the minimum to protect Russian subjects and trading interests.²²⁰ Nevertheless, the internal crises in Persia provided Russia with an opportunity to underline its interests in that country with displays of force that, although pushing right to the edge of the convention's limits, did not abrogate the agreement.²²¹ At the same time, Russia did exercise restraint in Persia in an attempt to preserve the agreement. For example, when the Persian Shah—Russia's protégé—was ousted in spring 1909 and replaced by his son, Russia considered an armed intervention in Tehran but ultimately exercised restraint. Nevertheless, the size and composition of Russian troop presence in northern Persia continued to be debated within Russia: Some factions argued that the Russian presence was excessive for the local threats faced; others argued that Russian presence in Persia should be augmented rather than decreased. Russia promised Britain that it would withdraw troops from northern Persia when the situation became less volatile.²²²

Frustration over Refugee Flow from Afghanistan

In 1910, problems on the Russo-Afghan border continued to vex the parties to the agreement. Russia was still irritated by the Amir's unwillingness to prevent the transborder flight of the Jamshedi refugees, which threatened to lead to a wider Russo-Afghan conflict. In addition, transborder horse thievery began to irritate local Russian officials, leading Russia to ask Britain again to restrain its semi-protectorate. Russia continued to be frustrated about its inability to engage directly with Afghanistan to address these cross-border issues. Russo-Afghan tension culminated at the end of 1910, when another flight of refugees—this time a group called the Hazaras—spilled into Russia in an exodus from alleged Afghan oppression. The Russians, still unable to deal directly with Afghanistan, asked the British to persuade the Amir to halt the flow of refugees.²²³ This crisis again demonstrated the difficulty that Russia faced in resolving local crises without officially sanctioned communication with the Amir. Although Russia was not ready at this point to abrogate the agreement or ask Britain for a renegotiation of the Afghanistan provision, it was growing frustrated and increasingly perceived Britain as ineffective at controlling their semi-protectorate.

²²⁰ Siegel, 2002, pp. 53, 55.

²²¹ Geyer, 1987, p. 337.

²²² Siegel, 2002, pp. 59, 64, 87.

²²³ Siegel, 2002, pp. 80, 94–95.

End to Formal Opposition to German-Backed Baghdad Railway

Issues surrounding the trans-Persian railway also came to a head in 1910. The threat from the German-backed Baghdad railway heightened Russia's commitment to the trans-Persian railway for commercial and security reasons.²²⁴ Russia mistakenly believed that Britain would support its railway, underestimating Britain's concern for the threat that the Russian trans-Persian railway would pose to India. However, in fall 1910, Sazonov replaced Izvolsky as the Russian foreign minister and decided that Russia could not afford to pursue a policy that "constantly placed her in opposition to Germany."²²⁵ In November 1910, a meeting between the German and Russian emperors ended Russian formal opposition to the Baghdad railway.²²⁶ Russia tried to reassure the British that this policy in no way implied a change in Russia's commitment to the 1907 convention.²²⁷ Although Russian policy strained relations with the British, it resulted from Russia's attempts to preserve its security and decrease the risk of conflict by reducing tensions with Germany. There is no evidence that Russia was emboldened to act counter to British interests by Britain's less-hardline approach.

Ultimatums to Persian Government over Shuster Affair

Russia reacted to the Shuster affair in Persia with a great deal of hostility. For example, when Shuster attempted to appoint Stokes (the anti-Russian military attaché), St. Petersburg demanded assurances that Stokes's duties be confined to organizational work in Tehran and that he not be allowed to work in Russia's northern sphere. In response to Shuster's seizure of property belonging to the Shah's brothers, Russia informed Britain that the instability in Persia—caused by the general unrest and Shuster's attempts to dictate Persian affairs in a manner that was incompatible with Russian interests—was intolerable, and that Russia could no longer refrain from an occupation of northern Persia. In November 1911, Shuster appointed another anti-Russian Englishman to a position in his administration. This time, Russia issued an ultimatum to the Persian government, threatening to dispatch troops to Persia if their demands were not met. Without waiting for the Persian response, Russia dispatched the troops to Persia. After Persia complied with Russia's initial demands, St. Petersburg chose to escalate its demands to include the dismissal of Shuster and the payment of indemnity to Russia by Persia.²²⁸

Although a crisis was ultimately averted when the Majlis voted to accede to the Russian demands and dismiss Shuster, the Shuster affair demonstrated the boldness with which

²²⁴ Siegel, 2002, pp. 65–66.

²²⁵ Neilson, 1996, p. 313. Izvolsky became Russia's ambassador in Paris in 1910 (Siegel, 2002, p. 86).

²²⁶ In the agreement, Russia would drop its opposition to the Baghdad railway and agree to connect that railway to its own Persian line; in exchange, Germany would not seek railway, telegraph, or territorial concessions in northern Persia. See Siegel, 2002, p. 91; Neilson, 1996, p. 314.

²²⁷ Neilson, 1996, p. 315.

²²⁸ Siegel, 2002, pp. 106, 109–111.

Russia sought to assert its interests in Persia. Although there are not internal Russian statements about British resolve in this instance, it appears that Russia was reacting to Persia's policy of bringing in a U.S. official who sought to undermine Russian influence. Again, this is evidence not of Russia becoming emboldened by British policies but of St. Petersburg reacting to events on the ground.

Further Russian Encroachment into Northern Persia

By 1912, Russian encroachment into northern Persia threatened to negate the principles of noninterference on which the Persia clauses of the convention were based. Although Russian officials in St. Petersburg urged local military officials to act cautiously and avoid interference in internal Persian affairs, Russian local officials in the north conducted themselves like an occupying power—essentially taking on the functions of local government to quell unrest and promoting what they perceived to be Russian imperial interests. Despite growing Russian military involvement in the north, Sazonov continued to deny the idea of a permanent Russian occupation both publicly and internally to senior Russian officials in St. Petersburg. And although Russian consuls in Persia strongly supported the ex-Shah's continued presence in northern Persia, Sazonov was aware that any Russian actions perceived as supporting the Shah too aggressively would threaten Grey's tenure as foreign minister—and, thus, the orientation of Anglo-Russian relations. In an attempt to defuse the situation in January 1912, Sazonov proposed to the British ambassador to Russia, George Buchanan, the establishment of direct negotiations between the ex-Shah and the Persian government.²²⁹ Russia believed that the ex-Shah might be persuaded to leave if he were offered enough money. Russia also used the negotiations as an opportunity to advance several demands for Persia, such as the preservation of the monarchy, British and Russian input on the deployment of Persian troops, and other Russian concessions in the northern zone. As Siegel notes, "Russia was asking Britain and Persia to recognize Russia's independence of action in its zone."²³⁰ Although the Russian press criticized Sazonov for negotiating the ex-Shah's departure, the foreign minister credited the Anglo-Russian agreement in an April 1912 speech for preventing a dangerous situation in Persia from becoming worse.²³¹ However, as Geyer notes,

[I]t was only thanks to the internal needs of the Anglo-Russian cartel that Persia itself continued to exist, at least as a fiction of international law, and that Russia and England pledged themselves to maintain her "integrity and independence." Russian officials in northern Persia only felt compelled to observe some limitations and restrictions because of the tense relations which characterized the Anglo-Russian partnership."²³²

²²⁹ Siegel, 2002, pp. 109, 123–124, 142.

²³⁰ Siegel, 2002, p. 124.

²³¹ Siegel, 2002, p. 125.

²³² Geyer, 1987, p. 100.

Killing of Russian Officers at Afghan-Russian Border

The year 1912 also brought additional difficulties for Russia in Afghanistan. In December 1912, two Russian officers patrolling the border with Afghanistan were killed when they stopped an Afghan caravan containing contraband.²³³ The incident was emblematic of the issues that Russia continued to face on its border with Afghanistan. As already noted, the convention stipulated that Russia was unable to deal directly with the Afghan border authorities to investigate the murders, and Russia was becoming increasingly frustrated with Britain's inability to convince the Amir to be receptive to Russia's interests. From the Russian perspective, "now that Russia was no longer a threat to the buffer state and to India, Britain should do everything possible to coerce the emir into working with Russia."²³⁴ There is no evidence that Russia saw Britain as having bad intentions. If anything, St. Petersburg perceived London as being ineffective at controlling its client in Afghanistan. In spite of the less-hardline approach that Britain took and the 1907 convention, events on the ground and actions of third parties in Central Asia increased tension in the relationship.

Russian Proposal to Partition Persian Neutral Zone

When the British and Russian foreign ministers met at Balmoral in September 1912, Persia was the most important issue on the agenda. The two sides agreed (as noted in the above section) that Persia needed additional financial support to stabilize. Russia proposed a joint loan and that the neutral zone in Persia be dissolved (which would amount to a partition of Persia) as a way of preventing a third power (e.g., Germany) from seeking railway concessions in the neutral zone. Sazonov was opposed to Britain's proposal to establish a Persian road guard to bring stability to the neutral zone, noting that the Russian public might view this as Russia giving up the neutral zone to Britain and getting nothing in return. On Afghanistan, Sazonov presented Grey with a document outlining Russia's principal complaints regarding its relationship with Afghanistan and emphasized the necessity of direct relations. Although Sazonov left Balmoral "pleased overall with his visit," the Russian public criticized him for not achieving a revision of the convention.²³⁵ Although it would take until the end of this period for Russia to become more explicit about the need to renegotiate the convention, the Russians proposals at Balmoral—specifically, the proposal to dissolve the neutral zone in Persia—reflected Russia's growing perception that the 1907 convention as negotiated with Britain increasingly did not serve its interests because of changing conditions in Persia.

²³³ Siegel, 2002, p. 130.

²³⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 132.

²³⁵ Siegel, 2002, p. 141.

Shift in Russian Strategic Calculus Toward Greater Recognition of the Value of Maintaining Accommodation with Britain

Although Britain was concerned in 1913 that Russia was heading for rapprochement with Germany, events in Europe actually shifted Russia's broader strategic calculus toward a greater recognition of the value of maintaining the accommodation with Britain. For example, the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 shook Russian confidence in the ability of the various alliances to keep the peace. The feeling became widespread among Russian officials that a clash with Germany and Austria-Hungary was inevitable.²³⁶ At the end of the period, the 1913 Linman affair (a crisis sparked by the 1913 appointment of a German corps commander in Constantinople that, from the Russian perspective, would put that area and the straits under German control), apparently decided both Tsar Nicholas and Sazonov on the impossibility of any understanding with Germany.²³⁷ For the first time since the Russo-Japanese War, the domestic argument that Russian foreign policy needed to be tied and subordinated to domestic stability was not advanced. The cooperation of the entente powers, including maintaining positive relations with Britain, was regarded by St. Petersburg as increasingly critical to Russian security.²³⁸

Continuing Assertion of Russia's Role in Persia

Despite the Russian desire—and the desire of Sazonov specifically—to strengthen the Anglo-Russian relationship and attain a favorable balance of power in Europe, unresolved issues between the two countries in Central Asia undermined this goal. In 1913, Russia continued to assert itself in Persia. During the aforementioned negotiations in 1913 over the trans-Persian railway, Russia could not understand Britain's hesitation—which, as mentioned earlier, was rooted in concerns over the security of India. Prime Minister Kokotsov declared that there was no conceivable situation in which Russia would benefit from taking India. During the actual negotiations over the railway, Russia objected to Britain's proposal of the location of the railway's terminus (Bandar-e-Abbas) for several reasons, including what Russia considered the prohibitive costs of converting the terminus into a suitable port. Moreover, Russia's policies in northern Persia had become more openly aggressive. Sazonov had previously countered British accusations about Russian obstructionist policies in Persia by portraying these incidents as entirely the independent actions of local officials. But in May 1913, he declared to Britain that "Russia desired more elbow room and freedom of action in northern Persia."²³⁹ Although Sazonov assured Britain that Russia did not wish to annex any part of Persia, he told British officials that Russia did want much more latitude in northern Persia without British interference, which potentially threatened the convention's provisions on refraining from

²³⁶ Geyer, 1987, p. 274; McDonald, 1992, p. 203.

²³⁷ McDonald, 1992, pp. 190, 195.

²³⁸ McDonald, 1992, p. 195.

²³⁹ Siegel, 2002, pp. 162–163, 167.

intervention in Persian domestic affairs.²⁴⁰ Sazonov also began pushing harder for a revision of the agreement to redistribute the neutral zone between the two nations; as noted above, Britain felt it had little option but to seriously consider this idea. Thus, by the end of 1913, the division of Persia's neutral zone and Russia's attainment of a freer hand in Persia seemed increasingly likely. In the year immediately before World War I, the northern provinces of Persia were, as Geyer notes, "not far removed from the status of an internal colony of the Russian empire . . . it was only thanks to the internal needs of the Anglo-Russian cartel that Persia itself continued to exist, at least as a fiction of international law."²⁴¹

Hostility Toward Britain's Acquisition of Controlling Share in Anglo-Persian Oil Company

Finally, Russia's reaction to Britain's acquisition of a controlling share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1914 was hostile. Russia accused Britain of extending its influence beyond the southern sphere and argued that Britain's actions were tantamount to a British absorption of Persia's southern sphere. Russia had plenty of oil and did not want any, but Russia also did not want Britain going anywhere near the Russian zone. Sazonov's proclamations on Russian actions in Persia were becoming increasingly expansionistic; in 1914, the tsar personally proposed to the British that the neutral zone be partitioned.²⁴²

Conclusion

Russia's goal for reaching an agreement with Britain over Central Asia was to buy time for recovery in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War and for allowing St. Petersburg to focus inward on addressing domestic turmoil. But once Russia had regrouped, the government was prepared to resume the "forward policy in Central Asia that had so characterized its late-19th century imperial policy, in an attempt to reestablish and solidify its place at the great power table,"²⁴³ as its actions toward the end of this period show. Specifically, Russia sought to consolidate its influence in Persia's northern zone and legitimize its right to conduct operations in that sphere as it saw fit without accusations from Britain that these actions constituted interference in Persia's internal affairs in contravention of the 1907 agreement. In Afghanistan, Russia had essentially lost patience with its inability to deal directly with Afghan authorities to solve the growing litany of challenges on the Russo-Afghan border. Thus, from Russia's perspective, the agreement as negotiated in 1907 was no longer sufficient and needed to be revised.

²⁴⁰ Siegel, 2002, p. 168.

²⁴¹ Geyer, 1987, p. 333.

²⁴² Siegel, 2002, pp. 184–185.

²⁴³ Siegel, 2002, p. 197.

End of Accommodation

The 1907 Convention did not really end. It remained in force—although, as illustrated by the third historical period, it was on the verge of collapse. But before that could happen or the Convention could be renegotiated, World War I broke out.

Longer-Term Implications

Two central questions are key to understanding the long-term implications of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. First, did the convention help either side achieve its stated objectives? Second, was the agreement necessary for—or did it substantially contribute to—the wartime alliance against Germany in 1914?

Achieving Stated Objectives

On this question, the results are mixed. The agreement likely contributed to reducing the risk of armed conflict or war between Russia and Britain in Central Asia. Despite numerous tensions and flashpoints, particularly in Persia and Afghanistan, officials in both Russia and Britain—particularly Grey and Izvolsky, who were the architects of the agreement—had a political interest in keeping the agreement alive, over and beyond the strategic calculations that had motivated the two sides to pursue the agreement in the first place.²⁴⁴ Even with these strong commitments, however, both sides desired a renegotiation or alteration of the agreement by 1914 because of changing circumstances. In Persia, Russia wanted a complete partition of the country rather than the two spheres and neutral zone that the agreement provided for. Britain, meanwhile, was increasingly concerned that Russia would simply absorb Persia. Moreover, with the discovery of oil in the country (and the transition of the British navy from coal to oil), Persia took on increased importance. A full partition (which would have left most of the oil-producing regions in the southern, British sector) was seen as the most advantageous approach. Russia still desired formal relations and trade with Afghanistan; Britain wanted to keep Afghanistan as its semi-protectorate and prohibit direct relations between Russia and the Amir. Thus, although the convention does appear to have helped reduce tensions and the risk of war in the short term, it also did not by itself represent a durable solution to the conflicts of interest between Britain and Russia, which likely would have led to revisions to the agreement or to the souring of relations. However, challenges in Europe intervened before Britain and Russia could resolve their differences in Central Asia. Shortly after the two sides recognized the need to rework the agreement, tensions in Europe intensified with the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Siegel argues that both Russian and British policymakers were focused on affairs in Persia and expected the matter to be

²⁴⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 43.

put on the back burner only temporarily.²⁴⁵ In the end, the situation in the Balkans grew into a crisis that engulfed Europe and led to the First World War.

Perhaps the primary initial motivation of Britain in pursuing the agreement was to redirect resources from the defense of India to other uses. On this score, the agreement seems to have been a more limited success. Although the agreement reduced what had become an increasingly costly competition, Britain did not significantly reduce spending on the defense of India after 1907.²⁴⁶ This is because British officials believed that the level of spending prior to 1907 had been insufficient for the Russian threat to India.²⁴⁷ In sum, the agreement did not achieve Britain's goal to reduce spending on India's defense, but that might not have been realistic in the first place. In the absence of an agreement with Russia over Central Asia, costs might have continued to escalate. The agreement at least stabilized spending.

For Russia, the agreement was primarily intended to help limit the risk of future destabilizing conflict with a great power rival while it focused on domestic reconstruction. This agreement was a necessary precondition to obtain international loans for domestic recovery, which Russia did manage to secure and thus avert bankruptcy. However, there is little evidence that Russia used the resources and time that the agreement helped provide to undertake serious domestic economic reform:

Quantifying research has shown conclusively that the structural weaknesses in the Russian economy were not overcome by the industrial boom . . . Since Western economies were growing at a far faster pace, attempts before the war to reduce Russia's relative backwardness were totally thwarted.²⁴⁸

Regardless of whether Russia took full advantage of the agreement to address its underlying weaknesses, the convention—by reducing the risk of a war with Britain and helping Russia access international loans and finance—did achieve at least some of the key goals of its initial architects.

Although the agreement did not lead to either side fully achieving the goals it intended, Russia and Britain did not fight a war over Central Asia, as many in the late 19th century had anticipated might happen. In this sense, the agreement helped reduce the risk of a future war and prevented both sides from an even greater escalation of military costs in the region. Although this is undoubtedly a more limited benefit than originally hoped for (particularly by Britain), it is significant.

²⁴⁵ Siegel, 2002, pp. 188, 194.

²⁴⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 47; Neilson, 1996, p. 316.

²⁴⁷ Siegel, 2002, pp. 48–49.

²⁴⁸ Geyer, 1987, p. 271.

Wartime Alliance Against Germany

The second important question related to long-term implications is whether the agreement was a necessary or important supporting precondition for a wartime alliance between Britain and Russia against Germany in the First World War. In short, although the agreement did help improve Russo-British relations overall and make the Triple Entente with France easier to achieve when war broke out, the 1907 convention was a localized agreement and its conclusion alone would not have been sufficient for the wartime alliance.

With Britain, Russia, and France forming the Triple Entente alliance at the onset of the First World War, the 1907 agreement might be interpreted as one of the principal diplomatic foundations of the European alliance structure. The evidence presented in this chapter paints a more complex picture. For starters, the agreement itself was focused entirely on concerns in Central Asia, not in Europe. And although the 1907 agreement offered opportunities for improved relations, tensions persisted in Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet. As previously noted, the 1907 agreement was on the verge of collapse on several fronts by 1914 and about to be renegotiated by the two powers. Neither side considered the contentious issues in the relationship to have been settled permanently.²⁴⁹

Although the 1907 convention certainly improved overall relations between Britain and Russia and made a combined alliance with France easier to achieve when war began—as was the primary goal of French policy in its own support for the Anglo-Russian rapprochement—other factors were more determinative of the eventual wartime alliance. As Wilson notes, the check on Germany was a secondary and “incidental” justification for the strengthening of the entente among Britain, France, and Russia.²⁵⁰ Particularly in the second and third historical periods, Russia was becoming more fearful of German behavior and policies: The refusal to participate in the international loan to Russia during the Algeciras Conference, the Linman affair, the Baghdad railway, and the general Russian perception that German foreign policy was becoming more aggressive and selfish helped create clear motivations for Russia to find strong allies. That said, although Russia for the most part welcomed the agreement with Britain, it did not automatically follow that Russia became anti-German. The Algeciras Conference increased Russia’s fear of Germany, but even this “brought to the fore some of those who saw the danger as being so great that only an alliance directly with Germany would provide adequate security.”²⁵¹ Throughout his ministry, Izvolsky stressed the need for good Russo-German relations as an essential factor of Russian foreign and domestic policy.²⁵² Thus, although recognizing the risks it faced from German behavior, Russia tried to strike a difficult balance between maintaining good relations with Germany (stemming from its need for international peace so it could conduct internal reconstruction) and maintain-

²⁴⁹ Siegel, 2002, pp. 198–200.

²⁵⁰ Wilson, 1985, p. 77.

²⁵¹ White, 1995, p. 242.

²⁵² McDonald, 1992, p. 111.

ing good relations with France and Britain (which offered benefits and safeguards against German domination).²⁵³ Although the 1907 convention helped ease Russia away from Germany and toward Britain, it was as much a symptom of broader changes in the European alliance system as it was a cause of them.

As already stated, however, the 1907 convention remained a localized agreement, covering a region of vital importance for both states. Russia and Britain did not subordinate Central Asia to European concerns. As Siegel notes, “such a conclusion ignores the crucial role [that] India and the rest of the Empire played in the formation of British foreign policy, and the importance of the continued growth in Russia’s Asian orientation in the post–Russo-Japanese War period.”²⁵⁴ The agreement, focused as it was on regional concerns, was not a sufficient nor a necessary condition for an Anglo-Russian alliance in 1914.

Conclusion

Benefits and Costs

In the end, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 had relatively limited benefits and costs for Russia and Britain. The actual benefits that St. Petersburg and London gained from the agreement were not as significant as each nation had initially hoped, particularly in Britain’s case.

Benefits

Britain. Although the agreement did mitigate Britain’s threat perceptions of an urgent and direct Russian advance on India, it ultimately did not bring about any reduction in the British Army’s requirements or expenditures for the defense of India, and therefore did not in the short term alleviate British concerns regarding imperial overstretch. At best, the agreement helped stave off greater future expenditures in Central Asia that might have occurred had relations with Russia continued to deteriorate.

Russia. The benefits of the convention were more apparent in Russia’s case. Because relations with Britain improved, Russia received international loans with support from the French government, which helped St. Petersburg avoid bankruptcy and forestall even greater domestic instability. The negotiations also helped Russia bring Britain closer to St. Petersburg’s desired position on the Straits Convention. Britain could not unilaterally revise the Straits Convention, but having British support for Russia’s objectives was valuable; over time, it could have helped lead to the realization of this long-term Russian goal, although substantial progress was not made before the outbreak of war in 1914. Finally, the agreement indirectly helped Russia achieve greater security vis-à-vis Germany. Although the creation of the Triple Entente was neither a Russian motivation for agreeing to British proposals to settle

²⁵³ White, 1995, p. 211.

²⁵⁴ Siegel, 2002, p. 19.

disputes in Central Asia nor a direct consequence, the 1907 agreement improved overall relations between Britain and Russia and made a combined alliance with France easier to achieve in the years that followed. An alternative scenario could have led to heightened risks of direct conflict between Britain and Russia over Persia or Afghanistan.

Costs

If the agreement's benefits were limited, so were its costs and risks.

Britain. From the British perspective, Russia did not become more demanding or aggressive as a result of the agreement, and there was no evidence that Britain's pursuit of a less-hardline approach caused Russia or other states to view London as weak-willed. In the years following the convention, Russia did pursue competitive behavior and attempted to leverage crises in Persia and Afghanistan to its advantage. However, this opportunism was at most a continuation of Russian strategy in the region from before 1907, not an expansion or escalation of its objectives. Britain faced comparatively few opportunity costs in the regions where it had acknowledged Russian interests because it had little appetite for further expansion in Persia, Afghanistan, or Tibet and was happy to essentially ratify the status quo. The British government did face domestic political challenges as a result of the agreement and found itself needing to defend the decision to engage with Russia against both Liberal and Conservative critics. In the end, however, these challenges proved manageable and mainly served to incentivize the government to robustly implement the agreement as a way of showing that it was working, thereby validating the initial decision.

Russia. From the Russian perspective, the convention's costs were primarily in the forgone advantages that Russia could have pursued—particularly in Persia. Absent the agreement, Russia could have deepened and expanded its influence in Persia, bringing more of the country under its control.²⁵⁵ Doing so would have involved a greater commitment of Russian resources and attention, however, at a time when both were sorely needed for domestic purposes. In addition, the convention—by improving Russian relations with both Britain and France—likely helped make a future rapprochement with Germany less likely. Although St. Petersburg decided to pursue the agreement with Britain only after concluding that better relations with Germany were not possible, the hardening of divisions in Europe that the convention modestly helped to facilitate was to prove immensely costly for Russia seven years later.

Conditions for Success

There were several conditions for the convention's relative success for Anglo-Russian relations. We summarize these in Table 2.2.

²⁵⁵ Russia had limited interest and potential for near-term expansion in Afghanistan or Tibet.

TABLE 2.2

Conditions for Success: Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907

Conditions	Description
Growing risk of war	Both sides were aware of the growing risks of war in Central Asia, and both countries had strong strategic and domestic incentives to prevent war.
Issues at stake were secondary	- Since the late 19th century, Britain had sought an agreement with Russia to rein in perceived imperial overreach and to respond to domestic financial imperatives that called for reducing expenditures on India's defense. - Russia sought to help establish the best foreign conditions for its primary need to restore domestic order at a time of extreme weakness.
Transactional gains were possible	Russia was also motivated by quid pro quo considerations, including securing international loan guarantees with the help of France and Britain and the potential for future renegotiation of the Straits Convention.
Leaders committed to success	After the agreement was signed, both countries were outwardly committed to preserving the agreement in order to demonstrate its value.

Long-Term Outcomes

Despite the convention's limited benefits, the agreement did not substantially improve overall relations between London and St. Petersburg. Some tensions were left unresolved or incompletely resolved, and local proxies in the region sometimes pursued policies contrary to the spirit of the agreement. In particular, relations with Afghanistan and Persia remained unresolved.

Russia became increasingly frustrated by the convention's prohibition on regularized relations with Afghanistan. Such relations were seen by St. Petersburg as necessary to resolve the litany of security challenges arising along the border between Russia and Afghanistan. Britain was committed to maintaining the semi-protectorate status of Afghanistan despite the fact that it could not convince the Amir to consent to the agreement or behave in ways that were more amenable to Russian interests.

In Persia, revolution and instability created a power vacuum and, from St. Petersburg's perspective, demanded action. As events in the third historical period demonstrated, Russia was quick to promote its interests and work toward the gradual absorption of Persia's northern province.²⁵⁶ As tensions—sometimes exacerbated by local Russian officials—between autocratic and democratic forces in Persia rose, Russia felt the agreement-imposed limitations on its influence, though St. Petersburg continued to exercise restraint at key moments (thus preserving the agreement). Britain, for its part, became more concerned that Russia would simply absorb Persia in response to the unrest, and the discovery of oil in Britain's southern sphere increased London's desire for a complete partition of the country, which would have required a renegotiation of the convention.

²⁵⁶ Siegel, 2002, p. 198.

Closing Thoughts

The continuation of competitive behavior by both countries in Central Asia demonstrates the fact that, despite an outward commitment to accommodation, improving relations was not always prioritized above other goals by either country. Each state continued to pursue significant interests in Central Asia, even when doing so injected tension into the relationship. India continued to play a crucial role in the formation of Britain's foreign policy, and Russia continued to assert its influence in Central Asia, particularly in Persia.

In the end, however, the continuation of competitive behavior in Central Asia underscored the limited nature of the agreement. The 1907 convention was never intended by either side to turn the other into an ally or partner. Rather, it was a localized agreement focused only on Central Asia, designed to reduce the risk of conflict (and, in Russia's case, bring about some additional narrow, tangible benefits). The convention focused on a limited set of goals that left key areas of disagreement in the relationship. Although the agreement helped prevent what was seen as a looming Central Asian crisis between Britain and Russia, it should not be a surprise that the convention in and of itself was not sufficient to lead to the wider Anglo-Russian entente that would follow in 1914.

U.S.-Soviet Negotiations on the Post–World War II Order (1945–1946)

In this chapter, we investigate the transformation of U.S.-Soviet relations over the year following the end of World War II in Europe.¹ In the aftermath of the conflict, during which the countries had allied against the Axis powers, the United States initially sought to sustain a working relationship by accommodating some, albeit not all, Soviet interests. But U.S. hopes waned as negotiations among the great powers progressed. By early 1946, Soviet actions in Turkey and Iran led U.S. officials to reevaluate their assessment of Soviet ambitions and to pursue a more-hardline policy premised on the belief that the Soviet Union was an expansionist power whose activities ran counter to core U.S. interests.

Soviet perceptions of the United States underwent a parallel transformation during this period. Under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet Union sought international recognition of its claim to a sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, an arrangement it believed was necessary to guarantee its security. On the eve of the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Stalin believed that the United States and Britain would accommodate Soviet security concerns and was willing to offer his own concessions to achieve this goal. Yet U.S. actions over the following year—the dropping of atomic weapons on Japan, excluding the Soviets from Japan’s postwar administration, and initially refusing to recognize Soviet-friendly governments in the Balkans—persuaded the Soviet Union that the United States would not provide the guarantees in Eastern Europe that the Kremlin desired. Thus, limited optimism for an amicable split between the great powers in the immediate aftermath of World War II gave way to an increasingly gloomy outlook for U.S.-Soviet relations by early 1946.

These postwar negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union have been studied extensively by international historians seeking to understand the origins of the Cold War and to determine whether a lasting accommodation between the two powers could have been reached. This case study draws on published scholarship, as well as collections of declassified U.S. documents, to reconstruct U.S. and Soviet perceptions and ambitions during this

¹ Although the United States adopted cooperative policies toward the Soviets on the topic of the postwar order before this time, we chose not to start the case study until after the defeat of Germany. This is because we were looking for cases in which rivalry, rather than cooperation against a shared enemy, was the dominant feature of the relationship.

period. Despite sustained scholarly interest, however, persistent source limitations continue to hinder efforts to assess Soviet thinking. The Russian and Soviet archives relevant to the issues discussed in this case have been only intermittently available to researchers.² Although historians have made important contributions to the field of Soviet history through such intermittent access, the possibility exists that key documents remain undiscovered for studies of this period.

Context

Structural and Strategic Context

U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1917–1939

Until World War II, U.S.-Soviet relations were marked by a high degree of hostility. Since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union's commitment to the global spread of communism had deeply troubled U.S. statesmen, who viewed the revolutionary philosophy as misguided and antithetical to American political principles. The United States extended famine relief in the early 1920s and encouraged the establishment of commercial ties between the two countries but withheld recognition of the new government until 1933, when the newly inaugurated Franklin Roosevelt administration moved to establish formal diplomatic relations in hopes of improving trade relations and encouraging cooperation against Japanese expansionism in Asia. Still, continued ideological animosity, disputes over the Soviet Union's outstanding debts to the United States through the mid-1930s, and concerns over Soviet behavior in Europe—including the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany, the occupation of eastern Poland, and the “winter war” against Finland in 1939—souring relations and precluded wider cooperation.³

Relations During World War II

When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Soviet Union and the United States began to transition from adversaries to allies. But even as the powers formalized military alliances and coordinated campaigns to roll back and defeat Germany, signs of stress were apparent. U.S. and Soviet strategists' disagreements over the timing of opening a second front in Europe and support for the Polish Home Army, for instance, marred the alliance and

² See, for example, discussions in Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008; Norman M. Naimark, “Cold War Studies and New Archival Materials on Stalin,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2002; and Donald J. Raleigh, “Doing Soviet History: The Impact of the Archival Revolution,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2002.

³ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1953*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994, pp. 3–32.

revealed differences in attitudes about how the war should be fought, the terms of its conclusion, and the political order that would follow.⁴

The war altered the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, but it also rewrote the global balance of power and ushered in a new bipolar era. By the time Germany surrendered and the war in Europe ended in May 1945, Germany, France, and Britain had depleted their financial reserves and suffered unprecedented physical destruction.⁵ In contrast, the United States, geographically sheltered from the fighting, emerged from the war as the dominant military, economic, and political power equipped and willing to shape the postwar order.⁶ Like other countries in Europe, the Soviet Union had suffered heavy military losses and destruction to much of its homeland.⁷ Still, by spring 1945, Soviet forces were stationed across most of Central and Eastern Europe and in Manchuria. Therefore, like the United States, the Soviet Union appeared poised to play a more active role in world affairs.

U.S., Soviet, and Allied leaders all recognized that a postwar settlement was necessary to chart a course of reconstruction, redraw political boundaries around the world, and create a system that would be both stable and durable. In late 1943, the leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain convened in Tehran to discuss military strategy (including the cross-channel invasion and Soviet entry into the war against Japan) and to begin outlining the terms of a postwar world order. This spirit of cooperation continued through conferences at Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, which established new international security and economic organizations, and at Yalta in February 1945, when the three premiers met to discuss the terms of Germany's unconditional surrender, the establishment of the United Nations (UN), the situation in the Far East, and governance of Poland and liberated Europe.⁸

Negotiations in Yalta, February 1945

Although both the United States and the Soviet Union hoped to sustain their wartime coalition, the negotiations at Yalta laid bare their disagreements. In particular, the Big Three—the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain—divided over the composition and process of establishing a provisional government in Poland, which Soviet forces had occupied since late 1944. Britain and the United States had maintained relations with the Polish government-in-exile in London and endorsed the creation of a “fully representative” government composed

⁴ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 548, 551–553, 582.

⁵ William I. Hitchcock, “Reversal of Fortune: Britain, France, and the Making of Europe, 1945–1956,” in Paul Kennedy and William I. Hitchcock, ed., *From War to Peace: Altered Strategic Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 80.

⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 3–6.

⁷ Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 133.

⁸ Herring, 2011, pp. 554, 580–582, 590.

of Poles from inside and outside the country. The Soviets, by contrast, pushed for recognition of the so-called “Lublin Poles,” a governing authority established by Soviet-backed communists.⁹ In the end, the parties agreed to reorganize the existing Lublin government “on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad.” Critically, the final text of the Yalta agreement omitted references to the formation of a “fully representative” government and supervised elections, and in effect conceded to communist predominance in the provisional government. Aware that this amounted to a major concession to Soviet interests, the U.S. and British leadership nonetheless maintained that a final framework would be reserved for post-conference talks.¹⁰

Similarly, the parties agreed to a Declaration of Liberated Europe, which endorsed the principles of self-government and self-determination but did not reach agreement on an enforcement mechanism.¹¹ Instead, the Yalta agreement committed the signatories to future consultations “on the measures necessary to discharge the joint responsibilities set forth in this declaration . . . when in the opinion of the three governments, conditions . . . make such action necessary.”¹² The result, as Cold War historian Melvyn Leffler noted, was that the declaration “did little to dispel the sphere of influence arrangements that had been incorporated into the armistice agreements and that had been sanctioned in the Churchill-Stalin percentages agreement of October 1944,” which had informally granted the Kremlin a dominant role in Romania, Finland, Bulgaria, and Hungary in exchange for British dominance in Greece and Soviet assurances in Italy.¹³

Relations Following Germany’s Surrender, May 1945

U.S. President Roosevelt, Soviet Premier Stalin, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed at Yalta to meet again to conclude these discussions following the surrender of Germany, which occurred on May 8, 1945. But just a month before the war ended, Roosevelt died, and Vice President Harry Truman assumed the presidency. In private meetings with Soviet officials, he struck a harder tone toward Moscow’s activities in Europe but otherwise conveyed a desire to continue cooperation.¹⁴ Over the following months, the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union established separate zones of occupation. Soviet forces seized factories, began to dismantle and transport German industrial plants eastward,

⁹ Leffler, 2017, p. 194.

¹⁰ Leffler, 2017, pp. 194–195.

¹¹ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 13.

¹² “Yalta Conference Agreement, Declaration of a Liberated Europe,” Yalta, Crimea, February 11, 1945 (via the Wilson Center).

¹³ Leffler, 2017, pp. 198–199. Also see Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 5; Albert Resis, “The Churchill-Stalin Secret ‘Percentages’ Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 2, April 1, 1978.

¹⁴ Leffler, 1994, pp. 46–47.

and employed widespread forced labor as part of a policy to extract reparations and prevent a resurgence of German power.¹⁵

By the time of the Potsdam Conference, fissures within the Alliance were apparent even as they remained committed to fighting together against Japan in the Pacific. Without a common enemy in Europe, they would struggle to reach consensus on five core issues concerning the end of the war and postwar reconstruction: the composition of postwar borders; governance of Central and Eastern Europe; German occupation, partition, and reparations; the situation in the Far East, and issues in Iran and the Turkish Straits (Table 3.1). U.S. and Soviet perceptions of each other's ambitions and the strategic motivations behind each country's positions are discussed in the following two sections.

Perceptual and Diplomatic Context

U.S. Threat Perceptions

In the aftermath of Germany's surrender, the United States was hopeful that the Soviet Union would pursue its interests through diplomacy but aware that circumstances might instead tilt the political balance in the Soviets' favor and lead to an expansion of communism, whether through military conquest or political and economic influence.

In June 1945, U.S. officials still hoped to avoid an open rift with the Soviet Union. Like his predecessor, Truman was opposed in principle to communism, and he was aware of Stalin's record of repression, which was now evidenced across the territories liberated from Nazi control by Soviet forces. But Truman also believed that cooperation to defeat Japan, stabilize Europe and Asia, and build a durable postwar settlement was both possible and desirable.¹⁶ Recognizing the extent of the economic, materiel, and human damage to the Soviet Union—and the U.S. preponderance of military, economic, and industrial strength—the president and his senior advisers agreed that the Soviet Union was not likely to attempt premeditated military action in Europe or elsewhere.¹⁷ Instead, the Soviet Union was expected to pursue its interests through diplomacy. U.S. officials anticipated that the negotiations might be difficult, and they acknowledged that U.S. and Soviet positions differed regarding Eastern Europe and elsewhere. In the end, however, they felt “we should be able to get 85 percent,” as Truman himself wrote.¹⁸ In the U.S. view, the global configuration of power would compel the Kremlin to work with the White House on the shared priority of containing German power, promoting economic recovery, and establishing a framework of mutual security.

¹⁵ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1994, pp. 147, 184–191, 239–245.

¹⁶ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 4; Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 65; Leffler, 1994, pp. 48–49.

¹⁷ Trachtenberg, 1999, pp. 16–22; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, pp. 62–63.

¹⁸ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, p. 42.

TABLE 3.1

Major Issues in U.S.-Soviet Relations in May 1945

Issue	U.S. Position	Soviet Position
Postwar borders	• Restoration of prewar borders of conquered states • Self-determination for colonial territories • Tacit recognition of the percentages agreement	• Retention of Soviet Union's wartime territorial gains in Poland, Iran, Finland, Romania, East China Seas, and elsewhere • Expectation that the United States and Britain would abide by the percentages agreement
Governance of Central and Eastern Europe	• Promotion of free elections, self-governance, and establishment of "fully representative" government • Recognition of Soviet security interests conditional on recognition of U.S. and British influence elsewhere • Tacit recognition of Soviet influence in communist countries	• Establishment of a Soviet sphere of influence across Eastern and Central Europe • Promotion of governments friendly to the Soviet Union in a strategic buffer extending across Eastern and Central Europe
Germany	• Divide, disarm, and occupy Germany • Authority for each occupying power to determine governance of its zone • Heavy reparations but not inhibitive of potential for postwar reconstruction • Reparations exacted by each power only from the zone it occupies	• Divide, disarm, and occupy Germany • Authority for each occupying power to determine governance of its zone • Harsh reparations required to prevent future German rise • Soviet Union should get half of all reparations
Far East	• Swift Soviet entry into the war against Japan • Preeminent U.S. role in the administration of postwar Japan	• Establish Soviet role in occupation and management of Japan • Secure Soviet claim to Southern Sakhalin and Kuril Islands • Expand access to strategic territory, ports, and railroads
Iran and the Turkish Straits	• Support for British presence in the Middle East • Support for end to British and Soviet occupation of Iran; desire to promote Iranian independence while safeguarding U.S. and British oil interests in the country • Receptivity to renegotiating the terms of the Montreux convention, which governed access to the straits	• Desire to expand access and establish postwar basis in Turkish Straits • Desire to delay withdrawal from Iran and secure favorable terms of access to country's oil markets

SOURCES: Herring, 2011; Leffler, 2007; Trachtenberg, 1999; Zubok, 2009; Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996.

Truman's confidence was buoyed by his knowledge that the United States possessed a secret weapon: the atomic bomb.¹⁹ In July 1945, some U.S. officials continued to question whether the weapon would work, but the president appeared reassured by recent successful tests. The United States did not develop the weapon to scare the Soviets—and Truman did not choose to use it against Japan to impress the Kremlin—but he did expect that the dem-

¹⁹ Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 78.

onstration of a weapon with such vast potential would “impress them and make them more manageable,” as one historian has summarized.²⁰

But even as U.S. officials expressed confidence in the prospect of continued cooperation, they feared that the dire situation in Europe and Asia might accrue to the communists’ favor. “There is a complete economic, social, and political collapse going on in Central Europe, the extent of which is unparalleled in history,” Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy reported in April 1945, echoing similar reports of impending strife in southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.²¹ After 15 years of depression, war, and now famine, the people of Europe seemed poised to throw their support behind leftist movements aligned with the Kremlin. The Soviet Union had not created these circumstances, but continued uncertainty and unrest could expand the communist orbit.²² If “Eurasia came under Soviet domination, either through military conquest or political and economic ‘assimilation,’ America’s only potential adversary would fall heir to enormous natural resources, industrial potential, and manpower.”²³

Soviet Threat Perceptions

In spring and early summer 1945, the Soviet Union was more concerned about Germany than about the United States. Perceptions of the United States were mixed, with the Soviets recognizing that the United States would seek to stop communist expansion over the long term but expecting in the short term that wartime coordination would continue indefinitely.

During this period, the Soviet Union viewed Germany—not the United States, and certainly not Great Britain or France—as the greatest threat to Soviet security. Even as Soviet forces chased the Nazi military west, and even after Hitler’s suicide and the regime’s surrender, the Soviet leadership expressed fear that Germany could recover from its losses and launch another attack. Recent historical experience suggested that such a revival was possible, but the assumption was also reinforced by Marxism-Leninism’s dictates that intracapitalist rifts would inevitably create wars, that the expansionist appetite of the imperial powers could not be sated, and that conflict between the communist and capitalist spheres was ultimately unavoidable.²⁴ As Stalin predicted in March 1945 as the end of the war neared, it would be “impossible to destroy the Germans for good” unless the Soviet Union were “merciless.” He worried that the United States and Western Europe would “seek to treat [Germany] more

²⁰ Leffler, 2007, pp. 44–45. Also see Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 78; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 17.

²¹ Leffler, 1994, p. 49.

²² Leffler, 1992, pp. 496–497.

²³ Leffler, 2017, p. 134.

²⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, New York: Basic Books, 2017, pp. 20–21.

leniently. This is why we, the Slavs, must be ready in case the Germans can get back on their feet and launch another attack.”²⁵

For the time being, however, the Soviet Union believed it was in a strong position to suppress German power and establish “a sphere of influence that would safeguard the Soviet periphery for all time.”²⁶ With its advance into the heart of Europe, the Soviet armies had “reunified” Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and enabled the establishment of friendly provisional governments in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary.²⁷ During the war, Russification campaigns across the Soviet borderlands, especially in the Baltics and Ukraine, had uprooted presumed subversives and consolidated Moscow’s control.²⁸ The Soviet Union and its communist partners abroad would need time to recover from the war, but it appeared to the Kremlin as if the opportunities to spread socialism were growing and that these objectives could be secured through nonmilitary means.

Against this backdrop, Soviet perceptions of the United States were mixed. Marxist-Leninist ideology predicted that the capitalist world ultimately would seek to extinguish the communist project and that the liberal capitalist democracies of the West were already plotting to encircle and destroy the Soviet Union.²⁹ During the war, the Soviets had suspected that the United States was purposefully delaying opening a second front to force the Soviets to bear the brunt of the fighting, and they considered U.S. materiel and economic assistance to be repayment for the Soviet Union’s disproportionate contributions to the war effort.³⁰ By contrast, the experience of cooperation and mutual hardship during the war, as well as personal interaction with the Roosevelt administration, had generated a grudging respect and an expectation that the United States would accede to Soviet plans in Eastern Europe and Manchuria, and perhaps in Iran and Turkey as well.³¹ Stalin and other senior Soviet officials interpreted the Yalta agreement as U.S. and British acquiescence to the creation of a communist sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and Soviet predominance in Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary.³²

Most Soviet officials believed that the wartime coordination would continue indefinitely.³³ “In spite of all possible difficulties that are likely to emerge from time to time in our relations with the United States,” Andrei Gromyko, then-Soviet ambassador to the United

²⁵ Quoted in Leffler, 2007, pp. 30–31.

²⁶ Leffler, 2007, p. 33.

²⁷ Leffler, 1992, pp. 3–6. Zubok, 2009, p. 10.

²⁸ Zubok, 2009, p. 7.

²⁹ Leffler, 2007, pp. 26–27.

³⁰ Zubok, 2009, p. 13.

³¹ Zubok, 2009, p. 13.

³² Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 5.

³³ Leffler, 2007, p. 27.

States, reported in July 1944, “there are certainly conditions for continuation of cooperation between our two countries in the postwar period.”³⁴ Soviet diplomats sounded the alarm when the Truman administration terminated Lend-Lease deliveries to the Soviet Union in April 1945, and they warned throughout the spring that “an organized effort to bring about a change in policy” toward the communists was under way in Washington, but statements by the president in May and June of that year seemed to reassure the Soviet leadership that the new president intended to maintain the spirit of cooperation with the Soviet Union.³⁵ Likewise, Soviet officials forecast that the United States would withdraw quickly from Europe, just as it had after World War I, and accede to shared Allied control over Germany.³⁶

Motives of Each Side

Neither the Soviet nor U.S. delegation foresaw the prospect of a Cold War between their countries when they arrived in Potsdam. Both Truman and Stalin anticipated that cooperation would benefit their postwar aims. Truman wanted Soviet assistance defeating the Japanese and building a durable international peace, Stalin wanted international recognition of a Soviet sphere of influence and postwar reconstruction assistance, and both wanted to prevent the reemergence of a powerful Germany or Japan. In short, both sides understood that they might need to cooperate to achieve their goals (see Table 3.2).³⁷

Stronger State: The United States

Upon assuming the presidency after the death of Roosevelt in April 1945, Truman had to develop his own approach to foreign policy. As vice president, Truman had been largely sidelined from most of the important discussions relating to wartime strategy and postwar reconstruction and was, by his own admission, uninformed of both the delicate negotiations that had produced the Yalta agreements and Roosevelt’s plans for the Potsdam conference. Instead, he was dependent on advisers inherited from his predecessor to explain the significance of the agreement.³⁸ Not all of Roosevelt’s former aides shared his desire to expand cooperation with the Soviet Union, and they now urged Truman to assume a more confrontational approach.³⁹ These debates were ongoing when the president arrived at Potsdam.

³⁴ Quoted in Zubok, 2009, p. 13.

³⁵ Zubok, 2009, pp. 15–16.

³⁶ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 48.

³⁷ Leffler, 2007, pp. 36–37.

³⁸ Leffler, 2017, p. 192.

³⁹ Gaddis, 2005, p. 15.

TABLE 3.2

Each Side's Motives Following the Defeat of Germany in World War II

Motive	Description
United States	
Ensure that no adversary or coalition of adversaries gains control over Europe or Asia.	The United States sought to support this goal by working with allies to reconstruct war-damaged areas and promote prosperity, and by binding the great powers to a framework of mutual security.
Ensure that Soviets enter the war to defeat Japan and avoid a split in the alliance.	The United States developed a quid pro quo strategy for achieving this goal, believing that the Soviet need for economic assistance gave the United States leverage.
Soviet Union	
Ensure external security.	The Soviets sought to prevent a future attack on the Soviet Union chiefly by preventing the Axis powers from reconstituting their militaries. The Soviets also sought to establish a strategic buffer by securing additional territorial concessions and placing friendly governments in power.
Balance the relationship with wartime allies against revolutionary goals.	The Soviets were willing to join the war against Japan and subordinate their revolutionary aims in China and Europe in the short term.
Secure economic assistance to recover from the war.	The Soviets sought assistance from the United States to support postwar reconstruction.

By July 1945, there was a general agreement in Washington that the overriding national security priority of the United States was to “ensure that no potential adversary or coalition of adversaries gained preponderant power control over the resources of Europe and Asia,” as Nazi Germany and Japan had recently attempted.⁴⁰ Such a situation, U.S. strategists feared, would provide an adversary with the extraordinary capacity to cut off the United States from the international economy and compel the United States to become a “garrison state” in which political and economic freedoms were severely curtailed.⁴¹ The United States could best avoid such a scenario by working with its allies to reconstruct war-damaged areas, promote prosperity, and bind the great powers to a framework of mutual security upheld by new international organizations.

But if this was the general ambition behind U.S. foreign policy in summer 1945, Truman’s immediate goal on the eve of the Potsdam Conference was to ensure that the Soviets entered the war to defeat Japan and to begin laying the groundwork for postwar Europe’s future.⁴² More broadly, he sought to maintain U.S.-Soviet cooperation and avoid a split between the allies.⁴³ Although Truman might not yet have fully articulated what he considered to be core

⁴⁰ Leffler, 1994, p. 48.

⁴¹ Leffler, 1994, p. 48.

⁴² Leffler, 2007, p. 41.

⁴³ Leffler, 2007, p. 42.

U.S. interests in the emerging world order, he sought to define the relationship with the Soviet Union on terms favorable to the United States.⁴⁴ Truman and his newly appointed secretary of state, James F. Byrnes, developed a *quid pro quo* strategy for dealing with the Soviets, believing that the Soviet need for economic assistance provided leverage to the United States. Believing the international community was behind the United States, administration officials also thought that they could force the Soviets to behave more cooperatively by publicizing unilateral Soviet actions.⁴⁵ Therefore, although the United States did continue to hope for a negotiated agreement with the Soviets that addressed key issues for both sides in the lead-up to Potsdam, it simultaneously pursued several approaches intended to coerce Moscow rather than accommodate it.

Weaker State: The Soviet Union

After the war, Stalin was motivated by three central concerns: external security, balancing the Soviet Union's relationship with its wartime allies against revolutionary goals, and securing economic assistance to recover from the war.⁴⁶ Among these, however, the Soviet leader's primary aim was to ensure the security of the Soviet homeland, an objective that would require denying a future adversary—including the prospect of a resurgent Germany or Japan—the ability to attack the Soviet Union's western or eastern flanks. To do so, Stalin hoped to prevent the Axis powers from reconstituting their militaries and to establish a strategic buffer.⁴⁷ Securing sufficient strategic depth also required securing additional territorial concessions or placing friendly governments in power. A friendly Polish government, even one not fully subservient to Moscow, was vital to safeguarding historical lines of communication linking the Soviet Union to Germany.⁴⁸ In the Middle East and North Africa, Stalin envisioned guaranteed access to the Turkish Straits (preferably via a military base concession), a sustained presence in northern Iran, and, potentially, the acquisition of all or part of Italy's former colonies. Soviet planners also optimistically hoped that, without a military threat to fight in Europe, the United States would follow its traditional path of withdrawal and return to North America, leaving only the Soviets as the major land power in Europe.⁴⁹

To achieve his objectives, Stalin was willing to join the war against Japan and to subordinate even his own revolutionary aims by working with the Nationalists in China, withholding recognition from the Chinese communists, and holding off upstart revolutionary efforts throughout

⁴⁴ Leffler, 2007, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Gaddis, 2005, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Leffler, 2007, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Leffler, 2007, p. 28; Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 27; Vladimir Pechatnov, "The Soviet Union and the World, 1944–1953," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. I, *Origins*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 90.

⁴⁸ Trachtenberg, 1999, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁹ Pechatnov, 2015, pp. 92–93.

Europe.⁵⁰ As historians Zubok and Pleshakov explain, Stalin believed that the Soviet Union had paid more than its fair share in blood and treasure to the Allied cause, and that its wartime allies needed “to pay for the enormous Soviet war effort.”⁵¹ As the war came to a close, however, the Soviet leader preferred cooperation to confrontation to achieve these goals.⁵²

Despite the allies’ evident disagreements over war aims and the postwar order, Stalin believed that his U.S. and British allies could be persuaded to accommodate Soviet security concerns, partly because they needed Soviet military support to defeat Japan.⁵³ He entered the talks seeking to confirm the Soviet sphere of influence, secure assistance with postwar reconstruction, and ensure Germany’s lasting defeat.⁵⁴ In practice, this entailed extracting U.S. loan guarantees; imposing punishing reparations terms on Germany; securing recognition of a Soviet right to extract resources from the Ruhr, the Rhineland, and the eastern occupation zone; revising the agreements governing transit of the Turkish Straits; securing permission to establish permanent military bases or other military presence along the Turkish Straits and in northern Iran; and establishing a stake in Italy’s former North African colonies.⁵⁵

Stalin’s willingness to join the war in the Pacific also gave him a chance to maneuver to gain territory, infrastructure, and a stake in postwar Japan’s future.⁵⁶ As in Europe, the Soviet premier was determined to (1) enfeeble an adversary that twice in the prior 40 years had threatened Soviet security and (2) regain territories and privileges lost in 1905, particularly southern Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and strategic railroads and ports in Manchuria.⁵⁷

Beyond these immediate demands, the Soviet Union’s general strategy was unclear. Stalin likely “did not [intend] to get into a worldwide shoving match with the United States nor did he anticipate that one would emerge from the circumstances of the settlement following World War II.”⁵⁸ But beyond a desire to exploit what he saw as a favorable configuration of forces (and beyond a general belief that the tides of history were stacked in communism’s

⁵⁰ Leffler, 2007, pp. 31–32.

⁵¹ Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 27.

⁵² Pechatnov, 2015, p. 94.

⁵³ Leffler, 2007, p. 28; Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 27; Pechatnov, 2015, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Leffler, 2007, pp. 36–37.

⁵⁵ Leffler, 2007, p. 30.

⁵⁶ Leffler, 2007, pp. 31–32; Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 37. Also see “Russian Proposal Presented to Foreign Ministers July 20, 1945,” in Richardson Dougall, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945*, Vol. II, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960.

⁵⁷ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 92.

⁵⁸ Norman M. Naimark, “Stalin and Europe in the Postwar Period, 1945–53: Issues and Problems,” *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2004, p. 36.

favor), Stalin does not appear to have articulated a master plan or grand strategy.⁵⁹ To the contrary, he often sent vague and sometimes contradictory messages to foreign communists. Stalin wanted socialism to spread globally, and he encouraged leftist parties to organize and establish broad, popular coalitions. But in summer 1945, he favored incremental measures over bold revolutions. As he warned one cadre of Polish communists, too swift a turn to the left risked making “Poland a bone of contention” among the British, Soviets, and Americans.⁶⁰

Historical Period 1: The Potsdam Conference and Immediate Aftermath, July–August 1945

The leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain met from July 17 to August 2, 1945, in Potsdam, Germany for the last wartime summit of the great powers. The immediate issues at hand were ending the war in Asia and developing a plan for postwar governance and reconstruction in Europe. In practice, this would require resolving multiple outstanding questions, including Germany’s political and economic future, reparations from the Axis powers, the terms of peace treaties with the other Axis countries, access to the Turkish Straits, and the withdrawal of Allied troops from Iran.

Stronger State’s Policies Toward the Weaker State

The principal U.S. objectives at Potsdam were to sustain the wartime alliance, begin discussions of postwar settlements, and ensure Soviet entry into the war in the Pacific. Although aware of reports that Soviet forces were looting Eastern and Central Europe and that the Kremlin was working to establish friendly governments in the territories under its control, Truman believed that his Soviet counterpart shared the U.S. desire to stabilize the continent and avoid a postwar rift among the Allies.⁶¹ As one historian has noted, neither Truman nor Byrnes believed that “real cooperation” with the Soviets would be possible. Instead, they pursued a “simple idea” to avoid direct confrontation: “the way to get along was for each side to run things in the area it occupied.”⁶² Accordingly, the U.S. officials sought to establish separate spheres of influence, with the Soviets controlling Eastern Europe and the United States and Britain controlling the west.⁶³ In short, the United States sought to preserve the relationship by pursuing a less-hardline policy that acknowledged Soviet interests while furthering U.S. interests.

⁵⁹ Naimark, 2004, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Leffler, 2007, p. 29.

⁶¹ Leffler, 2007, p. 44.

⁶² Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 16.

⁶³ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 4.

Willingness to Negotiate on the Composition of a Polish Government and Border Issues

This approach rested on negotiations over the future of Poland, which would confer *de facto* Allied recognition of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. U.S. overtures to the Soviet Union over the Poland issue predated the Potsdam Conference. In May 1945, the United States “more or less gave up on trying to save democracy in Poland” and, despite receiving promises from Stalin that he did not intend to “Sovietize Poland,” the Truman administration did not push hard for the Soviets to actually follow through.⁶⁴ This issue took the form of a debate over the future of the Polish government and Poland’s western borders during negotiations at Potsdam. The Soviets pushed to shift the Germany-Poland border westward to what was known as the Oder-Neisse line, arguing that the Polish government wanted such a settlement and that the Germans who had lived there previously had all fled. The British and U.S. delegations, however, pushed back in favor of maintaining the borders enshrined in the Yalta Declaration, citing the presence of a large German population, questions about Poland’s uncertain ability to administer what amounted to a significant increase in its territory, and the broader economic effects that would ripple through Germany.⁶⁵

The U.S. Proposal for a Modified Reparations Policy

To overcome this impasse on the issue of territorial boundaries, Byrnes linked U.S. acceptance of the new demarcation to Soviet acceptance of a modified reparations policy, which used a percentage-based solution that the United States preferred. Instead of taking reparations from Germany as a whole—the basis of the overall Allied policy for the German economy—Byrnes proposed that the Allied countries could take their reparations from their respective zones (he noted that the Soviet zone had an estimated 50 percent of existing German wealth) and exchange goods between the zones where necessary.⁶⁶ Trachtenberg contends that the U.S. delegation wanted “to reach an amicable understanding with the Soviets, and the U.S. government was willing to go quite far to achieve that objective.” Byrnes knew the reparations issue “was of fundamental importance” and “knew in general how he wanted it settled,” but he made sure “that his plan was not simply imposed on an unwilling Soviet Union that was left feeling cheated.”⁶⁷ Discussions on this topic began early in the conference, and disagreements between the two sides continued throughout, but neither side shifted position for most of the conference.⁶⁸

Byrnes, however, was willing to make a deal, offering acceptance of the Soviet-drawn demarcation between eastern Germany and Poland and 10 percent of surplus western

⁶⁴ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 13.

⁶⁵ “Thompson Minutes,” July 22, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁶⁶ “Bohlen Minutes,” July 23, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁶⁷ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 28.

⁶⁸ “Department of State Minutes,” July 27, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

German industrial capital (which they assessed as unnecessary for a German peacetime economy). He offered these as inducements because the U.S. government still sought some degree of comity with the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Byrnes fully acquiesced to the Soviet-drawn Polish border on July 30.⁷⁰ Ultimately, Stalin agreed to a modified reparation percentages proposal, and the three leaders approved the new border for Poland.⁷¹

When a compromise solution was not available, the United States agreed to extend discussions beyond the conference rather than force the issue and cause a potential rift. For instance, when the Soviets raised the issue of revising control of the Turkish Straits and granting the Soviets the right to build military bases in the area despite the Turkish government's objections, the first counteroffer from Truman and Churchill was to revise the 1936 Montreux Convention governing Turkish control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles during peacetime and war while leaving specific territorial concessions for Turkish-Soviet negotiations.⁷² When discussing the issue again the next day, Stalin was unable to convince Truman and Churchill to support his request to the Turks for a base in the region, so he settled for agreement to discuss international control over the straits with the Turkish government.⁷³

Push for Soviet Entrance into the War Against Japan

Although the United States was willing to accommodate some Soviet interests in Europe, it pursued a harder line in Asia. As the primary Allied belligerents in the Pacific War, the United States, Britain, and China released a proclamation (without Soviet input) on July 26 calling for Japanese surrender and laying out terms they would accept.⁷⁴ Historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa explains that Truman and Byrnes, armed with news of the successful U.S. nuclear test, believed that the atomic bomb alone could compel a Japanese surrender, forgoing the need to push the Soviets to join the war.⁷⁵ By shifting to now discouraging the Soviets from entering the war, the United States could prevent Stalin from claiming part of the spoils of a war to which his country

⁶⁹ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 29.

⁷⁰ In an attempt to break the impasse the day before, Byrnes made his linkage proposal on July 29, offering U.S. support for a shifted Polish border in return for Soviet acceptance of his reparations policy. Foreign Affairs Minister Vyacheslav Molotov continued to balk at the lack of a fixed sum for reparations but did not completely turn Byrnes down. Molotov noted three potential difficulties in convincing Stalin of the reparations plan: who would determine what equipment (particularly from the Ruhr) counted for reparations, the fixed sum issue, and deliveries of goods from the Soviet zone. "Bohlen Minutes," July 29, 1945, in Dougall, 1960; "Bohlen Minutes," July 30, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁷¹ "Department of State Minutes," July 31, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁷² "Department of State Minutes," July 23, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁷³ "Thompson Minutes," July 24, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁷⁴ "No. 1382 Proclamation," July 26, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

⁷⁵ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 158.

barely contributed. As Truman wrote in his memoirs, “I was not willing to let Russia reap the fruits of a long and bitter and gallant effort in which she had had no part.”⁷⁶

Effect on the Weaker State’s Perceptions and Behavior

Despite a desire by U.S. officials to use the Potsdam negotiations to extend U.S.-Soviet cooperation into the postwar period, the conference had mixed effects on Soviet perceptions of the United States’ intentions in Europe and its willingness to accommodate Soviet security interests.

Recognition of U.S. Concessions on Polish-German Border Issue

Records of private Soviet conversations after the conference indicate that the Soviet leadership interpreted U.S. concessions on the Polish-German border as evidence that the United States recognized the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. As Molotov and Andrey Vyshinsky, the deputy foreign minister, told the ambassador of Yugoslavia, “the English and Americans accept that they have lost Eastern Europe and the Balkans.” In another conversation, Molotov told a Soviet official that the Potsdam “decisions are to our advantage” and that the “sphere of influence has been recognized as ours.”⁷⁷

Continued Demand for Fixed-Sum Approach to Reparations

But the Soviets were unsatisfied with U.S. overtures on other issues. In response to Byrnes’s reparations proposal, for instance, the Soviets reiterated their demand for a fixed-sum approach and accused the United States of reneging on past agreements. Molotov announced early that the Soviets were willing to reduce their overall request but continued to press the point, accusing the Americans of changing their position after agreeing to fixed reparations at Yalta. In response, Byrnes said that the United States “had expressed no opinion” at Yalta, and instead accepted the proposed figure only as the basis for discussion.⁷⁸

Suspicion over U.S. Nuclear Weapons Program

The manner and timing of Truman’s decision to inform Stalin of the U.S. nuclear weapons program contributed to Soviet suspicions of the United States. On July 24, Truman and Stalin spoke privately after the conference’s eighth plenary session. No official record of the conversation exists, but, according to firsthand accounts, Truman told the Soviet leader that the United States had developed “a new weapon of unusual destructive force.” Showing “no

⁷⁶ Harry S. Truman, *The Memoirs of Harry S. Truman: A Reader’s Edition*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht, Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2019, p. 218.

⁷⁷ Geoffrey Roberts, “Stalin at the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam Conferences,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2007, p. 36.

⁷⁸ “Department of State Minutes,” July 27, 1945, in Dougall, 1960.

special interest,” Stalin responded positively and wished Truman would put it to “good use” in the fight against the Japanese.⁷⁹

Stalin was not surprised by the news because Soviet spies had already infiltrated the Manhattan Project. He was, however, angered by his supposed allies’ attempts to conceal its development and wary of the real intent behind the bomb, which he feared could be used to blackmail the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ This interpretation colored his view of U.S. actions for the remainder of the Potsdam Conference and beyond. “Hiroshima has shaken the world,” Stalin stated after the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on August 6, after the Potsdam Conference had concluded. “The balance has been destroyed.”⁸¹ He told Molotov to harden his negotiating stance toward the United States and Britain: “[W]e cannot achieve anything serious if we begin to give in to intimidation or betray uncertainty.” Stalin’s view was that the Soviets would need to “arm ourselves with the policy of tenacity and steadfastness” to achieve Moscow’s goals.⁸² Zubok and Pleshakov conclude that “the atomic bombardment of Japan and the abrupt end of the war in the Pacific . . . convinced Stalin that his dream of a postwar partnership was not to be fulfilled.” Instead, “the atomic bomb threw the Kremlin leader off balance—and eventually back into the curse of tyrants: neurotic solitude.”⁸³ Overall, the bomb fundamentally changed the Soviet perception of the United States as a distant power unable to directly threaten the Soviet Union militarily.⁸⁴ Braithwaite contends that Stalin believed “[t]he Americans’ bombs were intended not to end one war, but to demonstrate that they would win the next.”⁸⁵ Thus, the existence of the bomb came to overlay all negotiations between the allies going forward, convincing Stalin that members of the Truman administration intended to use it as a tool for coercion when they deemed it necessary.

Anger Over U.S. Decision to Release Potsdam Declaration on Japan Without Soviet Consent

This context may have contributed to Stalin’s anger over the U.S. decision to release the Potsdam Declaration, which called for the unconditional surrender of Japan, without his consent. Stalin correctly concluded that his U.S. allies wanted the Japanese to surrender without a Soviet invasion and extrapolated that the United States would work to block the Soviet claim

⁷⁹ “Editor’s Note,” Dougall, 1960. Stalin had been aware of the secret U.S.-British atomic project since 1942. Like his interpretation of the delay in opening a second front in the war, Stalin saw duplicity on the part of those allies. Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 58.

⁸⁰ Rodric Braithwaite, *Armageddon and Paranoia: The Nuclear Confrontation Since 1945*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 20.

⁸¹ Quoted in Leffler, 2007, p. 49.

⁸² Quoted in Leffler, 2007, p. 49.

⁸³ Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 40.

⁸⁴ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 96.

⁸⁵ Braithwaite, 2018, p. 21.

to the Kurils and elsewhere.⁸⁶ As a result, he hastened Soviet efforts to enter the war as soon as possible.⁸⁷ The Japan issue remained contentious throughout future conferences (discussed later), contributing to Stalin's interpretation of U.S. actions as duplicitous.

Effect on the Broader Relationship

Even as tensions emerged, the Potsdam Conference established what U.S. and Soviet officials still viewed as a workable forum for the great powers to continue cooperation and mediate their differences. On balance, Soviet leadership concluded that the agreements reached at Potsdam were in their favor despite Allied pushback on certain issues.⁸⁸ For the Soviets, the negotiations format offered some optimism for both the future of the relationship and achieving their goals on specific issues, such as receiving their preferred outcome on reparations.⁸⁹

But U.S. use of the atomic bomb shortly after the conference concluded had also altered the Soviet interpretation of the stakes of the ongoing negotiations. Stalin interpreted the military and political implications of the bomb in different ways. Although the United States might be able to threaten the Soviet Union in the near future, the bomb's immediate military utility was low because the U.S. arsenal remained too small to unleash a full-scale attack on the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ The bomb's political utility was of greater concern. The existence of a U.S. bomb and the lack of a similar weapon in the Soviet arsenal threatened Stalin's negotiating positions, great power aspirations, and position in the newly emerging international order.⁹¹ The new weapon dispelled any lingering Soviet hopes that the United States would return to its historical policy of isolation and underscored U.S. capability to threaten the Soviet Union: Regardless of where the United States stationed its troops or whether it maintained a permanent presence in Europe or Asia, bomb delivery mechanisms ensured Soviet forces or territory could be held at risk. Securing international recognition of the Soviet claim to an exclusive sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and ensuring that the governments of states within this area remained friendly to Moscow became an even more urgent priority.⁹²

U.S. attempts to accommodate Soviet concerns at Potsdam were not enough to stave off the gradual deterioration of relations through fall and winter 1945. In the months following Potsdam, the great powers continued talks via a Council of Foreign Ministers format agreed to at the summit. The Soviets still hoped that they could achieve their preferred outcomes on reparations and other outstanding issues while seeking to counter any U.S. attempts

⁸⁶ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 96.

⁸⁷ Hasegawa, 2005, p. 165.

⁸⁸ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 97.

⁸⁹ Zubok, 2009, p. 29.

⁹⁰ Craig and Radchenko, 2008, pp. 96–97; Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 42.

⁹¹ Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 87.

⁹² Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 43.

at “atomic diplomacy.” Despite his suspicions, Stalin thought that cooperation would be required to ensure both that Germany and Japan did not revive as military powers and that he could extract the reparations necessary to rebuild the Soviet Union.⁹³ Still, concern about U.S. intentions and the shifting military balance prompted Stalin to begin probing his allies’ lines on other areas of interest, contributing to a growing sense of unease between the Soviets and their wartime partners.⁹⁴ This period is discussed in the next section.

Historical Period 2: Deadlock in London, September–October 1945

The United States and Soviet Union continued to negotiate the terms of the postwar settlement through two major Council of Foreign Ministers conferences, the first hosted in London from September to early October 1945. These conferences offered a forum to discuss the increasingly contentious issues relating to postwar security and governance, including the Turkish Straits and European borders. Delegations from the United States, Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China attended.

Stronger State’s Policies Toward the Weaker State

Transition from Full Cooperation to Limited Accommodation

By fall 1945, U.S. Secretary of State Byrnes no longer believed that true cooperation between the United States and Soviet Union was possible. The relationship could be managed, however, if both parties accepted a spheres-of-influence arrangement and agreed not to interfere in the other’s zone. Byrnes calculated that in exchange for recognizing the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviets would “accept the predominance of the western powers in the areas they considered vital—above all Western Europe and Japan, but also the Mediterranean and the Middle East.” By the end of the period under consideration in this chapter, Byrnes was willing to defend places he saw as vital to U.S. interests, such as the Turkish Straits, and to ensure that the Soviets accepted U.S. primacy in Japan (including Soviet exclusion from the administration of postwar Japan).⁹⁵ In other words, Byrnes had begun by early 1946 to stake out a more-hardline approach on many of the key issues that were to prove central to undoing the period of U.S. relative accommodation.

During the London conference, the United States sought to communicate its general willingness to accommodate legitimate Soviet interests while signaling that it expected Soviet acquiescence to U.S. demands in the areas that it considered vital. When Molotov registered his unhappiness with the limited progress made on reparations since Potsdam, a cen-

⁹³ Leffler, 2007, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Zubok, 2009, p. 29.

⁹⁵ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 15.

tral Soviet concern tied to postwar reconstruction, Byrnes agreed that the work on the issue should be sped up.⁹⁶ Although Byrnes “heartily” agreed with the allies’ plan to speak to the Turks over Soviet access to the Turkish Straits, the United States and Britain successfully struck the issue from the agenda (although they did not move to forbid any discussion on the topic from occurring during the conference).⁹⁷ Thus, U.S. officials attempted to show that they were taking Soviet concerns under consideration but that there were limits to the extent to which they were willing to go on the issue. Molotov attempted to secure U.S. and British approval for a mandate over Libya, one of Italy’s former colonies. After Molotov told Stalin that the allies opposed establishing a Soviet naval base on the former colony’s territory, Stalin decided to push for a base option for civilian ships. Ultimately, the United States and Britain prevented the Soviet Union from establishing a sustained presence in the Mediterranean, but this issue remained a lower priority for Stalin.⁹⁸

Ambiguous Position on Governance in Eastern and Central Europe

At the same time, the United States sent mixed signals on the question of governance in Eastern and Central Europe. Shortly before the London conference began, U.S. and British representatives had informed the newly formed Romanian and Bulgarian governments, as well as Soviet representatives in each country, that the United States and Great Britain would not recognize the Soviet-backed leadership unless opposition candidates were represented in the government.⁹⁹ Meeting with his Soviet interlocutor privately on September 16, however, Byrnes took a slightly more conciliatory approach as he tried to secure broader cooperation. Telling Molotov that “it was essential for the future of the world that our nations continue to cooperate,” he urged that any differences should be discussed together and that both sides should “endeavor to adjust our disagreements in such a way as to preserve our unity of purpose.” Moreover, Byrnes emphasized that the United States understood why the Soviet Union would want friendly governments in bordering countries but that those governments should be representative of all of the people living in those countries.¹⁰⁰ Still, the United States did not recognize the new governments.

⁹⁶ “Memorandum by the Soviet Delegation to the Council of Foreign Ministers,” September 24, 1945, in E. Ralph Perkins, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: Political and Economic Matters, Vol. II*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.

⁹⁷ “Record of the First Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Lancaster House, London, September 11, 1945, 4 p.m.,” September 11, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

⁹⁸ Zubok, 2009, p. 39.

⁹⁹ Zubok, 2009, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ “Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Charles E. Bohlen, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State,” September 16, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

Introduction of a Treaty to Demilitarize Germany

In part to salvage the conference, Byrnes also attempted to move the conversation on Germany forward via a draft demilitarization treaty. In a conversation with Molotov, Byrnes proposed a treaty to demilitarize Germany for 20–25 years, gradually lifting the allied occupation and disarming Germany. U.S. negotiators hoped that this arrangement would assuage Soviet concerns about a revived, aggressive Germany.¹⁰¹

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Increasing Suspicion of U.S. Intentions

In the lead-up to the conference, Soviet threat perceptions were elevated and mistrust about the United States as a negotiating partner had also increased. As Zubok explains, Soviet leaders interpreted U.S. (and British) refusal to recognize the new Romanian and Bulgarian governments as evidence that “Western powers did in fact not grant the Soviets a free hand in the Balkans.”¹⁰² These actions, coupled with developments in Japan, led Stalin to believe that the West had launched a political offensive as a “direct consequence of the changed power balance after Hiroshima.”¹⁰³ That is, the Soviets perceived a shift in U.S. policy as a result of the changing balance of power—its newfound weapon underpinned more-assertive U.S. actions along the Soviet periphery. The hardening U.S. position might not have had its intended effect, however: Attempts at atomic diplomacy, overt or by implication, failed to force Stalin to offer new concessions. To the contrary, the pressure pushed the Soviets to take a harder line.¹⁰⁴

Insistence on Principle of Noninterference in Other Great Power's Spheres of Influence

The shift in Soviet attitudes toward the United States was evidenced by Soviet officials' behavior at the London conference, at which they were authorized to deadlock proceedings should the United States not respect Soviet interests. Historian Pechatnov concludes that the conference became “a reciprocal demonstration of toughness” between the allies.¹⁰⁵ Stalin's directive to Molotov was to insist on the Yalta principle of noninterference in other great

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Pechatnov, “The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will . . .”: Foreign Policy Correspondence Between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945–December 1946, trans. Vladislav M. Zubok: Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, WP-46, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁰² Zubok, 2009, pp. 30–31.

¹⁰³ Zubok, 2009, p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ At one point during the conference, Byrnes unsuccessfully tried to “wield” the bomb fairly overtly, telling Molotov, “If you don't cut out all this stalling and let us get down to work I am going to pull an atomic bomb out of my hip pocket and let you have it” (Craig and Radchenko, 2008, p. 98).

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Zubok, 2009, p. 31.

powers' spheres of influence. Stalin hypothesized that the Allies might be willing to sign such a peace treaty with Italy absent a Soviet signature. "So what?" Stalin cabled Molotov. "Then we have a precedent. We would get a possibility in our turn to reach a peace treaty with [the countries of Central Europe] without the Allies." Even if this shut down the conference early, he continued, "we should not be afraid of such an outcome."¹⁰⁶ Believing that the United States was adopting a hardline approach and attempting to outmaneuver the Soviets rather than account for Soviet interests, the Soviets prepared to do the same, making compromise at the conference less likely.

Attempt to Secure a Stronger Soviet Role in Postwar Japan

On the German demilitarization treaty issue, Molotov had initially responded positively to Byrnes's proposal and recommended to Stalin that the Soviets accept such a treaty, linking it to positive U.S. movement on the Balkans: "I believe that we should support Byrnes' proposal . . . in order to prevent new aggression by Germany, although not revealing excessive zeal. This would be acceptable only if Americans more or less move in our direction on the Balkan countries."¹⁰⁷ Molotov interpreted the U.S. proposal as recognizing Soviet security concerns, but Stalin viewed Byrnes's offer as an attempt to distract the Soviets from what he viewed as the United States' more-aggressive policies elsewhere. He responded to Molotov by outlining four objectives, each detrimental to Soviet security, that he believed the Americans were pursuing:

First, to divert our attention from the Far East, where America assumes a role of tomorrow's friend of Japan, and to create thereby a perception that everything is fine there; second, to receive from the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] USSR a formal sanction for the US playing the same role in European affairs as the USSR, so that US may hereafter, in league with England, take the future of Europe into their hands; third, to devalue the treaties of alliance that the USSR has already reached with European states; fourth to pull out the rug from under any future treaties of alliance between the USSR and [Romania], Finland, etc.¹⁰⁸

Stalin had hoped that the United States would withdraw from Germany, and from Europe generally, as it had after the First World War, leaving the Soviet Union as the predominant power there. He could not openly announce this aspiration, however, and instead tried to link such a development to securing a Soviet role in postwar Japan. Noting that it would be "difficult to reject an anti-German pact," (that is, an agreement regarding how to prevent Germany from again threatening Europe) Stalin urged that "we should exploit American fear of the growing influence of the USSR in Europe and should stipulate that the US-Soviet

¹⁰⁶ Zubok, 2009, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Pechatnov, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Pechatnov, 1999, p. 5.

anti-German pact would be conditioned on an anti-Japan pact with the US.” In practice, this meant directing Molotov to seek a full Allied Control Council over Japan rather than just an advisory role for the Soviet Union (and the other belligerents).¹⁰⁹

For the Soviet Union, the outcome of the dispute over Japan had become a symbol of what the Kremlin viewed as a broader disregard of the Soviet Union’s wartime contributions and its status as a peer to the United States. In a letter to Molotov on September 26, Stalin denounced the U.S. refusal to consider Soviet administrative proposals as “the height of impudence” and further evidence that the Americans lacked “a minimal sense of respect for their ally.”¹¹⁰ He returned to this same theme in a meeting with U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union W. Averell Harriman in late October, during which he complained that “[n]o decisions made by [Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers Gen. Douglas] MacArthur were being transmitted to [the Soviet Union] It was not being treated as an Ally. The Soviet Union would not be a satellite of the United States in the Far East or elsewhere.”¹¹¹ But Byrnes, aiming with British support to keep the Soviets out of any postwar administration of Japan, hedged for the rest of the conference.¹¹² Molotov expressed his dismay at not receiving an answer several times, but Byrnes dissembled, saying he had not had the chance to consult Truman about the issue.¹¹³

Refusal to Allow Chinese and French Participation in Discussions over the Balkan Countries

Molotov ran afoul of Stalin a second time during the London conference. Initially, the Soviet foreign minister agreed to allow Chinese and French participation in discussions over the Balkan countries. The disagreement stemmed from interpretational differences of the final agreement reached at Potsdam. Stalin wanted it strictly followed, that is, only signatories to a given country’s surrender terms may participate. Truman, however, saw no problem with other council members participating in discussions without voting rights.¹¹⁴ Stalin refused to budge, writing to Truman that he ordered Molotov to follow the Potsdam agreement strict-

¹⁰⁹ Pechatnov, 1999, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 97.

¹¹¹ Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 301.

¹¹² Zubok, 2009, p. 32.

¹¹³ “United States Delegation Minutes of the Eighteenth Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, London, September 1945, 11 a.m.,” September 24, 1945, in Perkins, 1967; “Memorandum by the Soviet Delegation to the Council of Foreign Ministers,” in Perkins, 1967; “United States Delegation Minutes of the Twentieth Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, London, September 25, 1943 [sic], 11 a.m.,” September 25, 1943 [sic], in Perkins, 1967 [Note: the document appears to be misdated 1943 instead of 1945. It appears in the Perkins 1945 volume]; “Memorandum of Conversation” September 27, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹¹⁴ “President Truman to the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union (Stalin),” September 22, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

ly.¹¹⁵ Zubok links this hardline to Stalin's understanding of the great powers' preponderance in their own spheres of influence, seeing Western efforts as a broader effort to "undermine" the East's exclusive rights to free action. Furious at Molotov, Stalin ordered that he rescind his approval for Chinese and French participation, ultimately stalling the conference.¹¹⁶

Effect on the Broader Relationship

The London conference ended without a settlement, but Stalin's hard-nosed approach had achieved some desired results. Frustrated by his inability to compromise with the Soviets, Brynes decided to pursue a less forceful negotiating position.¹¹⁷ As a peace offering, he dispatched Harriman to meet directly with Stalin, who hosted the U.S. official at his dacha in Gagri, on the Black Sea, in late October, hoping that the American diplomat would bring with him concessions on key issues.¹¹⁸ Stalin complained to Harriman about the limited Soviet role in the defeat of Japan, noting that the Soviets would not act as "an American satellite in the Pacific." The Soviet leader mused that, although he personally was not in favor of an isolationist policy, "perhaps now the Soviet Union should adopt such a policy."¹¹⁹ Harriman concluded that Stalin viewed every American move with deep suspicion but still believed that the United States could pursue its economic and cultural interests in Central Europe without threatening Soviet security. The ambassador misread the situation: A few weeks later, Stalin told visiting Polish communists to rebuff any U.S. efforts at engagement, warning them that the United States was attempting "to tear away our allies—Poland, [Romania], Yugoslavia and Bulgaria."¹²⁰

Historical Period 3: Cautious Optimism in Moscow, December 1945

Unsatisfied with the conclusion of the London conference, Byrnes proposed that the allied foreign ministers convene once again to attempt to reach agreement on the remaining peace treaties in Europe and the occupation and governance of Japan, Korea, and Germany, as well as other outstanding regional issues. The resulting conference, held in Moscow from December 16–26 of 1945, resulted in the signature of a communique outlining the terms for

¹¹⁵ "The Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Soviet Union (Stalin) to President Truman," September 24, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹¹⁶ Zubok, 2009, p. 31.

¹¹⁷ Zubok, 2009, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ Pechatnov, 1999, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Zubok, 2009, pp. 32–33.

¹²⁰ Zubok, 2009, p. 33.

the drafting of peace treaties with Italy, Romania, Hungary, and Finland; the establishment of the Far Eastern Commission and an Allied Council for Japan; the establishment of a provisional Korean democratic government; the creation of a United Nations commission for the control of atomic energy, and a set of general principals related to China, Romania, and Bulgaria.¹²¹

Stronger State's Policies Toward the Weaker State

As he had during the London conference, Byrnes's negotiating strategy combined more-hardline and less-hardline messaging.

U.S. Concession on French and Chinese Non-Participation in Peace Treaty Negotiations

In a bid to get negotiations back on track, Byrnes acquiesced to Stalin's demand that the French and Chinese not participate in peace treaty negotiations shortly before the Moscow conference. Stalin seems to have interpreted this move as emanating from a Soviet position of strength, in effect forcing the United States to back down on the issue. On December 9, the Soviet leader cabled his top advisers to brag that "thanks to our tenacity, we won the struggle" by forcing the United States and Britain to capitulate. He concluded that the Soviets compelled "a retreat of the US and Britain from their position" at the London conference.¹²²

U.S. Promise to Not Intervene Militarily in China

The Soviet position was further strengthened on December 15, the night before the Moscow conference began, when Truman announced that "United States support will not extend to United States military intervention to influence the course of any Chinese internal strife."¹²³ Instead, contemporary U.S. policy focused on mediating a negotiated settlement while maintaining Guomindang leader Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek)'s leadership role.¹²⁴ Although not intended as appeasement for Soviet interests, this move, as Zubok contends, "weakened Jiang Jieshi's position on the eve of the Moscow talks" and induced the Chinese to promise to demilitarize the Soviet-Chinese border and promise a central role in the economy of Manchuria in exchange for Soviet security assistance in China's restive northern and western

¹²¹ "Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Moscow, December 16–26, 1945," (via the Avalon Project, Yale Law School).

¹²² Pechatnov, 1999, p. 14.

¹²³ Harry S. Truman, "Statement by the President: United States Policy Toward China," December 15, 1945 (via the American Presidency Project).

¹²⁴ Niu Jun, "The Birth of the People's Republic of China and the Road to the Korean War," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. I, *Origins*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 222–224.

regions. Stalin believed that the move strengthened his position in Northeast Asia, potentially even allowing him to push the United States out and take control of Manchuria.¹²⁵

Thus, with Stalin's obstinacy softened because of perceived recognition of Soviet interests, the Moscow conference began on a strong footing.

Agreement to Recognize Balkan Governments in Exchange for Token Changes to Their Structure

Byrnes initially attempted to convince his Soviet interlocutors that U.S. recognition of the new Balkan governments would not be possible. Burnishing a report by a well-known newspaper editor, Byrnes also tried to convince Molotov that he had acted in good faith by ensuring an independent investigation of the governing situation in Romania and Bulgaria. The Soviet foreign minister agreed to study the report but noted that he questioned the editor's biases as one familiar with existing U.S. policy on the issue.¹²⁶ At an informal meeting among the foreign ministers a few days later, Byrnes and Molotov disagreed over a U.S. proposal to the conference that would reorganize the two new governments in a way that included additional opposition party participation.¹²⁷ Meeting with Stalin two days later, Byrnes acknowledged that the U.S. and Soviet delegations appeared to hold different interpretations of the Yalta agreement. Noting that the Yalta Declaration called for "temporary governments broadly representative of the people," the United States sought to establish more-representative governments in which opposition political parties could participate fully. The Soviets, meanwhile, contended that the Yalta Declaration "did not provide that all parties should be represented" but rather "that they should have full freedom to participate in the election." Stalin concluded that both the Bulgarian and Romanian elections allowed for such participation. "Already being accused of interference," Stalin suggested that the two governments could perhaps be advised to include members of the "loyal opposition" but not wholly reorganized.¹²⁸

Ultimately, Byrnes agreed to recognize the Balkan governments in exchange for token changes to their structure. In his report, the U.S. Secretary of State noted that the United States must recognize "that the Soviet Government has a very real interest in the character of

¹²⁵ Zubok, 2009, pp. 35–36.

¹²⁶ "Memorandum of Conversation, by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers," December 18, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹²⁷ "[Enclosure 2] Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers: Suggested Procedure with Regard to Bulgaria," December 18, 1945, in Perkins, 1967; "[Enclosure 3] Memorandum by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers: Suggested Procedure with Regard to [Romania]," December 18, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹²⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation, by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers," December 23, 1945, in Perkins, 1967. The memorandum of the meeting notes that Byrnes, agreeing at Stalin's request to discuss the issue with Bevin, "jokingly said that although they were supposed to have a bloc with England, he had even neglected to inform Mr. Bevin soon enough about the proposed meeting [with Bulgarian and Romanian representatives] in Moscow." Stalin responded: "this was obviously only a cloak to hide the reality of the bloc."

the government of these states” and could not expect a Soviet military withdrawal from Bulgaria and Romania unless the Soviets were confident “in the peaceful character of these governments.” Byrnes seems to have believed that the Soviets were actually willing to work with the United States and Britain to make the “governments more representative,” noting that it was “the first time since Yalta” that the Soviets had acquiesced to any substantive moves in this direction.¹²⁹

Denial of Soviet Request for an Allied Control Council for Japan

In contrast with his greater flexibility in Europe, Byrnes refused to budge on Soviet requests for an Allied Control Council for Japan throughout the conference. Soviet attempts to limit the Supreme Commander’s ability to implement policy in Japan were largely unsuccessful, although Byrnes agreed to minor symbolic amendments proposed by the Soviet delegation, such as the deletion of a provision on the size of the staff of each Council member.¹³⁰ Likewise, he accepted Soviet rewording to a draft of the terms of reference for a new Far Eastern Commission (which was to determine occupation policies for Japan), but he opposed the Soviet Union’s two substantive requests: that India be excluded from the Commission and that the U.S. right to issue interim directives be omitted.¹³¹ In his final report on the conference, Byrnes noted that his motivations were to demonstrate that the United States was willing to continue cooperating with its allies in the Pacific War but that “our agreement safeguards the efficient administration which has been set up in Japan under the Supreme Allied Commander.” He sought to ensure “that the authority of General MacArthur will not be obstructed by the inability of the Far Eastern Commission to agree on policies or by the inability of the Allied Council to agree on the methods of carrying them out.”¹³²

¹²⁹ “Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Moscow, December 16–26, 1945.”

¹³⁰ Early in the conference, the Soviet delegation submitted a set of proposed revisions to a U.S. plan for an “Allied Council” that would “consult and advise” the Supreme Commander in the Far East on matters related to the Japanese surrender and occupation and control of the country after the war. The Soviet revisions went further, calling for the establishment of an “Allied Control Council” whose members would have significantly more power; this included “control over the terms of surrender of Japan” and the ability for members who disagreed with the Supreme Commander on “questions of principle, such as questions concerning a change in the regime of control over Japan, changes in the constitutional structure, or a change in the Japanese Government as a whole.” In this case, the Supreme Commander’s orders would not be executed, and the matter would go to the larger Far Eastern Commission for discussion. “United States Delegation Minutes, Third Formal Session, Conference of Foreign Ministers, Spiridonovka, Moscow, December 18, 1945, 4:00–7:15 p.m.,” December 18, 1945, in Perkins, 1967. Also see George H. Blakeslee, “The Establishment of the Far Eastern Commission,” *International Organization*, Vol. 5, No. 3, August 1951, pp. 511–513.

¹³¹ Blakeslee, 1951, p. 513.

¹³² “Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Moscow, December 16–26, 1945.”

Effects on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Strengthened Confidence in Soviet Negotiating Approach

As negotiations in Moscow commenced, Stalin found Byrnes's willingness to accommodate Soviet concerns and interest in reaching compromises a welcome change from the precedent established in London. The U.S. diplomat's tone and offers were more accommodating, and he did not overtly attempt to use the bomb to pressure the Soviets. Moreover, the United States was no longer acting in lockstep with Britain and had diverged substantially on such issues as the situation in Iran (discussed later in this chapter).¹³³ Although Stalin was unable to formalize a stronger Soviet position in the postwar administration of Japan, he secured his desired outcome in the Balkans: recognition of the Romanian and Bulgarian governments in exchange for token changes to their structure. The importance that Stalin placed on this achievement was evident in the speed with which he personally contacted the Bulgarian leadership following the Moscow Conference. Stalin had initially instructed the Bulgarians to select "a couple of representatives from the opposition" that would receive "insignificant ministries."¹³⁴ Shortly after the Moscow Conference ended, Stalin contacted the Bulgarian leadership again, telling them "Your opposition can go to the devil! They boycotted the elections. Now three great powers recognized these elections." He believed his approach was successful, and that Britain and the United States would not blame the Soviets for the Bulgarian government's actions.¹³⁵

Willingness to Concede U.S. Position on Administration of Postwar Japan

Although Molotov ultimately secured U.S. concessions on recognition of the new Bulgarian and Romanian governments, one of the Soviet Union's primary objectives for the conference, Byrnes refused to budge on the Soviet Union's second goal of securing a role in administering Japan. Molotov repeatedly proposed revisions to plans to administer Japan but ultimately dropped his objections after Byrnes made clear that the two outstanding issues—India's inclusion in the council and the U.S. power to issue interim administrative directives for Japan—were not negotiable.¹³⁶

¹³³ Zubok, 2009, p. 33. On Iran, Byrnes did not want to allow the issue to "jeopardize" the work that the three powers had achieved over the course of the conference, and the British negotiators were unhappy that the conference would end without agreement on their proposal to establish a Tripartite Commission on Iran to oversee the withdrawal of allied troops. See "United States Delegation Minutes of an Informal Meeting, Conference of Foreign Ministers, Spiridonovka, Moscow, December 26, 1945, 3:20–5:30 p.m.," in Perkins, 1967; "Suggested Draft Terms of Reference for Tripartite Commission on Iran," Memorandum by the United Kingdom Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers, December 24, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹³⁴ Zubok, 2009, p. 34.

¹³⁵ Zubok, 2009, p. 34.

¹³⁶ Blakeslee, 1951, p. 513.

Expectation that Future Negotiations Would Be Productive and Beneficial to Soviet Interests

Nonetheless, the Soviet leadership appeared temporarily “satisfied by the abolition of the FEAC [Far Eastern Advisory Commission] and its replacement by a Far Eastern Commission and an [Allied Council] for Japan,” as one historian with access to Soviet records has summarized.¹³⁷ The negotiations did not cause the Soviet leadership to rethink its assumption that the United States was seeking to establish a foothold in Asia to tilt the global balance of power in its favor, but the symbolic compromises by the United States on the wording of the agreement—combined with the more-substantial U.S. concessions on Bulgaria and Romania—might have persuaded the Soviet leadership that its “policy of tenacity and steadfastness” was working.¹³⁸ The Soviet expectation that the countries could continue to negotiate over the Japan issue was apparent during Stalin’s December 24 meeting with Byrnes, during which the Soviet leader raised the prospect of negotiating another pact for the disarmament of Japan.¹³⁹ In a summary of the conference circulated among his staff, Molotov set a similar tone, noting that the parties “managed to reach decisions on several important European and Far Eastern issues and to sustain development of cooperation among the three countries that emerged during the war.”¹⁴⁰

Effect on the Broader Relationship

On balance, the Soviets considered the concessions that they received at the conference positively. The conference provided momentum for progress on other issues, such as on reparations and peace treaty negotiations, and the Soviets still held out hope for further success in negotiations with the West.¹⁴¹

Yet this spirit of cooperation was not enough to stave off further deterioration of the U.S.-Soviet relationship when the Soviet Union started to test U.S. and British positions by assuming a more assertive posture toward Iran and Turkey. Beginning in December 1945 and continuing through early 1946, the Soviets began to flex their military power in Iran, using their wartime presence to stoke ethnic tensions and encourage separatist movements, interfere in Tehran’s attempts to suppress the rebellions, and press for favorable oil concessions. Concurrently, Moscow redoubled its efforts to secure a permanent military presence in the Turkish Straits.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Roberts, 2006, p. 303.

¹³⁸ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 99.

¹³⁹ Roberts, 2006, p. 304.

¹⁴⁰ Pechatnov, 1999, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ Pechatnov, 2015, p. 100.

¹⁴² Pechatnov, 2015, p. 101.

The Soviet decision to attempt to assume a more assertive posture and probe U.S. and British positions in the Middle East was likely a result of several factors, such as security concerns, economic imperatives, differing interpretations of conversations with U.S. and British interlocutors during the wartime summits, and a desire to influence ongoing postwar negotiations.¹⁴³ Stalin does not appear to have wanted to use the Turkish crisis as a pretext for war; it is more likely that he thought that pressure against the Turks might make his Western partners more pliable in the ongoing negotiations.¹⁴⁴ According to Zubok, Stalin “still hoped to neutralize the growing resistance of Western powers to Soviet demands to Turkey” and timed using these levers to pressure his Western partners at the Moscow conference. However, Zubok goes on to say that “Stalin’s sense of priority and urgency led him to redirect his energies from Turkey to Iran, where chances for the success of Soviet expansion seemed to be very high at that time.”¹⁴⁵

In Iran, the Soviet Union—like the British and the United States—was mainly concerned with “oil and influence.” Zubok concludes that, in the short term, “Stalin seemed to be holding all the cards, but he preferred to avoid a direct showdown,” perhaps expecting “that the British and the Americans would eventually prefer to resolve the future of Iran at a trilateral conference.”¹⁴⁶ Although Byrnes was not thrilled with a British proposal on a Tripartite Commission for Iran presented at the Moscow conference on December 25, he was eager to ensure that the issue did not go before the UN “because he was afraid that it would disclose the differences between [the] three Governments.”¹⁴⁷ When the issue came up again the next day, the Soviets moved to end further discussions because the sides could not reach a settlement. The British delegation pushed back, hoping to ensure that their proposal was accepted but the Soviets ultimately prevailed and no mention of Iran appeared in the final conference report.¹⁴⁸ Throughout negotiations on this issue, a gap remained between the American and British positions, and Byrnes did not seek to back up the U.S. ally. Reporting back after the conference, Byrnes noted, “I do not wish to minimize the seriousness” of the broader Iran issue. “But I am not discouraged,” he continued. “I hope that the exchange of views may lead to further consideration of the grave issues involved and out of such consideration a solu-

¹⁴³ Zubok, 2009, pp. 36–43.

¹⁴⁴ Zubok, 2009, pp. 39–40.

¹⁴⁵ Zubok, 2009, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ Zubok, 2009, p. 43.

¹⁴⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation, by the United States Delegation at the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers,” December 25, 1945, in Perkins, 1967.

¹⁴⁸ “United States Delegation Minutes of an Informal Meeting, Conference of Foreign Ministers, Spiridonovka, Moscow, December 26, 1945, 3:20–5:30 p.m.,” in Perkins, 1967; “[Enclosure 3] “Suggested Draft Terms of Reference for Tripartite Commission on Iran,” in Perkins, 1967.

tion may be found.”¹⁴⁹ Such optimism would wane shortly thereafter, however, as the United States began shifting to a more-hardline approach.

End of Accommodation

By early 1946, the United States began shifting toward a more competitive stance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which manifested in changes to U.S. policies in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.¹⁵⁰ Zubok and Pleshakov explain that many U.S. officials came to regard Stalin’s first postwar speech in early February—which highlighted the need for the Soviet Union to maintain its own security through self-sufficiency and by rearming, while enumerating the flaws in the capitalist system—“as the declaration of the Cold War.”¹⁵¹ Leffler argues that although “neither Stalin’s speech nor his actions were as threatening as some U.S. officials thought they were,” policymakers who were already predisposed to heightened threat perceptions interpreted it pessimistically.¹⁵² Kennan dispatched his famous Long Telegram, which warned that the United States would never achieve anything resembling peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union because of the nature of the Soviet system, shortly thereafter.¹⁵³

On February 28, Byrnes delivered a speech at the Overseas Press Club that outlined a harder stance toward the Soviet Union. He stated that if the United States were “to be a great power we must act as a great power, not only in order to ensure our own security but in order to preserve the peace of the world.” He continued, noting a change from the spheres-of-influence policy that he himself had supported roughly six months earlier, “Though the status quo is not sacred and unchangeable, we cannot overlook a unilateral gnawing away at the status quo . . . we cannot allow aggression to be accomplished by coercion or pressure or by subterfuges such as political infiltration. . . . We will do nothing to break the world into exclusive blocs or spheres of influence. In this atomic age we will not seek to divide a world which is one and indivisible.” He then indirectly highlighted existing issues with Soviet behavior: threats of use of force (in Turkey), leaving troops in countries where they should have been withdrawn (Iran and Eastern Europe), delays in “making of peace” (likely a reference to Soviet foot-dragging during the great power summits), and unilaterally taking

¹⁴⁹ “Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Moscow, December 16-26, 1945.”

¹⁵⁰ Zubok, 2009, p. 46.

¹⁵¹ Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 35. Leffler argues that Stalin knew this speech would be interpreted by West “to mean that he was sundering the wartime alliance and resuming an ideological offensive” so he “made repeated public and private efforts to clarify his views.” In other words, although Stalin articulated his own harder line to a domestic audience, he still believed some form of cooperation might have been possible. Leffler, 2007, pp. 53–54.

¹⁵² Leffler, 1992, p. 103.

¹⁵³ George F. Kennan, “George Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram,’ February 22, 1946,” (via the Wilson Center).

defeated countries' property before finalizing reparations agreement (an eye toward Soviet behavior in the eastern occupation zone of Germany).¹⁵⁴

Turkey and Iran

U.S. Adoption of a More-Hardline Policy Outside Europe

Soviet actions in Turkey and Iran convinced many officials in the United States that the Soviets were pursuing an expansionist policy that encroached on areas of U.S. national interest.¹⁵⁵ The crises resulted in a starker dividing line between east and west.¹⁵⁶ Trachtenberg concludes that Soviet actions in Turkey and Iran caused Truman to reinterpret everything that had occurred over the past year in Europe as representing the beginning of a pattern. Trachtenberg argues that Truman concluded that "[t]he Russians had been 'high handed' and 'arbitrary' in Poland and elsewhere in the region" and that "their basic tactic was to confront the West with a *fait accompli*." Truman accepted the Oder-Neisse line as a reasonable compromise at Potsdam, given Polish suffering during the war, but he saw the seizure of territory as a "high handed outrage" in early 1946.¹⁵⁷

Truman might have been unhappy in early 1945 with Soviet actions in their own sphere of influence, but he had not yet adopted a hardline policy in response. By the end of that year, his position had started to change. He now interpreted what he viewed as a Soviet *fait accompli* in Poland as the beginning of a broader campaign to expand Soviet influence that included latter Soviet actions in the Balkans and portended the potential for another extension into Turkey. Thus, he began shifting toward a more-hardline approach, noting that "there isn't a doubt in my mind that Russia intended an invasion of Turkey and the seizure of the Black Sea Straits to the Mediterranean. Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making."¹⁵⁸ Eyeing Soviet actions in Iran—"an outrage if I ever saw one," he wrote—Truman began pushing for a harder line there, as well.¹⁵⁹

The effects of this hardening line appeared almost immediately. No longer watching Soviet actions in Turkey and Iran passively, the Truman administration dispatched a battleship to the Turkish Straits as a public show of support to the Turks against Soviet pressure. The day after Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech in March 1946, the U.S. government sent a note of protest to the Soviets, warning that the United States could no longer "remain indifferent" to the continued Soviet refusal to withdraw troops from Iran so long past the

¹⁵⁴ Joseph F. Byrnes, "[W]e have Pinned Our Hopes to the Banner of the United Nations," address by Secretary of State (Joseph F. Byrnes) delivered to the Overseas Press Club in New York, February 28, 1946, *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 349, March 10, 1946.

¹⁵⁵ Zubok, 2009, p. 48; Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 40.

¹⁵⁷ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 38.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 38.

¹⁵⁹ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 38.

deadline.¹⁶⁰ U.S. support to the Iranian government empowered the Iranian leadership, at U.S. urging, to bring its case before the newly formed UN. As Zubok explains, this was “a brilliant move that changed the whole game in Iran” because it enhanced the political credibility and potency of U.S. opposition to the continued Soviet presence by making the issue not only about oil “but also the ability of the new United Nations to defend members against the encroachments of the big powers.”¹⁶¹ The Turkish government, also buoyed by U.S. and British support, rejected Soviet pressure for some sort of military arrangement for joint control of the straits, forcing the Soviets to back down.¹⁶²

U.S. Policy Shift Toward Containing Perceived Soviet Expansionism

These two crises sharpened the dividing line between east and west, shifting areas that had once been the subject of negotiation to more-overt contests of strength and influence. In 1945, Byrnes had hoped to define clear spheres of influence to avoid such conflicts—with the Soviets remaining content with their Eastern European sphere—but U.S. officials in 1946 saw Soviet probing elsewhere, like Iran and Turkey, as evidence that the Soviets were no longer content with this arrangement. Trachtenberg argues that Byrnes’s approach in 1945 stemmed from a belief at the time that a clear spheres-of-influence division was the best way to manage great power relations in the postwar world. But perceiving changes in Soviet behavior, U.S. policy had to correspondingly shift to limit what Washington now perceived as “Soviet expansionism.”¹⁶³

Europe

Divergent U.S. and Soviet Positions on Germany

In February, Byrnes presented Stalin with a new draft demilitarization treaty for Germany, which (as discussed earlier) had been under consideration since the previous fall. Although Stalin had agreed “in principle” to such a treaty during the Moscow conference—he had been happy with Byrnes’s promise to maintain the Potsdam-Yalta understanding on great power cooperation—Zubok contends that Stalin had made “a tactical move.”¹⁶⁴ Stalin was strongly opposed to such a treaty, and soon thereafter senior Soviet officials came to share that opposition. After studying the proposal for several months, senior Soviet officials reported to Stalin that the draft demilitarization treaty was an attempt to force the Soviets out of Germany entirely. They concluded that any early Soviet withdrawal from Germany would lead both Germany and other Central European states to “automatically become dependent on

¹⁶⁰ Zubok, 2009, pp. 44–45.

¹⁶¹ Zubok, 2009, p. 44.

¹⁶² Zubok, 2009, p. 46.

¹⁶³ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 37.

¹⁶⁴ Zubok, 2009, p. 66.

American economic and financial assistance and with political strings attached.” Their best course of action remained “the continuation of the joint occupational regime for an indefinite period.”¹⁶⁵

Although at Potsdam the future of Germany had seemed to be one of cooperative great power administration, this shifted by mid-1946. Instead of running Germany’s foreign trade on a zonal basis, U.S. officials began demanding a common trade policy and to run Germany as a single economic unit. They argued that this was actually the Potsdam agreement and the Soviets were now renegeing on it. “America’s Germany policy had been totally transformed,” Trachtenberg says, “and this transformation was to play a fundamental role in setting the major powers at odds with each other.” Despite the hope for cooperation, the former allies were now accusing each other of dividing Germany, and Western policy took on a “distinct anti-Soviet edge.”¹⁶⁶ Byrnes delivered a speech in Stuttgart in September on the “Reinstatement of Policy on Germany,” which continued in this line.¹⁶⁷ The speech succeeded in reinforcing to Soviet officials that the United States sought “to get rid of the Soviet presence in Germany and deny the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Central Europe.”¹⁶⁸

The “Truman Doctrine” and Marshall Plan, Extending U.S. Influence in Europe

By 1947, any last hopes for cooperation began to disappear. In March, Truman delivered a speech to the U.S. Congress outlining his Truman Doctrine, in which he promised U.S. support to countries facing Communist uprisings.¹⁶⁹ A few months later, discussions on the European Recovery Program—known popularly as Marshall Plan—began. Stalin, according to Zubok and Pleshakov, interpreted this effort as “a large-scale attempt by the United States to gain lasting and preeminent influence in Europe” and saw “a far-reaching design to revive German military-industrial potential and to direct it, as in the 1930s, against the Soviet Union.” He viewed it as “a challenge on the same strategic scale as the U.S. atomic monopoly.”¹⁷⁰ In response to this more-hardline U.S. policy, one of Stalin’s top deputies told the newly created Cominform (which coordinated activities among Communist parties around the world) that a division into two hostile camps had occurred in Europe. Communist groups throughout Europe became much more confrontational as a result.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Zubok, 2009, pp. 66–67.

¹⁶⁶ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 34.

¹⁶⁷ Joseph F. Byrnes, “Speech by J. F. Byrnes, United States Secretary of State, Restatement of Policy on Germany, Stuttgart, September 6, 1946,” (via U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany).

¹⁶⁸ Zubok, 2009, p. 68.

¹⁶⁹ “Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Moscow, December 16–26, 1945.”

¹⁷⁰ Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 50.

¹⁷¹ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 64.

Soviet Blockade of West Berlin, Presaging the Division of Europe

As the West began moving to formally create a west German state by the end of 1947, Stalin decided to launch a counteroffensive by imposing a blockade on the Western sectors of Berlin. As Zubok and Pleshakov explain, his “reasoning was crude and obvious: joint, four-partite administration of Germany and its capital was the result of the Yalta-Potsdam agreements; if the Western partners violated it in their zones, why should Stalin not do the same in his own?”¹⁷² The Truman administration did not back down in the face of the blockade, ultimately forcing Stalin to capitulate. The upshot was a major failure for Soviet foreign policy: the creation of NATO by a Western Europe fearful of Soviet aggression.¹⁷³ Ultimately, this major crisis between the Soviet Union and the United States would set the tone for the early Cold War. Although the initial postwar period started with the possibility of cooperation between the great powers, it ended with a clear dividing line between East and West rife with tensions and confrontation.

Longer-Term Implications

The United States’ limited efforts to accommodate Soviet interests affected the overall structure of the future Cold War.

Lack of accommodation in the postwar administration of Japan allowed the United States to retain its preeminent position there; had the United States allowed an arrangement akin to the allied coordination mechanism in Germany, its influence likely would have been reduced. Perhaps the Soviets would have secured a greater role in the political development of postwar Japan, affecting the development of the superpower relationship in Asia.

In Europe, meanwhile, accommodation confirmed the Soviet sphere of influence in the east. As tensions worsened, Europe became the focal point for the growing superpower confrontation. This division would subsequently become both the basis for the entire postwar order and a flashpoint for the most-severe crises during the Cold War.

Conclusion

Benefits of Cooperation

As World War II was ending, U.S. officials viewed limited cooperation with the Soviets as a necessity and hoped, at minimum, to ensure an “amicable divorce” between the wartime allies.¹⁷⁴ The Truman administration sought to sustain a working relationship by accommo-

¹⁷² Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 52.

¹⁷³ Zubok and Pleshakov, 1996, p. 52.

¹⁷⁴ Trachtenberg, 1999, p. 34.

dating some Soviet interests, believing that the two sides could reach an agreement granting each state its own demarcated sphere of exclusive influence. The clearest example of this approach was Byrnes's willingness to trade U.S. recognition of the Soviet-drawn Polish border in return for a modified reparations policy.

For its part, the Soviet Union sought international recognition of its claim to a sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, which it believed was necessary to ensure its security. On the eve of the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, Stalin expected the United States and Britain to accommodate the Soviet Union's security concerns and was willing to offer his own concessions to achieve this goal.

In 1946, however, U.S. leadership came to believe that the Soviets would never be content to remain in their own sphere. Whereas Truman and Byrnes effectively prevented Soviet leverage in Japan, Soviet policy in Turkey and Iran through early 1946 pushed Truman to reinterpret his understanding of Soviet behavior in 1945. Revising his thinking all the way back to the shift in the Polish border, Truman saw the Soviets as presenting one *fait accompli* after another as part of an overall expansionist policy that challenged U.S. national interests. The United States moved away from a policy of partial accommodation because it did not achieve desired results and seemed unlikely to do so in the future. Byrnes might have intended for a spheres-of-influence settlement that would allow the two sides to go their separate ways, act freely in their own zones, and achieve some modicum of peace and stability in Europe, but Soviet actions along the periphery convinced U.S. officials that Stalin's objective was more expansionist in nature.

Stalin, meanwhile, saw U.S. actions—overlaid by the political imbalance imparted by the American atomic monopoly—as part of a pattern of behavior that increasingly threatened Soviet security and did not appear to reflect any genuine U.S. interest in mutual accommodation. The discrete areas where the United States pursued more-cooperative policies had been accompanied by several developments that Stalin perceived to be threatening or adversarial, and he decided to respond in kind. Moreover, Kremlin efforts to expand its sphere of influence through negotiations, from Japan to Iran, had been continually rebuffed by the United States. A sphere of influence that contained only Eastern Europe was not sufficient for Stalin, but the Soviet leader's push for more was interpreted in Washington as a rejection of any sort of limited sphere and as evidence of a desire for unchecked Soviet expansionism.

Long-Term Outcomes

With a pattern of crisis and leverage replacing one of negotiation and partial accommodation, the opportunity for cooperation largely closed as the United States moved toward a policy of containing Soviet behavior. A hardline U.S. policy on the postwar administration of Japan allowed the United States to retain its preeminent position there while accommodation in Europe confirmed the Soviet sphere of influence in the east. As tensions worsened, however, Europe would become the focus of the growing superpower confrontation.

U.S.-Soviet Détente (1969–1975)

This case study examines the mutual easing of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union between 1969 and 1975. During this period, less-hardline U.S. approaches were only rarely the primary factor in Soviet decisions to moderate the country's foreign policy, whether by pursuing new accommodating policies or in implementing more-aggressive policies elsewhere. U.S. efforts at accommodation did, however, encourage a relaxation in Soviet hostility toward the United States and—combined with changes in the military balance and strategic environment—establish the necessary conditions for the leadership to engage in genuine compromises with the United States.

Yet this movement toward a lasting détente was stymied by other competitive U.S. policies, particularly U.S. acquisition of new long-range delivery systems perceived as intended to obviate traditional Soviet advantages and prevent the Soviet Union from maintaining strategic parity, which encouraged the Kremlin to continue its own military buildup despite the substantial economic and political costs. The Soviets generally viewed these investments as a means to maintain the existing strategic balance and therefore did not perceive a contradiction between their continued arms buildup and participation in arms control negotiations. But as the improvement in Soviet strategic forces became apparent, and as Soviet activism in the Third World expanded in response to new opportunities, U.S. policymakers began to reappraise the risks of continued accommodation. After some incremental progress, the Soviet Union's behavior therefore contributed to a hardening in U.S. policy and a dissolution of support for less-hardline approaches.

Our decision to examine trends in U.S.-Soviet relations over six years was intended to allow consideration of the complexity and duration of U.S. attempts to establish and preserve a détente with the Soviet Union. This wide temporal scope was also advantageous because of the continued difficulty of accessing documentation of Soviet national security debates during the 1970s. Although the opening of Russian and Eastern European archives after the Soviet Union's collapse cast new light on the functioning of the Soviet government during the Cold War, material from the Central Committee, Ministry of Defense, and other critical organs of Soviet foreign and defense policy remain comparatively inaccessible.¹ Moreover, contemporary reporting on Leonid Brezhnev's regime was often opaque, in part because

¹ Mark Kramer, "Declassified Materials from CPSU Central Committee Plenums. Sources, Context, Highlights," *Cahiers du Monde russe [Notebooks of the Russian World]*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2, Archives et nouvelles

the Central Committee ceased publishing public accounts of its plenums during the mid-1960s. The resulting scarcity of materials documenting the regime's internal deliberations has discouraged scholarship on Soviet foreign policymaking during this period, which is often treated as "an era of stagnation" that lacked either the adventurism of the Khrushchev years or the dynamism of Gorbachev's reforms.² These challenges make it difficult to evaluate Soviet perceptions of specific U.S. policy changes or to provide a complete account of debates within the regime, and therefore precluded the use of a more traditional process-tracing approach. Nonetheless, a review of the available historical literature, published interviews, oral histories, and memoirs by senior Soviet and U.S. officials enables a reconstruction of changes in Soviet perceptions of the threat posed by the United States and the implications for Soviet foreign policy behavior.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. In the first section, we describe the context of U.S.-Soviet relations during this period, highlighting variations in each country's perception of the other's ambitions and the risk of war. In the second section, we present a general summary of the factors motivating U.S. and Soviet behavior during this time. Third, we survey U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union over two periods: (1) the Nixon administration's opening of a back channel and the initial Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) from 1969 to 1971 and (2) the height of U.S.-Soviet détente from 1972 to 1975. In that third section, we also assess the effects of U.S. policy changes on Soviet threat perceptions and behavior. In the fourth section, we describe the factors that contributed to the end of the accommodation; in the fifth section, we evaluate the long-term implications for the bilateral relationship. In the concluding section, we summarize the costs and benefits of accommodation in this case and evaluate the role of U.S. policy in the observed outcomes.

Context

Structural and Strategic Context

By 1969, when this case begins, the general parameters of the Cold War contest were already established (See Table 4.1).

The Division of Europe

In Europe, the United States and Soviet Union had established two opposing political and military blocs: NATO, which included the liberal democratic states of Western Europe and Canada, and the Warsaw Pact, which was a political and military alliance among Soviet sat-

sources de l'histoire soviétique, une réévaluation (Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources), January–June 1999, pp. 275–278.

² Edwin Bacon, "Reconsidering Brezhnev," in Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, ed., *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 1; Donald J. Raleigh, "Russia's Favorite: Reevaluating the Rule of Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev, 1964–82: Guest Editor's Introduction," *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 52, 2014, p. 4.

TABLE 4.1

Major Issues in U.S.-Soviet Relations in 1969

Issue	U.S. Position	Soviet Position
Status of Berlin	• Permanent division tacitly accepted • U.S., British, and French rights to access East and West Berlin	• Permanent division tacitly accepted but Western withdrawal from Berlin demanded • Restriction on trade, movement of people across sectors
European borders	• Soviet claim to European sphere of influence illegitimate • Soviet dominance of satellite states illegitimate; support for increased autonomy of Central and Eastern European states • Support for freedom of movement, trade, and information across continent • Opposed to all-European conference without U.S. participation	• Sought maintenance of territorial and political gains during World War II • Claim to sphere of influence in Eastern Europe legitimate and deserving of recognition • Sought all-European security conference without U.S. participation to secure formal recognition of postwar borders
Nuclear arms	• Support for nonproliferation agreements, mutual reductions in the production of enriched uranium; limitations on the development and fielding of antiballistic missile (ABM) defenses and other strategic arms • Preference for a comprehensive framework restricting offensive and defensive systems • Diverse and sizable arsenal required to deter attack, defend interests	• Support for nonproliferation agreements, mutual reductions in offensive systems • Preference for negotiating restrictions on defensive and offensive systems sequentially • Sizable, predominantly ground-based arsenal required to deter attack, defend interests • U.S. forward-based systems seen as destabilizing
Conventional forces in Europe	• Reduction in NATO and Warsaw Pact forces should be mutual and absolute • Equipment should not be accounted for in reductions	• Desire to reduce U.S. military presence in Western Europe • Reduction in NATO and Warsaw Pact forces should be proportional not absolute • Reductions in equipment and force levels required
Vietnam	• Accepted 1954 Partition of Vietnam • Extended direct military, economic, intelligence, and political support to South Vietnam • Supported formation of a democratic state and sought to counter communist advance in the country and across Southeast Asia	• Accepted 1954 Partition of Vietnam • Initially opposed North Vietnam's escalation of the war in the South but extended military, economic, and intelligence assistance to Hanoi and National Liberation Front for South Vietnam
Third World modernization	• Political, economic, military, and covert support to pro-Western, anti-leftist governments and movements in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia • Promotion of liberal democratic capitalist political and economic models	• Political, economic, military, and covert support to socialist and nationalist revolutionary governments and movements in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia • Promotion of socialist and communist models of development

elite states in Central and Eastern Europe. The two great powers also engaged in periodic militarized crises over Berlin, which had been divided but whose political status remained unresolved. The Soviet expectation of a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and outstanding disputes over postwar borders remained sources of tension among the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies.³

U.S.-Soviet Competition for the Third World

Beyond Europe, the superpowers were engaged in a competition for influence that stretched across Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, then commonly referenced as the “Third World.” In part, the United States and the Soviet Union sought to secure access to new bases, expand their trade relationships, and consolidate new alliances—and, in the process, each denied the other the associated strategic advantages. But the superpowers were also engaged in an ideological battle to shape the development of postcolonial states and to encourage opposing models of modernity and governance.⁴ Although the two countries avoided direct conflict, periodic crises on the periphery provided reminders of the possibility that a local crisis could escalate to a direct confrontation.

The most significant dispute of this kind was fought over Vietnam, where the United States deployed combat forces in 1964 to support South Vietnam’s campaign against North Vietnam and a communist insurgency. The Soviet Union initially viewed the conflict as a local issue and had sought to avoid inflaming tensions with the United States by pressing Hanoi not to attack the South.⁵ But as the U.S. intervention in Vietnam expanded, the Soviet Union felt new pressure to demonstrate solidarity with the North Vietnamese. The conflict seemed to exemplify Soviet fears of U.S. warmongering, but it also heightened tensions with China, which accused the Soviet Union of betraying the revolutionary cause.⁶ Although Soviet diplomats continued to work behind the scenes to restrain the communist regime in Hanoi, they reacted coolly to U.S. requests to pressure the government to accept a negotiated settlement on U.S. terms.⁷ And when direct talks between U.S. and Soviet leaders were held

³ Leffler, 2007, pp. 162–163; Mark Kramer, “The Demise of the Soviet Bloc,” *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 83, No. 4, 2011b, p. 790.

⁴ For a comprehensive history of the Cold War as an ideological contest, see Westad, 2017.

⁵ Zubok, 2009, p. 198.

⁶ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents*, Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1995, p. 143; Jonathan Haslam, *Russia’s Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 222; Simon Miles, “Envisioning Détente: The Johnson Administration and the October 1964 Khrushchev Ouster,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2016, p. 737; Zubok, 2009, p. 198.

⁷ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 134, 136, 139, 143, 156.

in Geneva, Glassboro, New Jersey, and elsewhere, disagreements over Vietnam distracted negotiators and precluded serious discussion of other issues.⁸

Intensified Conventional and Nuclear Arms Race

This competition in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere unfolded against the backdrop of an intensified conventional and nuclear arms race. For the first two decades of the Cold War, the United States' general economic, industrial, and technological advantage over the Soviet Union had assured it a general military advantage as well, although the numerical balance of forces in Europe had granted the Soviet Union a local conventional advantage since the end of World War II. To sustain its edge and expand its options in the event of a crisis, the United States embarked on a sweeping defense program to expand the quantity and quality of its strategic arms, improve its missile defenses, and increase the size of its conventional forces. Between 1961 and 1968, the United States grew its inventory of launchers by 40-fold, sped up production and fielding of its solid-fuel Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and promoted development of new multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) systems designed to overwhelm Soviet ABM defenses, among other programs.⁹ In parallel, the United States announced an intention to move away from a military strategy of "massive retaliation" to one of "flexible response" premised on the development of graduated nuclear options short of a massive global exchange and a greater reliance on conventional forces.¹⁰ Concurrently, the United States proceeded to expand its armed forces, which rose from approximately 2,307,000 in 1961 to roughly 2,687,000 in 1964 and nearly 3,550,000 in 1968.¹¹

Determined to deter a surprise attack and to dissuade U.S. interference in the Soviet sphere of influence, the Soviet Union in 1965 directed its own military buildup, including substantial quantitative increases in its ICBM force, the development of SLBMs to diversify its nuclear forces, and construction of hardened missile silos.¹² Reversing the policy under Khrushchev to prioritize long-range nuclear forces, the Soviet military also expanded and modernized its conventional forces and redoubled efforts to arm, train, and standardize

⁸ Miles, 2016, p. 745; Dobrynin, 1995, p. 136; Zubok, 2009, p. 198; Nigel J. Ashton, "Uncertain Decade: US-Soviet Relations, 1961–68," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 2003, p. 202.

⁹ Alexey Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, "The Impact of MIRVs and Counterforce Targeting on the US-Soviet Strategic Relationship," in Travis Wheeler Michael Krepon, and Shane Mason, eds., *The Lure and Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age*, Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2016, p. 67.

¹⁰ Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. VIII, 1961–1964, Washington, D.C.: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011, pp. 22, 61–64, 188–189.

¹¹ Correlates of War National Material Capabilities (version 6.0) dataset (J. David Singer, "Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985," *International Interactions*, Vol. 14, 1987).

¹² Zubok, 2009, pp. 196–198.

Warsaw Pact forces.¹³ The Soviet Union secured a second-strike capability by 1965 and, over the next three years, constructed and deployed a nuclear triad of ICBMs in hardened silos, SLBMs, and a growing fleet of heavy bombers.¹⁴ The number of ICBMs in the Soviet inventory doubled between 1965 and 1968, granting the Soviet Union a rough strategic parity with the United States by approximately 1969.¹⁵ In parallel, the Soviet Union also began to field new conventional and nuclear power projection platforms and capabilities, including heavy transport platforms, improved cruisers and destroyers, and helicopter carriers.¹⁶ Together, these armament programs underscored the Soviet capacity to inflict “unacceptable damage” on the U.S. homeland and introduced uncertainty about the U.S. capacity to defend its allies in Europe in the event of conflict on the continent.¹⁷

Interest in Stabilizing the U.S.-Soviet Relationship

Even as both sides dedicated new resources to their arms buildup over the 1960s, U.S. and Soviet officials increasingly questioned the sustainability of their rivalry. They also expressed new interest in stabilizing the contest, as will be discussed in the following two sections. Shaken by the crises over Berlin and Cuba and facing new dissent from their Warsaw Pact and NATO partners, the superpowers also began to explore avenues to slow the arms race, control nuclear proliferation, and otherwise curb the economic and strategic costs of continued competition. In 1963, they established a crisis communication hotline between Washington and Moscow and signed a Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which outlawed testing in the atmosphere, in outer space, and underwater; it also established a precedent for cooperation on strategic arms limitations.¹⁸ Concerned by the potential consequences of nuclear proliferation outside Europe after China conducted two successful nuclear tests and Japan, Canada,

¹³ Mark Kramer, “The Kremlin, the Prague Spring, and the Brezhnev Doctrine,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, ed., *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion and Utopia*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2011b, p. 288.

¹⁴ Angela Romano, “Détente, Entente, or Linkage? The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in U.S. Relations with the Soviet Union,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 4, September 2009, p. 703.

¹⁵ Matthew J. Ambrose, *The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018, p. 32; Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Austin Long, “The Geopolitical Origins of U.S. Hard-Target Kill Counterforce Capabilities and MIRVs,” in Travis Wheeler Michael Krepon, and Shane Mason, eds., *The Lure and Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age*, Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2016, pp. 19, 22; Zubok, 2009, p. 205.

¹⁶ Keith L. Nelson, *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 51–52.

¹⁷ As quoted in Kramer, 2011b, p. 291.

¹⁸ Hal Brands, “Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, August 2007, p. 391; Herring, 2011, p. 731; Miles, 2016, p. 726.

Sweden, and India indicated a new interest in developing their own programs, U.S. and Soviet negotiators forged the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.¹⁹

Yet similar agreements on the core questions of borders in Europe, the status of Germany, and the strategic arms race remained out of reach in the late 1960s. The strategic and perceptual factors contributing to the continued hostilities between the countries are discussed in the next two sections.

Perceptual and Diplomatic Context

U.S. Threat Perceptions

With few exceptions, senior U.S. policymakers in 1969 believed that the Soviet Union represented the most urgent threat to the United States, its allies, and the maintenance of a peaceful international system. The Soviets possessed a formidable and growing nuclear arsenal and a sizable military presence in continental Europe; from the U.S. perspective, the Soviets also possessed a ruthless commitment to the export of communism, whether through direct force (as demonstrated in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe), subversion (exemplified in its support of leftist parties across the West), or support to radical movements across the developing world (including, of particular interest to the United States, Vietnam). From Washington's perspective, Moscow's ultimate goal appeared to be no less than global domination.²⁰

Yet even as U.S. policymakers remained deeply concerned in the late 1960s about the Soviets' long-term ambitions—and even as they recognized the continued risk of inadvertent or uncontrolled escalation—they did not fear that the Soviets were planning to launch a premeditated assault on the United States or Western Europe in the near future. Between 1963 and 1969, when this case study begins, U.S. analysts consistently assessed that the Soviet Union recognized the United States' global conventional military advantage (even if the Soviet buildup had narrowed the gap) and understood the risk that a conventional conflict would escalate to a nuclear exchange, and therefore did not wish to start a fight. Likewise, U.S. officials and analysts correctly ascribed Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's removal in October 1964 to elite anxiety over the Soviet Union's slowing economy, the worsening rift with China, and domestic discontent; and U.S. leaders deduced that the new Soviet leadership wished to reduce tensions, preserve the status quo ante in Europe, and avoid further brinksmanship with the United States. Even as U.S. leaders viewed the Soviet system as fundamentally incompatible with Western democratic capitalism, and even as they feared the spread of communism throughout the Third World, senior policymakers believed that the Soviet Union shared their interest in stabilizing the international system and avoiding a war

¹⁹ On Soviet motivations, see Brands, 2007, pp. 406–408.

²⁰ Frank Costigliola, "U.S. Foreign Policy from Kennedy to Johnson," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 112–113.

that would be catastrophic to both states—a perception that began late in the John F. Kennedy administration, lasted through the Lyndon Johnson administration, and extended into the incoming Richard Nixon administration.²¹

The threat of nuclear annihilation underscored U.S. perceptions of the benefits and risks of accommodation with the Soviet Union throughout this period. By 1963, defense analysts had determined that a full nuclear exchange between the rivals, regardless of which side initiated the attack, would cause catastrophic damage to both countries.²² U.S. assessments of the nuclear risks that might accompany a direct conflict between the two states grew even more alarming as the decade progressed and new Soviet capabilities came online.

Soviet Threat Perceptions

A similar combination of fear and opportunity characterized Soviet perceptions of the United States in 1969. The “collective leadership” that governed the Soviet Union after 1964 adhered to a conservative interpretation of Leninist ideology, which predicted that the struggle between the communist and capitalist systems inevitably would produce another world war. The officials responsible for Soviet foreign policy—General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev; Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin; Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Mikhail Suslov; Nikolai Podgorny, who became first Second Secretary of the Communist Party and then Chairman of the Presidium; and Chairman of the Party and State Control Committee Aleksandr Shelepin, among others—agreed that the Soviet Union should attempt to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States, but they still viewed the United States as intrinsically hostile to the communist world.²³ Driven by its “beastly colonial nature, aggressiveness, [and] warmongering,” as a 1966 Party Report described, the United States was seen as an untrustworthy negotiator seeking to exploit the Soviet Union’s strategic inferiority and could not be presumed to negotiate in good faith.²⁴

This conviction was evidenced in Soviet strategists’ continued belief, despite repeated U.S. assurances to the contrary, that the United States was preparing for a disarming first strike.²⁵

²¹ Costigliola, 2010, pp. 112–113; Leffler, 2007, pp. 202–203; Miles, 2016, p. 722; Robert D. Schulzinger, “Détente in the Nixon–Ford Years, 1969–1976,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 374–375.

²² William Burr and David Alan Rosenberg, “Nuclear Competition in an Era of Stalemate, 1963–1975,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 89.

²³ Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and Détente of the 1970s,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2008, pp. 194–197.

²⁴ Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, “Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962–1975,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 140; Zubok, 2009, p. 197.

²⁵ John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich, and John F. Shull, *Soviet Intentions 1965–1985*, Vol. I, *An Analytical Comparison of U.S.-Soviet Assessments During the Cold War*, McLean, Va.: BDM Federal, Inc., 1995,

The U.S. development of highly accurate, multiple warhead MX missiles and MIRVed warheads over the late 1960s, combined with the perceived vulnerability of the United States' own missile silos and control centers, were interpreted as signs that the United States was readying to threaten the Soviet Union's predominantly land-based ICBM force, thereby reducing its capacity to execute a retaliatory response.²⁶ This fear propelled the country's arms buildup and underscored Soviet leaders' conviction through the mid-1960s that strategic parity was a precondition to negotiation of a political settlement.²⁷

By 1969, however, the improvement in the Soviet strategic forces compelled a reconsideration of the short-term risks of war—and the value of negotiating with the United States. In a stark departure from earlier phases of the Cold War, Soviet officials no longer seriously feared an imminent war because they believed that the Soviet Union now possessed a sufficient number of ICBMs to ensure retaliation, thereby deterring the United States from attempting a first strike.²⁸ According to an account by Chief of the General Staff Marshal Sergey Akhromeev, the Soviet Union's acceptance of the principle that war could be deterred as long as the country maintained a sufficient second-strike capacity was evidenced in a July 1969 decision of the Defense Council to prioritize the manufacture of fewer survivable missiles over a greater quantity of more-vulnerable missiles.²⁹

Still, Soviet leaders remained fearful of the United States. Even if they believed that war could be avoided in the short term, they emphasized the need for continued vigilance against U.S. attempts to reclaim strategic superiority. As one account, based on interviews conducted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, summarized: "Soviet strategists considered the nuclear balance to be unstable, because technological advances and increases in the size of the arsenal could significantly augment the power of one side relative to the other, thereby upsetting the balance."³⁰ Although willing to listen to U.S. offers and to cooperate on peripheral issues, Soviet officials continued to be suspicious even of sincere U.S. attempts to reduce military tensions or curb the arms race.³¹ In January 1967, for instance, the Soviet government did not respond to a formal U.S. proposal to negotiate mutual troop reductions in Europe—a deal that Secretary of State Dean Rusk had sweetened with the assurance that withdrawn troops would not be redeployed to Vietnam, thereby shielding

p. 2; Svetlana Savranskaya and David A. Welch, "SALT II and the Growth of Mistrust," transcript of the Proceedings of the Musgrove Conference of the Carter-Brezhnev Project Musgrove Plantation, St. Simon's Island, Ga., May 7–9, 1994, final version, February 5, 1995, pp. 30–31, 36.

²⁶ Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 2; Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Austin Long, "The MAD Who Wasn't There: Soviet Reactions to the Late Cold War Nuclear Balance," *Security Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2017, pp. 609–610.

²⁷ Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, p. 142.

²⁸ Green and Long, 2017, p. 616; Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 126.

²⁹ Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 16.

³⁰ Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 17.

³¹ Zubok, 2009, p. 205.

the Kremlin from expected Chinese criticism. This lack of response stemmed from Soviet suspicions that the offer was a ploy to undercut the Soviet Union's ability to intervene in Eastern Europe.³² Similarly, Soviet diplomats underestimated the Johnson administration's sincere desire to stabilize the arms race, interpreting attempts to negotiate a freeze on offensive and defensive weapons as an attempt to preserve U.S. superiority in offensive weapons. Soviet negotiators therefore ignored or rebuffed multiple attempts to raise the issue of mutual reductions in strategic arsenals and military budgets between 1965 and 1969.³³

Motives of Each Side

Although U.S. and Soviet leaders remained committed to the Cold War, a combination of international and domestic pressures motivated the countries to reconsider the terms of their rivalry. Table 4.2 lists the major considerations that prompted the United States and the Soviet Union to pursue greater bilateral engagement and limited accommodation.

Stronger State: The United States

By the late 1960s, U.S. policymakers viewed the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union as necessary to decrease the risk of conflict and reduce the political and economic burden of sustaining the competition over the long term. The immediate priorities for U.S. defense policymakers were to deter a deliberate and devastating nuclear attack on the United States or its allies, to counter and contain Soviet influence until the system collapsed, and to maintain a stable international system conducive to the spread of liberal democratic capitalist systems of governance and economics. But U.S. policymakers believed that the United States no longer had the raw power to contain the Soviet Union by force; instead, they sought to persuade their Soviet counterparts to limit adventurism abroad by binding Moscow to a system of shared institutions and commitments.³⁴ In the process, the United States could also reassure its allies, who appeared increasingly worried about the costs and risks of the global confrontation, and ensure that recent efforts by its traditional partners (West Germany, France, and Britain) to improve relations with the Soviet Union did not come at the expense of U.S. interests.³⁵

³² Dobrynin, 1995, p. 169.

³³ Ambrose, 2018, p. 20; Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 197, 226; Nelson, 1995, p. 73; Zubok, 2009, p. 200.

³⁴ Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016, pp. 25–26.

³⁵ Jussi Hanhimäki, "Henry Kissinger: Vision or Status Quo?," in Marie-Pierre Rey Frédéric Bozo, Bernd Rother, and N. Piers Ludlow, eds., *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945–1990*, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Berghahn Books, 2012, p. 197; Schulzinger, 2010, p. 375.

TABLE 4.2

Each Side's Motives for Seeking Détente

Motive	Description
United States	
Reduce the risks associated with the U.S.-Soviet competition, including the risk of a deliberate Soviet nuclear attack on the United States or its allies.	Improved relations with the Soviets were viewed as essential to decreasing the risk of conflict.
Counter and contain Soviet influence until the system collapsed.	The United States sought to persuade the Soviet Union to limit its adventurism abroad through a commitment to shared institutions and agreements.
Maintain a stable international system conducive to the spread of liberal democratic capitalist systems of governance and economics.	U.S. policy was crafted to appease many in the United States and in Western Europe who opposed the war in Vietnam and the continued arms race.
Soviet Union	
Foster the domestic and international conditions needed to strengthen communism at home and encourage adoption of the model abroad while avoiding escalation with the United States.	- The Soviets sought to maintain strategic parity by retaining sufficient nuclear forces to launch a retaliatory blow in order to deter a surprise attack and allow the Soviets to engage with the United States as equals. - In support of the same goal, the Soviets also sought to reduce tensions and improve communications with the United States and Western Europe.
Reduce the costs and risks associated with the U.S.-Soviet competition.	Increasing defense expenditures had forced the Soviets to divert funds from the production of consumer goods, industrial and agricultural products, and development of nonstrategic military programs.

But détente also was aimed at another audience: a restive public in the United States (and Western Europe) that opposed the war in Vietnam and the continued arms race. U.S. leaders feared that this group could force limits on U.S. defense expenditures and restrict the president's capacity to authorize military activities abroad.³⁶ In 1969, congressional opponents nearly blocked the Nixon administration's proposal for the Safeguard ABM program, which was saved only when Vice President Spiro Agnew broke a tie vote in the Senate. Other legislation passed that same year, including the Military Procurement Authorization Act of November 1969 (which imposed a \$2.5 billion ceiling on spending in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand) and the Defense Appropriations Act of December 1969 (which included an amendment precluding the use of U.S. ground forces in Laos or Thailand), appeared to portend future restrictions on both the president's power to pursue a more assertive foreign policy and the resources required to implement it.³⁷

³⁶ On détente as conservative politics, see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

³⁷ Nelson, 1995, p. 23.

Weaker State: The Soviet Union

Although the Soviet Union continued to rebuff overtures from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations throughout the 1960s, the atmosphere in Moscow became more receptive after 1968 as Brezhnev began to consolidate political power, isolate conservative hardline opponents, and elevate a cadre of officials who endorsed the attempted improvement in relations with the United States. Despite this conviction that the struggle between the communist and capitalist systems could end only with war, the new leadership rejected both the extreme paranoia of the Stalin era and the recklessness of the Khrushchev period in favor of a more pragmatic interpretation of the East-West rivalry.³⁸ The new regime had been alarmed by Khrushchev's reckless foreign policy, and it sought to reimpose a degree of predictability and caution to Soviet foreign policy.³⁹ Believing that the forces of history were working in the Soviet Union's favor, this group sought to foster the domestic and international conditions conducive to strengthening communism at home and encouraging adoption of the model abroad while avoiding unnecessary escalation.

In particular, Brezhnev's two foreign policy priorities were to prevent war and to safeguard the post-1945 European borders that he and other Soviet officials believed provided a necessary buffer against hostile Western forces, whether U.S. or German. Achieving these objectives required balancing two competing approaches. Maintaining a general strategic parity, particularly by retaining sufficient nuclear forces to launch a retaliatory blow, was necessary to deter a surprise attack and to allow Soviet negotiators to engage as equals with their U.S. counterparts. At the same time, minimizing the risk of inadvertent confrontation or escalatory spiral required a reduction in tensions and an increase in improved communications with the United States and Western Europe. Brezhnev and his allies believed that by negotiating from a position of strength, the Soviet Union could attain recognition of its desired European borders, curb the costly arms race, reorient resources toward building a productive socialist system at home, and consolidate or expand communist influence abroad.⁴⁰

By the late 1960s, economic and political factors lent urgency to this effort. Soviet defense expenditures had already begun to outpace national growth, forcing the state to divert funds from the production of consumer goods, industrial and agricultural products, and development of nonstrategic military programs.⁴¹ Although the Soviet Union would continue to increase its defense spending through the 1970s, advocates of engagement with the United States continued to express hope that the country could reduce its military costs by negotiat-

³⁸ Zubok, 2009, pp. 172–177, 204.

³⁹ Nelson, 1995, pp. 119–120; Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, pp. 138–139; Zubok, 2009, pp. 194–197.

⁴⁰ Leffler, 2007, pp. 237–243; Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, pp. 140–141; Zubok, 2008, pp. 428–429; Zubok, 2009, p. 193.

⁴¹ Leffler, 2007, p. 199; Nelson, 1995, pp. 32–33. Between 1965 and 1970, Soviet defense spending rose 40 percent as the country raced to close the gap in conventional and nuclear forces with the United States (Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, p. 142).

ing agreements on mutual disarmament.⁴² These economic challenges constrained the Soviet Union's ability to address emerging fissures within the communist bloc. New opposition had emerged from within the Warsaw Pact as efforts to promote economic integration faltered and new dissident and reformist movements arose in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, and elsewhere.⁴³ To shore up the Soviet Union's position in Eastern Europe and consolidate its control over the Warsaw Pact required additional political, military, and economic investments—investments that would become increasingly difficult to fund if the arms race accelerated and the Soviet Union continued to be denied access to Western technologies.⁴⁴

The need to reduce the costs and risks associated with the U.S.-Soviet competition became even more urgent as relations with China deteriorated over the 1960s.⁴⁵ A 1967 Foreign Ministry memorandum prepared for the Politburo summarized the problem succinctly, noting that a relaxation of tensions with the United States could help avoid “a situation where we have to fight on two fronts—that is, against China and the United States.”⁴⁶ The rift reached a crisis point in March 1969, when a border clash brought the neighboring states to the brink of war. Although a ceasefire was reached in September, the months-long crisis diverted resources toward the Soviet Union's southern flank and highlighted the need to reduce pressure elsewhere.⁴⁷ The conflict also heightened fears that Beijing and Washington might strike an alliance of convenience against Moscow, even if Soviet officials continued to believe that a lasting rapprochement between the capitalist and socialist states was impossible.

Historical Period 1: From Nixon's 1969 Inauguration to the 1971 Invitation to Moscow

Stronger State's Policies Toward the Weaker State

Pursuing a Détente with the Soviet Union

Inaugurated in January 1969, President Nixon and Kissinger, his national security adviser, moved quickly to develop and implement a strategy to reduce international tensions and stabilize the superpower contest. Détente, as the approach came to be known, was premised on

⁴² Leffler, 2007, p. 215; Nelson, 1995, p. 32; Zubok, 2008, pp. 428–429; Zubok, 2009, p. 193.

⁴³ Kramer, 2011b, pp. 292–299.

⁴⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, “The Structure of Great Power Politics, 1963–1975,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 493–494.

⁴⁵ Zubok, 2008, pp. 428–429. On Sino-Soviet relations during this period, see Elizabeth Wishnick, *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*, Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001, pp. 28–43.

⁴⁶ Excerpted in Dobrynin, 1995, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Zubok, 2009, pp. 209–210. The number of Soviet forces along the Chinese border tripled between 1969 and 1973 (Wishnick, 2001, p. 30).

the belief that the economic, political, and military costs of containment as implemented under recent administrations had become unsustainable. Instead, Nixon and Kissinger maintained, the United States should seek to manage Soviet power through arms control agreements and expanded East-West trade that would stabilize the relationship and bind the Soviet Union to the status quo. At the same time, rapprochement with China and expanded security cooperation with the Third World would limit the opportunities for Soviet adventurism and allow the United States to share more of the security burden with allies. Through a combination of accommodating and competitive tools, the United States could, as Kissinger described, encourage the Soviets to realize “the limitations of both its physical strength and of the limits [sic] of its ideological fervor.”⁴⁸

To lessen the costs of containment and encourage the Soviet Union to moderate its behavior, the Nixon administration pursued a strategy of *linkage* (the idea of making progress in one area dependent on progress in another area), premised on the idea that doing so would induce Moscow to pursue accommodating policies of its own. In practice, this would entail a combination of carrots (e.g., concessions on East-West trade and strategic arms negotiations) and sticks (e.g., demonstrations of U.S. technical superiority, continuation of U.S. military modernization programs) intended to persuade the Soviets that they had more to gain from a productive relationship with the United States than from pursuing unrestrained competition.⁴⁹ Notably, the Nixon administration did not seek to outline new terms for U.S.-Soviet competition in the Third World or attempt to negotiate a comprehensive settlement to the Cold War.

U.S. Proposal for Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

From the very start, the Nixon administration struck a more inviting tone toward the Soviet Union. After the president declared a new “era of negotiations” in his inaugural address, Kissinger transmitted a request through the Soviet ambassador to open a personal “back channel” to explore cooperation on such issues as Vietnam, Berlin, and strategic arms.⁵⁰ A presidential announcement of the resumption of arms control talks begun during the Johnson administration followed soon after.⁵¹ To indicate his desire to curb the arms race, Nixon used his first press conference to announce the United States would seek “sufficiency” rather than “superiority” in military power, a message underscored a month later when the administration decided to downsize the country’s planned ABM deployment by replacing the larger Sentinel system (which was to be directed against the Soviet threat) with a smaller Safeguard

⁴⁸ Brands, 2016, pp. 25–26.

⁴⁹ Hanhimäki, 2012, p. 197.

⁵⁰ Richard Moss, *Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente*, Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2017, pp. 24–28.

⁵¹ Evangelista, 1999.

system (which was directed against the Chinese).⁵² In February 1970, during his first speech to Congress on U.S. foreign policy, Nixon recognized the Soviet Union's legitimate security interests in Eastern Europe and stressed his willingness to engage in negotiations on regional issues, arms control, and trade to reduce tensions and promote détente.⁵³ During the first half of 1970, the administration approved a series of compromise proposals to jumpstart SALT, which the Johnson administration had opened in November 1968; this culminated in the agreement on May 20, 1971, to decouple discussion of defensive arms from offensive strategic weapons.⁵⁴ That same month, Nixon announced he would attend a summit in Moscow, scheduled for May 1972.⁵⁵

Continuation of U.S. Nuclear Arms Buildup Despite SALT Proposal

At the same time, however, the Nixon administration unveiled a series of policies intended to demonstrate U.S. superiority and its resolve to defend its interests by force if necessary.⁵⁶ Although aware of Soviet concerns, the Nixon administration in 1969 refused to suspend testing of MIRVs during the SALT negotiations, “contending that the question of MIRV limitations should be resolved only on a mutual basis in the course of the negotiations.”⁵⁷ MIRVed Minuteman III ICBMs were fielded the following year, and Poseidon C-3 SLBMs deployed in 1971.⁵⁸ Likewise, Nixon decided in early 1970 after a brief review to continue to develop and deploy an ABM system, although he also elected to reduce its scale; he also endorsed development of new offensive systems—such as the B-1 supersonic heavy bomber, the undersea long-range missile system, and new mobile ICBM systems—because he believed the buildup would concern Soviet planners and persuade Moscow to trade concessions on other areas in order to halt development of these systems.⁵⁹ All the while, U.S. back-channel negotiations with the Soviet Union proceeded in parallel with behind-the-scenes discussions to open relations with China, culminating in July 1971 with Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing and the public

⁵² Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, revised ed., Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994, p. 150; Richard Nixon, “The President's News Conference,” January 27, 1969 (via The American Presidency Project); Schulzinger, 2010, p. 379. On the shift to “sufficiency” as the standard for U.S. strategic forces, see Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1969–1972*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, pp. 15–19.

⁵³ Richard Nixon, *First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's*, February 18, 1970 (via The American Presidency Project).

⁵⁴ Garthoff, 1994, pp. 151–157.

⁵⁵ Schulzinger, 2010, p. 379.

⁵⁶ Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 51.

⁵⁷ Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2016, p. 85.

⁵⁸ Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2016, p. 57; Green and Long, 2016, pp. 22–23.

⁵⁹ Moss, 2017, pp. 64, 69.

announcement that Nixon had accepted an invitation to become the first U.S. president to visit Beijing.⁶⁰

Intensification of U.S. Military Pressure on North Vietnam

Other, more-assertive policies were intended to coerce the Soviet Union into assisting the U.S. attempt to secure a negotiated end to the war in Vietnam. In October 1969, for instance, the president ordered a global nuclear readiness exercise, known as the Joint Chiefs of Staff Readiness Test, in an attempt to signal his willingness to use “excessive” force to secure U.S. objectives. The risky operation, which was terminated after evidence that the Soviets had detected the activities, was intended to lend credibility to Nixon’s prior threats to intensify military pressure on Hanoi and, by instilling fear that the local conflict could escalate, persuade the Soviet leadership (as well as their counterparts in Beijing) to compel the North Vietnamese government to make concessions at the negotiating table.⁶¹ When this failed to bring a breakthrough in the Paris peace talks, the United States intensified its military pressure on North Vietnam by ordering an escalation of the bombing campaign and an expansion of operations into Cambodia and Laos in May 1970.⁶²

Rebalancing of U.S. Overseas Commitments

Other, more-ambiguous policy changes were intended neither to accommodate nor threaten the Soviet Union; instead, they were motivated by the administration’s desire to maintain the U.S. forward presence while reducing its international commitments. During a stopover in Guam in 1969, for instance, the president announced a new strategic doctrine premised on three tenets, each of which were elaborated on in subsequent statements. First, the United States remained committed to its treaty obligations and would use nuclear weapons to defend its allies and other nations against attack from a nuclear power. The United States would not, however, repeat its response to the Vietnam crisis; although it would furnish economic and military assistance to a state facing the threat of internal subversion, it would not commit ground troops. Instead, the United States called on its allies to assume greater responsibility in preserving both internal and regional security, a policy known as the Nixon Doctrine.⁶³ Underscoring the point, the president in late 1969 approved a shift in U.S. military planning from the established “two and a half wars” posture to a “one and a half wars” basis, a for-

⁶⁰ Herring, 2011, pp. 771, 775–779.

⁶¹ William Burr and Jeffrey Kimball, “Nixon’s Secret Nuclear Alert: Vietnam War Diplomacy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Readiness Test, October 1969,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, pp. 126–130; Scott D. Sagan and Jeremi Suri, “The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Spring 2003, pp. 158–171.

⁶² George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 4th ed., Boston, Mass.: McGraw-Hill, 2002, pp. 131–165.

⁶³ Sargent, 2015, p. 53.

mula that reduced U.S. forces in Asia from 23–2/3 divisions to 14–1/2 divisions and enabled a 6-percent reduction in the defense budget.⁶⁴

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

No Change in Soviet Assessments of U.S. Intentions and the Risk of War

Much about the Soviet leadership's internal deliberations between 1969 and 1971 remains unknown. But the available scholarship (which is based on interviews, memoirs, and archival materials) suggests that, at least initially, neither the Nixon administration's sticks (with the notable exception of its outreach to China) nor its carrots fundamentally altered Soviet assessments of the United States' intentions or the relative risk of war during this period. Aware of the president's hawkish record in Congress, Soviet analysts writing shortly after the 1968 election described Nixon and his staff as "profoundly anti-Soviet" and predicted that he was likely to use negotiations only "to sound out our positions and to pay his dues to the public opinion of his country," rather than to pursue genuine engagement.⁶⁵ Over the next two years, while U.S.-Soviet talks proceeded and U.S. demonstrations of military strength continued, those who opposed negotiations (particularly Soviet military leaders), continued to argue that the United States intended to use arms talks as a pretext to deny the Soviet Union its recent gains and to restore the U.S. offensive advantage, reviving the threat of a bolt-from-the-blue attack.⁶⁶ Participants in the early strategic arms talks recalled that Minister of Defense Andrei Grechko "remained permanently apoplectic" during the negotiations and would "repeatedly and irrelevantly launch into admonitory lectures on the aggressive nature of imperialism, which, he assured us, had not changed."⁶⁷ This faction remained suspicious of U.S. efforts to impose limits on ballistic missile defenses and viewed the notion as a U.S. attempt to reclaim a first-strike capability.⁶⁸ In this group's view, one participant in the negotiations recalled, "[t]here was no guarantee against a new world war except a continued buildup of Soviet armed might," because "we would be had, we would be cheated, we had to stay away from [arms limitations]."⁶⁹

Then again, U.S. attempts to signal military strength also did not impel the Soviet Union to reexamine its existing assessment of the overall strategic balance or of U.S. foreign ambitions and therefore did not weaken the position of those within the Soviet leadership who were inclined to hear out the Americans, although perhaps not to offer concessions of their

⁶⁴ Poole, 2013, pp. 20–31; Sargent, 2015, p. 56.

⁶⁵ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 176; Haslam, 2011, p. 256.

⁶⁶ Mark Kramer, "Foreign Policymaking and Party-State Relations in the Soviet Union During the Brezhnev Era," in Rüdiger Bergien and Jens Gieseke, eds., *Communist Parties Revisited: Sociocultural Approaches to Party Rule in the Soviet Bloc, 1956–1991*, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Berghahn Books, 2018, p. 286.

⁶⁷ As quoted in Haslam, 2011, p. 218.

⁶⁸ Evangelista, 1999, pp. 209–210.

⁶⁹ General Nikolai Detinov, Deputy Chief of General Staff, as quoted in Haslam, 2011, p. 218.

own. The administration's more-assertive policies—such as the decision to continue the Safeguard ABM program, the intensification of bombing in North Vietnam, the increase in alert status, and the fielding of the first MIRVed ICBMs—appeared to confirm the theory that the United States sought military superiority, but this did not cause Soviet officials to fear that a war was now more likely. To the contrary, Soviet assessments of Nixon continued to hew closely to the description offered in a post-election assessment circulated among Party leadership in 1968: he was seen as “quite a cautious man, disinclined to precipitate international crises, understanding, like his predecessors in the White House, the need to sustain a certain degree of mutual understanding with the USSR and to follow a course that would make possible the avoidance of nuclear war with it.”⁷⁰ Through 1971, Soviet officials continued in meetings and written memoranda to stress Nixon's desire to enact tax cuts and his difficulty securing congressional support for the Safeguard ABM program, reasoning that domestic factors—not strategic calculations—had motivated the policy and would also limit his administration's ability to sustain the buildup and would disincentivize adventurism.⁷¹ For instance, Soviet analysts writing after Nixon's 1970 announcement of the ABM program reasoned that an actual deployment was unlikely because popular opposition would make it difficult for the Nixon administration to secure the necessary funding and would instead incentivize U.S. negotiators to pursue mutual limitations.⁷² Although the shortage of public documents on Soviet deliberations leaves many questions unanswered, there is little evidence that this perception was altered by the October 1969 global nuclear readiness exercise, which the Nixon administration had hoped would persuade the Kremlin of U.S. willingness to escalate. Instead, the available records suggest that Soviet analysts were unsure of how to interpret the evidence that the U.S. military had increased its readiness status and did not see the maneuver as reason to pressure Hanoi to offer concessions.⁷³

Soviet Participation in Back-Channel Talks on Strategic Arms Limitations

Why did the Soviet Union decide to accept the U.S. invitation to open back-channel talks in 1969 and then to participate in SALT through 1971? The available evidence suggests that the Soviets decided to hedge their bets, believing they had little to lose from participating in dialogue now that the Soviet Union had attained parity and mitigated the threat of a surprise attack.⁷⁴ For most of 1969, the U.S.-Soviet back channel was used for questions of protocol, as Moscow gambled that time would increase pressure on the Nixon administration to initiate more-specific discussion of arms control without the requirement that the Soviets deliver North Vietnamese concessions—a requirement that Soviet officials viewed as unreasonable

⁷⁰ Haslam, 2011, p. 257.

⁷¹ Evangelista, 1999, pp. 220–223; Haslam, 2011, p. 256; Moss, 2017, p. 67.

⁷² Evangelista, 1999, pp. 221–223.

⁷³ Sagan and Suri, 2003, pp. 178–179.

⁷⁴ Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, p. 142.

because it would in effect allow Hanoi to dictate Soviet policy.⁷⁵ By keeping communication channels open and maintaining the possibility of future negotiations, the Soviets preserved the possibility that the United States might return with a better offer—particularly because they believed that their own negotiating leverage would improve as new military systems came online.⁷⁶

Worsening Sino-Soviet Tensions Leading to Reevaluation of U.S. Overtures

The deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in fall 1969—and the subsequent improvement in Sino-U.S. relations in 1971—provided additional encouragement to improve relations with the United States to avert the prospect of a two-front challenge. In his memoirs, Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin suggested that the decision to agree to begin the first series of formal SALT negotiations in fall 1969 was motivated by a desire to reach agreement before the United States could use its improved relations with China to impel Soviet concessions.⁷⁷ These talks gained new urgency after the discovery of Kissinger’s secret trip to Beijing in July 1971.⁷⁸ Caught off guard, the Politburo interpreted the U.S. diplomat’s visit as a “grand strategic setback” and evidence that, as one diplomat reported, the United States and China were “building a new strategic alignment of forces in Asia and in the world as a whole.”⁷⁹ In contrast to the Nixon administration’s attempts to demonstrate U.S. military superiority, the diplomatic “stick” of U.S.-China rapprochement compelled the Soviet Union to reevaluate the benefits of engaging the United States and the costs of continued intransigence in the back-channel talks.

Successful Dialogue with West Germany Showing Benefits of Diplomatic Engagement

Concurrently, a series of positive negotiations in Europe persuaded the Soviet leadership of the potential benefits of engagement. Beginning in 1969, when Social Democratic Party leader Willy Brandt was elected chancellor, West Germany pursued a policy of *Ostpolitik* premised on the pledge to reopen transit between the two German states and reduce enmity with the communist world.⁸⁰ In August 1970, the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Germany

⁷⁵ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 247–249; Moss, 2017, pp. 29, 32–36.

⁷⁶ Haslam, 2011, p. 256; Zubok, 2009, p. 216.

⁷⁷ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 202. For a discussion of the first series of SALT talks, held in Helsinki from November to December 1969, see Moss, 2017, pp. 67–73.

⁷⁸ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015, p. 43.

⁷⁹ Brands, 2016, p. 33.

⁸⁰ For a brief history of Soviet negotiations during this period with West Germany, as well as with France, Britain, and other Western European states, see Jussi Hanhimäki, “Détente in Europe, 1968–1975,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, *Crises and Détente*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

(often referenced as West Germany) signed the Moscow Treaty, in which both sides agreed to recognize the postwar borders of Europe and the territorial integrity of all European states. A subsequent West German–Polish agreement followed in December 1970, formalizing West Germany’s recognition of the post-1945 political reality and paving the path to a normalization of relations.⁸¹ The opening to Western Europe bolstered the political authority of advocates for détente with the Politburo, who now argued that continued dialogue could resolve the dispute over West Berlin and reduce the risk of a general war in Europe in the near future. “We have already achieved much,” Brezhnev explained to his speech writers in October 1971, “And we will do everything to make the Conference on European Security and Cooperation [CESC] proclaim a declaration on the principles of peaceful coexistence in Europe. This will postpone war perhaps by 25 years, probably even by a century.”⁸²

The successful dialogue with West Germany created more-favorable conditions for the Soviets to respond positively to the Nixon administration’s overtures. The Soviets recognized that U.S. support and participation was necessary to resolve the status of Berlin and to affirm the permanence of postwar borders. But just as importantly, the success of the West German initiative bolstered Brezhnev’s personal authority and granted him new flexibility to engage the United States and to circumvent the hardliners, still present in every level of the government and Party, who opposed any effort to reach accommodation with the West.⁸³ The Soviet premier previously had been unwilling to invest personally in improving relations, agreeing only to open back-channel talks but not to take the initiative required to encourage substantive talks.⁸⁴ In the aftermath of the Moscow and Warsaw treaties, Brezhnev expressed new confidence in Moscow’s ability to strike a bargain with Washington—and new interest in using the back channel as a vehicle to accelerate a political settlement in Europe.⁸⁵ He committed himself personally to the task of improving relations through substantive negotiations on arms control, leveraging the back channel to smooth areas of disagreement and secure the signing of the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin in September 1971.⁸⁶ He conceded to U.S. requests to link talks on Berlin to progress in the SALT negotiations and began to express new interest in existing U.S. proposals for mutual force reductions.⁸⁷ In a series of public speeches during spring 1971—including at the annual Party Congress—Brezhnev called for negotiations on force reductions to begin and, in a major departure from Soviet policy, agreed in

⁸¹ Zubok, 2009, p. 212.

⁸² Zubok, 2009, p. 215.

⁸³ Zubok, 2009, p. 213.

⁸⁴ Haslam, 2011, p. 256; Zubok, 2009, p. 216.

⁸⁵ Leffler, 2007, p. 204.

⁸⁶ Haslam, 2011, p. 256; Moss, 2017, pp. 83–85; Zubok, 2009, p. 216.

⁸⁷ Moss, 2017, pp. 83–85.

principle to put indigenous forces on the table.⁸⁸ And when Nixon wrote to personally invite the Soviet premier to talks on “big issues” in August 1971, Brezhnev responded quickly with an invitation to a formal summit in Moscow in May 1972.⁸⁹

Consolidation of Brezhnev’s Leadership of the Soviet Union

Lastly, political changes within the Politburo provided favorable conditions for the Soviet Union to consider a limited negotiated settlement with the United States and, by early 1972, to begin pursuing one more actively. Through a combination of bureaucratic skill, personal charm, and the status afforded by his management of the 1968 Czechoslovakia crisis, Brezhnev asserted control over Soviet relations with the United States and Western Europe and consolidated his leadership of the regime between 1968 and 1971.⁹⁰ Although he shared his counterparts’ commitment to communist ideology, he was distinguished by a deep-rooted aversion to war, one established during the experience of World War II and attenuated by a recognition of the devastation that a nuclear conflict would cause.⁹¹ These fears were evidenced during a May 1972 military simulation, during which he was presented with the results of a simulated U.S. first strike that killed 80 million Soviets: Given a button and asked to authorize a simulated retaliatory strike, the premier, according to one attendee, turned “pale and perspiring,” “trembled visibly,” and repeatedly requested assurances that the button would not initiate a real launch. After that, he abstained from any further simulations or exercises involving nuclear weapons.⁹²

As his influence over the government grew, Brezhnev removed or demoted critics of engagement and promoted allies (such as Gromyko, Grechko, and KGB chairman Yuri Andropov) who shared the premier’s desire to relax tensions.⁹³ The resulting change in atmosphere was evidenced at the Twenty-Fourth Party Congress held in March 1971, which Brezhnev used as an opportunity to deliver a six-hour address setting out a program for relaxing tensions with the West and promoting international peace. In it, he called for the rejection of the use of force, the signing of bilateral and regional agreements, the negotiation of arms limitations leading to the eventual prohibition of all “weapons of mass destruction,” mutual reductions in military spending, and the convening of an all-European Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE), among other items.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Christoph Bluth, “Arms Control as a Part of Strategy: The Warsaw Pact in MBFR Negotiations,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, May 2012, p. 249.

⁸⁹ Zubok, 2009, p. 216.

⁹⁰ Zubok, 2009, pp. 206–209.

⁹¹ Leffler, 2007, p. 237.

⁹² Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 24.

⁹³ Savranskaya and Taubman, 2010, p. 143; Zubok, 2009, p. 206.

⁹⁴ Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, p. 186.

Effect on the Broader Relationship

Although the Nixon administration's overtures did not produce a breakthrough in SALT or a settlement of other disputes between the superpowers, the changes in U.S. policy between 1969 and 1971 were still significant because they opened a door for the Soviet Union to walk through once other factors, such as the success of West German negotiations and Brezhnev's consolidation of power, created favorable conditions for the Soviet Union to engage more directly.

The thaw in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union decreased the risk of direct confrontation when crises in the Third World occurred. Events on the periphery of the conflict—including the Soviet dispatch of surface-to-air missiles to Egypt in March 1970, the U.S. incursion into Cambodia and Laos from May to June 1970, and the discovery that Soviet forces were building a submarine base in Cuba over fall 1970—prompted a series of diplomatic crises, but each was resolved peacefully. The states' shared desire to avoid a stand-off that could bring them to the brink of war (like the Cuban Missile Crisis a decade earlier) contributed to their desire to resolve crises peacefully, but the existence of a back channel provided an important means to achieve this shared goal. It allowed U.S. and Soviet officials to maintain a regular stream of private communications, to build the personal relationships that allowed them to mediate regional disputes quickly, and, when necessary, to withdraw from standoffs without a loss of face.⁹⁵ Soviet officials, although still wary of the Nixon administration, were sufficiently reassured by U.S. overtures to agree that it was worthwhile to wait and see how events unfolded rather than presume hostile intent. A memorandum approved for one session of the Politburo in 1971 alluded to this need to exercise restraint, positing that it was “in our long-term interest to demonstrate the possibility of a further development of Soviet-American relations in spite of their inherent fluctuations.”⁹⁶

Despite progress in other areas, the arms race continued unabated throughout this period. Determined to match U.S. qualitative improvements, to offset the advantage conferred by U.S. forward-based systems, and to alleviate concerns about Chinese nuclear forces, the Soviet Union continued its conventional and nuclear buildup even as it engaged in preliminary SALT negotiations. By Soviet accounts, the qualitative aspects of the buildup were primarily reactive efforts to maintain strategic parity by either imitating U.S. improvements or mitigating the anticipated effects of those improvements.⁹⁷ According to two senior participants in the discussion, the Soviet Defense Council's decision in July 1969 to put two recently developed ICBMs (the SS-17 and the SS-19) into production was largely a response to the U.S. development of its own MIRVed missiles and its expected fielding of a new ABM system, which were perceived as a Pentagon effort to reclaim nuclear superiority by holding the foundation of Soviet strategy—its ICBM force—at risk while introducing uncertainty about its

⁹⁵ Moss, 2017, pp. 46–61; Sargent, 2015, p. 46.

⁹⁶ Excerpted in Dobrynin, 1995, p. 209.

⁹⁷ Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, pp. 7, 11.

ability to retaliate if struck.⁹⁸ For similar reasons, the Politburo approved the deployment of new MIRV-capable ICBMs in 1970, with flight tests beginning in 1971.⁹⁹ Moreover, Soviet negotiators continued to demand that any arms agreement include restrictions on MIRVs or forward-based bombers, both areas where U.S. superiority was clear, resulting in a deadlock by fall 1970.¹⁰⁰ The impasse was not broken until the United States conceded to the Soviet Union's demand to continue with an ABM-only treaty, a move that freed both states to continue with their offensive buildup.¹⁰¹

Historical Period 2: From the 1972 Moscow Summit to the 1975 Helsinki Act

Stronger State's Policies Toward the Weaker State

Completion of Strategic Arms Negotiations

The Nixon administration's efforts to promote détente with the Soviet Union intensified in preparation for the president's visit to Moscow. Working through back channels and the formal SALT negotiations, the United States pushed to fast-track a set of written agreements that expanded the scope of bilateral cooperation.¹⁰² In the months leading to the May 1972 summit, the U.S. and Soviet delegations reached understandings on reducing pollution; scientific, medical, and technological cooperation; space exploration; and a joint commercial commission tasked with negotiating a comprehensive trade agreement.¹⁰³

But these agreements were secondary to the strategic arms negotiations that accelerated after the United States accepted the Soviet Union's condition to delink negotiations on offensive and defensive weapon systems. In Moscow, the United States and Soviet Union finalized the text of an ABM Treaty, which permitted each to construct no more than the two ABM sites (one to defend the capital, and the other to protect a missile base) deemed the minimum required for each side to maintain a credible deterrent against a first strike, and completed an Interim Agreement on the Limitation of Strategic Arms (SALT I), which, in recognition of the U.S. advantage in MIRVs, allowed the Soviets to retain 1,618 ICBMs and 950 SLBMs, compared with the 1,054 ICBMs and 656 SLBMs permitted to the United States.¹⁰⁴ Signifying the start of a new era in East-West relations, the United States agreed to issue a statement on

⁹⁸ Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 3. Also see Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2016, pp. 57, 94.

⁹⁹ Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2016, pp. 57, 64; Burr and Rosenberg, 2010, p. 108; Hines, Mishulovich, and Shull, 1995, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 211–212; Garthoff, 1994, pp. 134, 141; Moss, 2017, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ Moss, 2017, pp. 84–85.

¹⁰² Moss, 2017, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Schulzinger, 2010, p. 380.

¹⁰⁴ Schulzinger, 2010, p. 380.

the “Basic Principles of Relations between the United States and the Soviet Union,” affirming the prospect of “peaceful coexistence” and committing to preserve “normal relations” based on the principles of “sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual advantage.”¹⁰⁵

Expansion of U.S.-Soviet Trade Relations and Arms Control Talks

Accordingly, the Nixon administration continued to take steps to improve relations, expand areas of cooperation, and resolve outstanding flashpoints. Consultations for a second round of SALT began in late 1972, eased by the prior U.S. decision to delink discussion of defensive and offensive systems. Expanding on the understanding reached in Moscow, an ambitious trade agreement providing for the opening of trade offices and the export of U.S. agricultural and industrial products as well as machinery, plants, and equipment was signed in October 1972; in a demonstration of the new climate, the White House committed, pending congressional approval, to extend most-favored nation status to the Soviet Union and to grant Export-Import Bank credits.¹⁰⁶ Separately, the Nixon administration in June 1973 agreed to a target of \$3 billion in trade over the next three years.¹⁰⁷ After Nixon’s resignation in 1974, President Gerald Ford continued his predecessor’s policy of détente with the Soviet Union. At a conference with Brezhnev in Vladivostok in November 1974, Ford approved a broad agreement establishing the framework for SALT II and continued to defend the arms control negotiations, even as his administration came under growing political pressure.

Continued Effort to Press the Soviet Union on Human Rights and Support to Revolutionary Governments

The following year, the United States approved the Helsinki Final Act, the concluding document of the three-year multilateral CSCE. Previous administrations had opposed the prospect of a European conference out of concern that it would inflame fissures of Western communism, elevate Soviet claims, and strengthen the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, but the Nixon administration viewed the proposed negotiations as a secondary concern unlikely to alter international relations or substantially benefit either party. Confronted with increased Western European interest, and desiring to preserve the nascent détente with the Soviet Union, the Nixon administration had agreed to support the venture, a policy the Ford administration sustained through 1974 and 1975.¹⁰⁸ The United States’ primary purpose in the deliberations was to preserve harmony within NATO, and Washington supported the

¹⁰⁵ Garthoff, 1994, p. 290.

¹⁰⁶ Mike Bowker, “Brezhnev and Superpower Relations,” in Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 98.

¹⁰⁷ Bowker, 2002, p. 98.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah B. Snyder, “The United States, Western Europe, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1972–1975,” in Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, eds., *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 258–263.

conclusion of an array of agreements that covered trade, military confidence-building measures, political borders, and (despite initial Soviet reticence) human rights norms.¹⁰⁹

But the United States also continued to pursue more-confrontational policies to check Soviet power, expand U.S. influence, and compel concessions in ongoing negotiations. Frustrated with the pace of negotiations to end the war in Vietnam, the Nixon administration authorized major naval and air campaigns against North Vietnam in March, May, and December 1972 before ultimately coercing the South Vietnamese to accept a January 1973 peace agreement enabling U.S. withdrawal.¹¹⁰ Elsewhere in Asia, the Nixon administration and then the Ford administration continued to take steps toward normalization of relations with China, building on the principles for the establishment of formal diplomatic arrangements agreed to during Nixon's first presidential visit to the country in February 1972. In the Middle East, the United States first dismissed Soviet attempts to mediate a political settlement among Egypt, Israel, and Syria; then, in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, moved to exclude the Soviet Union from the peace process altogether.¹¹¹ And if the Nixon and Ford administrations viewed the war in Vietnam as an important lesson against intervening directly in the Third World, they did not question the underlying premise that the spread of revolutionary nationalist movements threatened U.S. interests and empowered Soviet influence. As a result, they continued to provide substantial military and economic assistance to allies and partners that pledged to serve as regional policeman on behalf of the United States.¹¹²

Continued Modernization and Diversification of U.S. Nuclear Forces

Even as it argued for arms control, the United States also continued to modernize and diversify its nuclear forces out of concern that the nuclear balance was “delicate” and in hopes of using counterforce investments “as carrots or sticks to mold Soviet grand strategy in a more favorable direction,” as two nuclear scholars have summarized.¹¹³ Between 1972 and 1975, the Nixon and Ford administrations initiated development of new systems for all three legs of the nuclear triad, including the Trident I and II SLBMs, the MX ICBM, and the B-1 bomber program.¹¹⁴ During the same period, the administrations undertook a systematic review of limited nuclear options, resulting in a 1974 assessment that nuclear weapons could be used

¹⁰⁹ Sarah B. Snyder, “Jerry, Don’t Go”: Domestic Opposition to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act,” *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2010, pp. 68–69.

¹¹⁰ Herring, 2011, pp. 796–798.

¹¹¹ William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Third Edition, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005, pp. 130–176.

¹¹² Westad, 2007, pp. 197–198, 200–201.

¹¹³ Green and Long, 2016, p. 32.

¹¹⁴ Brendan Rittenhouse Green, *The Revolution That Failed: Nuclear Competition, Arms Control, and the Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020, p. 125.

to control escalation and, later that year, the publication of Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy 74.¹¹⁵

Support for the Inclusion of Human Rights Issues in the Helsinki Final Act

Other U.S. policies during this period cannot be easily categorized as more- or less-hardline. After some initial resistance, the United States supported the Western European-led effort to force the Soviet Union to accept the inclusion of a set of “Basket III” human rights issues in the negotiations for the Helsinki Final Act, which was completed between 1973 and 1975. In isolation, U.S. support for Soviet participation in a European conference—a long-held Soviet objective—amounted to a less-hardline approach toward resolving outstanding conflicts of interest on the continent. But by forcing the Soviet Union to choose between the prospect of an all-European agreement and acceptance of restrictions on its internal policy, the Nixon administration’s decision also challenged the Soviet ability to maintain the political, social, and cultural controls it had long deemed necessary to preserving security, maintaining Communist Party control, and guarding against perceived external subversion.¹¹⁶

Emergence of Congressional Opposition to Détente

Throughout this period, the Nixon and Ford administrations’ attempts to engage the Soviet Union engendered significant opposition in Congress, where a bipartisan coalition of anti-détente lawmakers argued that the United States had conceded too much for too little reward.¹¹⁷ Angered by the 1972 signature of the U.S.-Soviet trade agreement, in which the Nixon administration had agreed to lower tariffs against Soviet goods in exchange for Moscow’s agreement to a partial payment on its 1945 Lend-Lease debts, Democratic lawmakers Henry M. Jackson of Washington and Charles A. Vanik of Ohio introduced legislation that prohibited implementation unless the Soviet Union lifted restrictions on emigration by Soviet Jews. Although the language undercut the 1972 agreement and undermined Ford’s ability to offer future economic inducements, he was forced to sign it into law in 1974 after a long and politically costly public debate.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Green and Long, 2016, p. 23.

¹¹⁶ On the Final Act and rise of dissent movements within the communist bloc, see Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001; also see Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

¹¹⁷ Snyder, 2010, pp. 67–81.

¹¹⁸ Julian E. Zelizer, “Détente and Domestic Politics,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 33, No. 4, September 2009, p. 660.

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Soviet Interest in Continuing to Improve Relations with the United States

Although some elements of the Soviet regime continued to oppose engagement, Brezhnev and his allies welcomed the Nixon and Ford administration's overtures and sought to continue improving Soviet-American relations through the mid-1970s.¹¹⁹ Détente, as Brezhnev explained in 1972, could not halt the "historical progress" of international class struggle, "for the world outlook and the class aims of socialism and capitalism are opposite and irreconcilable."¹²⁰ But the progress on arms control, trade, and European security lent credence to his theory that the United States, and the capitalist world, recognized that a shift in the global correlation of forces was underway and that it was now possible to redress outstanding disputes through negotiation and compromise.¹²¹ Although the United States viewed the move as a purely procedural gesture, Kissinger's acceptance of the Soviet text of the Basic Principles of Relations impressed the Soviet delegation, which perceived the decision as "tantamount to recognition of the most important principle that the Soviet side stood and struggled for during many years": acknowledgement of equality as a basis for détente.¹²² Securing wider recognition of Soviet status as a global power equivalent to the United States therefore became the overriding goal of Soviet foreign policy.¹²³

After years of continued military gains, satisfactory back-channel negotiations, and invitations to high-profile summitry in which it would be recognized as an equal power, the Soviet leadership was reassured that it "now had everything it needed to speak firmly and clearly to the Americans, but also respectfully," as one historian noted.¹²⁴ In a special session of the Politburo to discuss the president's 1972 visit to Moscow, Soviet participants now described Nixon as a shrewd but pragmatic negotiator who could be worked with to actualize the Basic Principles and place Soviet-American relations on a more stable basis.¹²⁵ Reflecting on the period in his memoirs, Dobrynin credited the years of increased personal interaction between the two governments for the breakthrough, noting that such events as the Moscow Summit had allowed "both sides to overcome strong mutual suspicions and become engaged in more constructive relationships."¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Stuart J. Kaufman, "Organizational Politics and Change in Soviet Military Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 1994, p. 372.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Bowker, 2002, p. 93.

¹²¹ Svetlana Savranskaya, "Unintended Consequences: Soviet Interests, Expectations and Reactions to the Helsinki Final Act," in Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart, eds., *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*, Berghahn Books, 2008, p. 179.

¹²² Zubok, 2009, p. 218.

¹²³ Savranskaya, 2008, p. 176.

¹²⁴ Leffler, 2007, p. 243.

¹²⁵ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 256.

¹²⁶ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 252.

Soviet Overtures for Conventional and Nuclear Arms Limitation

Unlike in the previous period, the Soviet Union attempted to build on this foundation of goodwill by enacting its own more-accommodating policies. In May 1972, Brezhnev confronted the Defense Council and forced the military to drop its objections to SALT, clearing the way for productive negotiations and the signing of the ABM treaty in Moscow that month.¹²⁷ Following the successful summit, Brezhnev invited Nixon to continue a personal correspondence and eagerly made plans for his own visit to the United States in 1973, where he met with the president to discuss nuclear disarmament, expanded cultural exchange, and scientific cooperation, among other issues.¹²⁸ The signing of an Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War during the trip was interpreted by Brezhnev as further evidence that the countries could work together “toward some sort of crisis management and prevention,” and he redoubled his efforts to preserve and expand the bilateral dialogue.¹²⁹ That same month, the Soviet Union persuaded Warsaw Pact member states to begin talks with NATO on mutual reductions of armed forces in Europe in exchange for agreement to host the long-requested CSCE.¹³⁰

Commitment to Expand U.S.-Soviet Cooperation To Reduce Risk of Nuclear Conflict

Perhaps the clearest demonstration of Brezhnev’s commitment to détente was his decision to invest his personal legitimacy in negotiations with the United States by urging progress on another SALT agreement during the November 1974 summit in Vladivostok.¹³¹ Overruling ardent opposition from his aides and other senior officials, Brezhnev offered Ford a series of concessions to break the stalemate, including allowing U.S. forward-based systems and French and British armaments to be excluded from any SALT treaty, in exchange for what he believed would be U.S. recognition of parity.¹³² He might have believed, as another Soviet official proposed when interviewed after the end of the Cold War, that “[w]ith numbers of strategic weapons [such as MIRVed missiles] so high, the role and the importance of the so-called forward-based systems was, in a way, diminished.”¹³³ But Brezhnev’s willingness to compromise on long-standing Soviet negotiating lines—and to overrule opposition from his closest advisers—also underscored the strength of his commitment to working with the United States to decrease the costs of the arms race and reduce the risk of a nuclear con-

¹²⁷ Zubok, 2009, p. 220.

¹²⁸ Zubok, 2009, p. 222.

¹²⁹ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 277–278.

¹³⁰ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 276–277.

¹³¹ Leffler, 2007, pp. 245–256.

¹³² Ambrose, 2018, p. 44; Burr and Rosenberg, 2010, p. 107; Leffler, 2007, pp. 246–247.

¹³³ Savranskaya and Welch, 1994, p. 61.

flict.¹³⁴ As his personal interpreter, Victor Sukhodrev, later recalled, Brezhnev “over and over again” told his colleagues about

the importance of those first few minutes of conversation with Nixon in 1972 which had had a decisive effect . . . There was nothing specifically about strategic arms—no numbers, nothing. Its significance is purely psychological. Nixon did indeed say what Brezhnev says that he said, although in different words perhaps: “Let’s leave systems aside, and let’s talk about how to improve our relationship.” That left upon Brezhnev a lasting impression.¹³⁵

Over years of interaction, the Soviet premier, an emotive figure who privileged personal relationships, became even more convinced that he had found sincere partners in Washington who shared this primary goal of decreasing the chance of nuclear war—and he might not have been willing to squander it over what he viewed as technical details.¹³⁶

The Soviet premier remained committed to improving relations with the United States despite the United States’ periodic attempts to apply military pressure, not because of them. When the United States moved a carrier group into the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 India-Pakistan War, Brezhnev reacted with confusion, rather than hostility, and chose not to respond.¹³⁷ Similarly, he was taken aback by the U.S. decision to escalate attacks on North Vietnam in spring 1972 but overruled calls to boycott his planned visit to Washington because he believed the strategic arms negotiations were too important to risk.¹³⁸

Growing Soviet Frustration with Perceived Inconsistencies of U.S. Approach

Soviet frustration with the perceived inconsistencies of the U.S. approach mounted over 1974 and 1975, however. The Politburo reacted vehemently to the debate and passage of the Jackson-Vanik Act, which revived Soviet fears that the United States was seeking to subvert communism from within.¹³⁹ When the issue first arose in Congress in 1973, Brezhnev had rushed to assuage U.S. concerns by persuading the Central Committee to agree to a de facto halt to the collection of taxes on emigrating Jews, sharing unpublished emigration figures with the White House, and even, on Nixon’s personal request, providing a briefing on the departure of Soviet citizens.¹⁴⁰ He could not understand why the White House was

¹³⁴ Burr and Rosenberg, 2010, p. 107; Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 330–333; Haslam, 2011, p. 302; Savranskaya and Welch, 1994, p. 61.

¹³⁵ Savranskaya and Welch, 1994, pp. 10–11.

¹³⁶ Leffler, 2007, pp. 245–248.

¹³⁷ Zubok, 2009, p. 217.

¹³⁸ Dobrynin, 1995, pp. 247–249; Zubok, 2009, pp. 218, 220.

¹³⁹ Leffler, 2007, p. 245; Zubok, 2009, p. 234.

¹⁴⁰ Victor Dönninghaus and Andrei Savin, “Don’t Be Seen Repealing the Decree on the Jews—Just Don’t Enforce It: L.I. Brezhnev, Détente, and Jewish Emigration from the USSR,” *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Spring 2014, pp. 24–29.

unable to prevent the legislation's passage, and took the sudden focus on human rights "as a kind of personal affront," Sukhodrev later recalled.¹⁴¹ In response, the Politburo announced that it was abrogating the 1972 trade agreements, including its agreement to repay the Lend-Lease debt, and issued a veiled warning that the "grave damage" inflicted to trade relations "by no means encourages Soviet-American relations in other spheres."¹⁴² The Soviets also expressed concern about the United States' growing relationship with China, a trend that was perceived as hostile to the Soviet Union's interests and in tension with U.S. assurances that Washington did not seek conflict. In repeated encounters with U.S. leadership, Brezhnev pressed for assurances that the United States would not conclude a military agreement with China, warning that Beijing would make "perfidious attempts to bring about a clash between the Soviet Union and the United States."¹⁴³

Concession to Western European Demands on Universal Human Rights

These points of tension were not sufficient to dissuade the Soviet Union from participating in the CSCE or even from making the final concessions on human rights necessary to secure passage of the Helsinki Final Act in August 1975. The conference fulfilled the long-stated Soviet desire for a European security conference to recognize postwar frontiers, and Brezhnev had personally urged Washington and Bonn forward after a framework was agreed on during the 1972 summit.¹⁴⁴ During the final summit of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation in 1975, the Soviet delegation conceded to Western European demands to include provisions on the free movement of people, family reunification and visits, and informational, cultural, and educational openness in exchange for recognition of the territorial and political status quo in Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁵ These references to universal human rights, including the right of emigration, were viewed as potentially "subversive," but Brezhnev and Gromyko persuaded their colleagues that the security gains justified the risk. Misinterpreting the shifting winds in Washington, they argued that the United States had committed to the principle of noninterference in internal affairs and would not condition future interactions on the human rights provisions.¹⁴⁶

Effect on the Broader Relationship

U.S. attempts to accommodate Soviet concerns and to expand discussion of a variety of security issues likely reduced the chance of conflict in Europe between 1972 and 1975.

¹⁴¹ Savranskaya and Welch, 1994, p. 45.

¹⁴² Dobrynin, 1995, p. 337.

¹⁴³ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 283.

¹⁴⁴ Haslam, 2011, p. 265.

¹⁴⁵ Leffler, 2007, pp. 249–250; Zubok, 2009, p. 237.

¹⁴⁶ Dobrynin, 1995, p. 346; Savranskaya, 2008, p. 180.

By settling the issue of Western access to Berlin, the Quadripartite Agreement removed a perennial source of tension and averted the prospect of another crisis over the city. Similarly, the Helsinki Final Act provided a framework for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and that was bolstered by military confidence-building measures intended to avert miscommunications and misperceptions that could spark a crisis. The desire to secure additional force reductions, promote East-West trade, and conclude scientific and cultural agreements to boost the Soviet economy provided additional incentives for the Soviet Union to exercise restraint and pursue peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms.

The United States and the Soviet Union did not resolve their conflicts of interests outside Europe, however. At the same time that the United States began to reconsider the utility of direct interventions, the Soviets—emboldened by the recent improvement in their military capabilities, encouraged by North Vietnam’s victory, and eager to exploit new opportunities created in the aftermath of decolonization—began again to expand support for foreign revolutionaries and leftist regimes across the Third World.¹⁴⁷ Historians of Soviet policy in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East during this period have highlighted the opportunistic nature of this support, pointing out that Soviet support was implemented incrementally and was typically responsive to requests from local actors or revolutionary partners, such as Cuba, rather than according to a centrally organized plan. Both U.S. and Soviet policymakers viewed these indirect interventions as ways to avoid direct confrontation, but their commitments often inflamed local conflicts. The superpowers narrowly avoided a direct confrontation during the Yom Kippur War, but the Nixon administration’s decision to place U.S. nuclear forces on high alert exemplified the risk that a crisis on the periphery could still escalate out of control.¹⁴⁸

Finally, the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union continued despite the 1972 ABM Treaty and the ongoing SALT II process as both parties sought to maintain their relative position. Persuaded that military power translated into political influence, and determined to stave off recent and anticipated U.S. technological gains, the Soviet Union continued steadily building and modernizing its nuclear and conventional forces. Starting in 1972, it began conducting flight tests of its first MIRVed ICBMs.¹⁴⁹ Two years later, it tested its first SS-20 intercontinental ballistic missile, which had a 5,000km range designed to hold targets across Western Europe at threat without violating the SALT I agreement’s 5,500km limit.¹⁵⁰ Motivated by bureaucratic pressure and a desire to offset the U.S. advantage in forward-based systems, the Soviet Union also continued to enhance its air and naval

¹⁴⁷ Westad, 2007, pp. 197–198, 200–203.

¹⁴⁸ Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969–1973*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 323–326.

¹⁴⁹ Arbatov and Dvorkin, 2016, p. 59.

¹⁵⁰ Haslam, 2011, p. 305.

power projection capabilities.¹⁵¹ Although the United States retained the advantage in both the number and survivability of its nuclear warheads, among other measurements, the scale and speed of the Soviet armaments program and the extent of Soviet activity in the Third World in the mid-1970s began to raise U.S. doubts about the effectiveness of U.S. deterrents.

End of Accommodation

Brezhnev's Declining Health

Despite both sides' desire to preserve their gains, the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union proved too difficult to sustain over the long run. The first blow fell in 1975, when Brezhnev suffered a stroke and began a steep physical and mental decline. His gradual withdrawal from foreign policy decisionmaking and the absence of another senior official with either the stature or vision to generate new approaches robbed the pro-engagement faction of its most important leader and meant there was no one to break the stalemate when negotiations with the United States stalled or to adjust to new tensions in the relationship as they emerged.¹⁵²

Soviet Interventions in the Third World

Yet even a healthy Brezhnev likely would have struggled to preserve the thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations because he was unable to transcend the ideological conflict at the heart of the Cold War and therefore unwilling to offer the concessions necessary for a wider settlement. For the Soviet premier, détente with the United States never meant giving up opportunities to advance socialism in the Third World. To the contrary, Brezhnev believed that it would ultimately be impossible to halt the "historical progress" of international class struggle because, as he explained in 1972, "the world outlook and the class aims of socialism and capitalism are opposite and irreconcilable."¹⁵³ From the mid-1970s onwards, the Soviet Union was faced with both increased opportunities and increased pressure to support leftist movements across the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. The split from China, which now challenged the Soviet Union for leadership of the communist world and aligned with the United States at the United Nations, compelled Moscow to find new ways to promote its revolutionary agenda abroad.¹⁵⁴ At the same time, increasing Cuban and Vietnamese activism propelled the Soviet Union to expand its interventions in civil conflicts in Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.¹⁵⁵ The available record of Soviet decisionmaking related to these

¹⁵¹ Bowker, 2002, p. 91; Pavel Podvig, "The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s: A Research Note," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Summer 2008, p. 118.

¹⁵² Zubok, 2008, pp. 433–435.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Bowker, 2002, p. 93. Also see Zubok, 2008, p. 434.

¹⁵⁴ Friedman, 2015, pp. 203–204; Leffler, 2007, pp. 258–259.

¹⁵⁵ Westad, 2007, pp. 159, 164.

interventions does not provide evidence that U.S. efforts to accommodate Soviet interests in Europe or in arms negotiations emboldened the Kremlin to launch a new campaign in the Third World. Rather, changes in the international environment created both new opportunities and new pressure to pursue objectives that the Soviet Union had long articulated.

Anti-Détente Backlash in the United States

The Soviet Union's adventurism in the Third World, combined with its continued military buildup, contributed to the anti-détente backlash in the United States. In the mid-1970s, a coalition of hawkish Democrats and conservative Republicans united to denounce the Helsinki Final Act, which they claimed had ceded Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and legitimated its human rights abuses.¹⁵⁶ They accused Nixon and Ford of abandoning Vietnam and turning a blind eye to Soviet interference in Angola, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, and they argued that the U.S. attempt to improve relations had emboldened Moscow to exploit perceived U.S. weakness.¹⁵⁷ Between 1975 and 1980, this bipartisan movement of lawmakers, academics, and advocacy groups, such as the Coalition for a Democratic Majority and the Committee on the Present Danger, charged that the U.S. government was underestimating Soviet military capabilities and ambitions and called for a more muscular policy toward the communist bloc.¹⁵⁸ Through such initiatives as the Team B exercise, which argued that the CIA had underestimated Soviet military capabilities, this coalition pushed Washington toward more-hardline policies.¹⁵⁹

Facing a tough reelection, Ford attempted to distance himself from détente in 1976 but the association undercut his support among elements of his conservative base and contributed to his ultimate defeat.¹⁶⁰ The Jimmy Carter administration continued the SALT II negotiations, which yielded an agreement in 1979, but the spirit of cooperation that had motivated détente faded after 1976. Efforts to negotiate multilateral force reductions stalled as the continued Soviet arms buildup and interventions in the Third World continued to fuel public dissatisfaction with the approach. By 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the two countries had retreated into positions of mutual hostility.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Leffler, 2007, p. 252; Snyder, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Zelizer, 2009, pp. 662–663.

¹⁵⁸ Jeremi Suri, "Détente and Its Discontents," in Bruce Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 227–245; Jesus Velasco, *Neoconservatives in U.S. Foreign Policy Under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010, pp. 121–127.

¹⁵⁹ Sargent, 2015, pp. 261–296. For discussion of the Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan, see Vladimir Snegirev and Valery Samunin, *The Dead End: The Road to Afghanistan*, trans. Anna Vassilieva, Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Zelizer, 2009, pp. 668–669.

¹⁶¹ Sargent, 2015, pp. 264–273, 285–288.

Longer-Term Implications

The U.S. pursuit of less-hardline policies enabled it to secure a set of discrete objectives, including restrictions on certain types of armaments, the creation of new communication channels, and new frameworks for economic, trade, and scientific cooperation. The Soviet Union's shared desire to preserve the productive dialogue, to regain control of the arms race, and to negotiate political settlements to stabilize Europe also provide a compelling incentive for the superpowers to reconcile disagreements and avoid the type of militarized crises that had characterized earlier phases of the Cold War.

Although the United States did secure agreements on trade, arms control, and European security, among other issues, it did not resolve the underlying drivers of competition with the Soviet Union. To the contrary, both powers viewed accommodation as a temporary means to reduce the costs of competition so they could continue to wage the contest, albeit through more-indirect means. Unable and unwilling to address the issue at the heart of their antagonism—the mutual belief that the other state's system of governance, economics, and ideology posed an existential threat to its own survival—the United States and the Soviet Union deferred the resumption of tensions but did not fundamentally alter their relationship. Because both parties continued to believe that the other posed a long-term threat to their interests, and because both parties sought to preserve their ability to compete over the long term, neither perceived an incentive to seriously propose arrangements to constrain the competition in other areas, most notably the Third World, or to establish a wider political settlement.

These outstanding disagreements over issues outside the scope of negotiations ultimately undermined the political feasibility of further accommodation and contributed to the resumption of tensions. Even as Soviet defense spending increased through the 1970s, advocates of engagement with the United States, particularly the ailing Brezhnev, continued to express interest in expanding agreements on mutual disarmament. But in the years after Helsinki, the tension between the Soviet desire to improve relations with the United States and its commitment to encouraging the global spread of communist systems became too difficult for Soviet—and American—officials to reconcile. As historian Zubok has noted, the Soviet Union “entered the period of détente with the outdated agenda of the unresolved issues dating back to World War II and of messianic goals driven by the Marxist-Leninist ideology” but, having achieved many of its strategic objectives, now proved “unable to take full advantage of the unique constellation of factors to resolve the new problems” of the 1970s and articulate a new, more expansive agenda for U.S.-Soviet negotiations.¹⁶² The drift in Soviet foreign policy made it more difficult for the Ford and Carter administrations to identify areas of potential cooperation and initiate less-hardline approaches to the relationship. Hemmed

¹⁶² Zubok, 2008, p. 443.

in by their domestic opponents and alarmed by growing evidence of communist gains, U.S. policymakers reevaluated the benefits of accommodating the Soviet Union.¹⁶³

Nonetheless, U.S. attempts at accommodation planted the seeds for the transformation of the Cold War in the late 1980s. To an extent unrecognized by either country at the time, the trade, cultural exchange, and human rights provisions of the Helsinki Act would chip at the Iron Curtain and embolden a new generation of transnational activists that successfully challenged the communist system across Eastern Europe.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, the era's arms control negotiations established both a framework and a proof of concept for the later Intermediate Nuclear Forces agreement, which would impose more-significant reductions a decade later.

Conclusion

Benefits of Less-Hardline Policies

Between 1969 and 1975, U.S. and Soviet recognition of a mutual desire to avoid war and to protect negotiations on core issues in the relationship had an overall, albeit temporary, stabilizing effect by incentivizing both de-escalation and confidence-building measures during repeated international crises. Our review of the literature did not find compelling evidence that U.S. offers of accommodation emboldened the Soviet Union to increase its demands or reduce its assessment of U.S. resolve below existing expectations. Instead, U.S. policies provided the necessary reassurance that a limited political settlement was possible and in the Soviet Union's interests. In turn, by resolving the long-standing dispute over Berlin, the period defused a hotspot in the relationship that had brought the powers to the brink of conflict in the past and provided both new incentives and instruments to peacefully resolve other regional disputes that arose during this period.

Conditions for Success

Multiple factors contributed to the observed improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations during this period. A common interest in reducing the risk of conflict and curbing the economic and political costs of the competition provided a common basis for negotiations on a limited set of issues, and encouraged continued cooperation despite periodic regional disputes. At the same time, factors beyond U.S. control—particularly changes in the composition of the Soviet leadership, the qualitative and quantitative improvement in Soviet strategic forces, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, the parallel improvement in Soviet relations with Western Europe, and the slowdown in Soviet economic growth—provided both incentives and pressures to engage productively in negotiations. For instance, the USSR's successful negotiations with West Germany emboldened Brezhnev to pursue a more expansive diplo-

¹⁶³ Sargent, 2015, pp. 264–273.

¹⁶⁴ Snyder, 2011, p. 2011.

matic settlement with Europe and to dedicate his personal attention to negotiations with the United States after 1972.

Despite these incentives, *détente* unfolded as an incremental process in which trust accumulated over time and progress in one area often spilled over into others. Although Soviet leaders remained wary of U.S. intentions during this period, the Nixon administration's consistent attempts at engagement were interpreted as evidence that Soviet military achievements could be translated into political leverage and that recognition of its long-stated claims in Europe and elsewhere would be forthcoming. Confronted with renewed pressure from China and new opportunities from the West, the Soviet leadership ultimately chose to take steps toward reducing tensions.

Long-Term Outcomes

But U.S. accommodations did not (and were not designed to) alter the fundamental competitive dynamic between the two states. The unresolved contradiction between the pragmatic Soviet desire to relax tensions with the United States and its ideological commitment to global revolutionary movements ultimately proved a constraint. Although U.S. overtures did not embolden Moscow to expand its activity in the Third World or to increase its defense spending, offers to expand trade, negotiate arms limitations, and other cooperative practices also did not persuade the Soviet Union to suspend these competitive activities. Unsatisfied, critics pointed to the evidence of Soviet activity as evidence that a more assertive U.S. policy was required to check Soviet ambitions and to deter further exploitation. In the absence of a wider settlement, U.S. efforts to pursue less-hardline policies catalyzed a domestic political backlash that strengthened over time and, as evidence of new Soviet defense programs and renewed interventionism in the Third World emerged, ultimately restricted the White House's will and ability to follow through on its promises or to offer new concessions.

The ultimate breakdown of U.S.-Soviet relations illustrates the challenge of sustaining a less-hardline approach overtime. By pushing to assert its interests in areas that they viewed as agreed-on arenas of competition, Soviet statesmen did not intend to sabotage *détente*, but their actions nonetheless weakened their U.S. counterparts' willingness to accept the political and strategic risks associated with the pursuit of more-accommodating policies. Soviet actions provided fodder for political movements that were predisposed to view the weaker state as an unrelenting expansionist power, strengthened arguments against continued U.S. engagement with the Soviet Union, and increased the domestic cost of future concessions. Just as importantly, Soviet actions also impelled statesmen in the Ford and Carter administrations who had previously embraced *détente* to revisit their assumptions about the Soviet Union's ambitions and capabilities. In the end, the Soviet Union's failure to imagine how its actions could constrain U.S. policymakers, coupled with U.S. policymakers' reasonable misinterpretation of Soviet intentions, created the conditions for the resumption of hostilities.

U.S.-Russia Reset (2009–2013)

This case study examines the *reset*, a term used here to refer to the changes in U.S. policy toward Russia that occurred after President Obama took office in January 2009. Less than six months earlier, the five-day war between Russia and Georgia had sent U.S.-Russia relations to a post-Cold War low. The George W. Bush administration had frozen all but essential communication with Russia. The Obama administration came into office convinced that this state of affairs was counterproductive for U.S. interests and adopted a less-hardline policy toward Russia. Russia responded positively, moderating its threat perceptions regarding the United States and altering policies of significant importance to Washington. Within three years, however, the relationship was once again fraying. As relations worsened, the United States ended the reset policy in August 2013.

The chapter defines the three core elements of the reset as (1) an emphasis on engagement with Moscow; (2) a rejection of *linkage* in U.S. policy, and (3) less emphasis on geopolitical competition with Russia. The reset was a significantly less-hardline policy than what came before it. However, it was deliberately circumscribed from the start. There were no accommodations reached—or, in some cases, even sought—regarding several core Russian security concerns.

That said, the reset's impact on Russian behavior was significant and led to much more cooperation, although it was relatively short-lived. The relationship itself was rapidly and dramatically transformed. Strikingly, the United States continued the policy for over a year after Russian behavior began to become less cooperative. There is no evidence that less-hardline elements of U.S. policy caused this change in Russian behavior or that it emboldened Russia to increase demands or reduce its assessment of U.S. resolve at any point in this period. In the end, the reset produced considerable results for the United States at little cost. Its short duration was partially a function of its limited nature; without addressing many core issues of disagreement, the reset did not produce a sustainable cooperative equilibrium in the relationship. Instead, competition on the unresolved issues in the relationship overwhelmed the areas of cooperation that the reset policy had established.

This chapter relies on contemporaneous English- and Russian-language press accounts, official statements, academic and think-tank analysis, and the memoirs of several former senior U.S. officials who were involved in the reset. Unfortunately, no Russian officials involved in this period have published memoirs. No U.S. or Russian archives from the period are available to researchers. Our evidence, therefore, is not comprehensive, and our con-

clusions here are more tentative than for some of the earlier case studies for which more-complete information has become available.¹

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section describes the context of U.S.-Russia relations in this period, including each side's perceptions of the other's ambitions. The next section describes U.S. motives in launching the reset and Russian motives in responding positively to it. The third section describes the policies of both sides during this period in greater detail and explores some broader dynamics in the relationship, and the fourth section analyzes the drivers that ended the reset. Finally, we evaluate both the long-term implications of the reset for the bilateral relationship and the costs and benefits of the U.S. pursuit of a less-hardline policy.

Context

Structural and Strategic Context

By 2009, the United States and Russia had already gone through several major ups and downs in bilateral relations since the end of the Cold War. The early to mid-1990s were marked by hopes of strategic partnership and perhaps even alliance. Russia appeared to be adopting market democracy at home and eschewing the Soviet inheritance in its foreign relations. There were dramatic reductions in conventional arms in Europe and strategic nuclear arsenals. Although Moscow was certainly not happy about the first two rounds of NATO enlargement, even those moves did not poison relations, in large part because they were accompanied by renewed NATO engagement with Russia.² The relatively brief honeymoon was over by 1999, when NATO, led by the United States, bombed Serbia without UN Security Council authorization and against Russia's objections. Relations improved again after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks on the United States, when Russian President Putin supported the United States and, among other things, facilitated U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. But it soon became clear that three core disputes made this improvement unsustainable.

¹ For an illustration of gaps between memoir accounts and historical records, see Barbara Keys, "Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman," *Diplomatic History*, No. 4, 2011; and Marc Trachtenberg, *Between Empire and Alliance: America and Europe During the Cold War*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. For discussions of the pitfalls associated with memoirs as sources and methods for counteracting them, see Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934–1938*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992, p. xx.

² James Dobbins and Andrei Zagorski, "Lessons Learned from Russia-West Interactions on European Security," in Samuel Charap, Alyssa Demus, and Jeremy Shapiro, eds., *Getting Out from "In-Between": Perspectives on the Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CF-382-CC/SFDFA, 2018.

Perceived U.S. Policy of Regime Change and Color Revolutions

As it had during the bombing of Serbia, Russia objected to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Eventually, Moscow came to view these efforts as connected and attributed to Washington a global policy of regime change. Russia also saw U.S. policy as the key driver of the so-called “color revolutions” in three former Soviet republics in 2003–2005: Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Moscow came to see those popular uprisings as a tool of U.S. policy to remove governments that pursued policies counter to U.S. interests and replace them with more-pliable elites.³ In other words, color revolutions were merely nonmilitary regime change efforts. As the United States became more outspoken in its criticism of Russia’s authoritarian turn in the 2000s, Moscow increasingly came to believe that it could be a target of U.S. regime change efforts. As the democratic legitimacy of the Russian political system faded and the Bush administration continued promoting the “freedom agenda,” these insecurities became more pronounced.

Regional Security Architecture

The tensions brought to the surface by the color revolutions—specifically, the desire of the postrevolutionary Georgian and Ukrainian governments to join the EU and NATO—reflected perhaps the most significant underlying fault line in the relationship. In the 1990s, NATO and the EU enlarged eastward. This enlargement was not conceived of as an effort to counter Russia. Rather, the accession process was a means of compelling aspirant countries to adopt these organizations’ rules, standards, and norms.⁴ Membership required countries to transform themselves, altering everything from fisheries codes to civilian control of the security sector, to comply with these rules, standards, and norms. Furthermore, NATO and, to a lesser extent, the EU had committed to an open-ended enlargement process whereby any European state that met the criteria for membership would, in principle, be entitled to join.⁵ This approach set the Euro-Atlantic institutions on a path of being prepared to incorporate essentially all of the former Communist Bloc and the European former Soviet republics, the leaders of which were often glad to accept Western rules in return for a security guarantee and massive economic assistance.

³ See, for example, A. N. Bel’skii and O. V. Klimenko, “Politicheskie tekhnologii ‘tsvetnykh revolyutsii’: puti i sredstva protivodeistviya,” *Voennaya mysl’*, Vol. 9, 2014, pp. 3–11.

⁴ Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009.

⁵ The 1997 NATO Madrid Summit declaration states that the Alliance will “maintain an open door to the admission of additional Alliance members in the future” (NATO, “Madrid Declaration on Euro-Atlantic Security Cooperation,” Madrid, Spain, July 8, 1997). The Treaty on the European Union states that “any European State” that respects the EU’s values “may apply to become a member of the Union” (European Union, “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,” Rome, December 13, 2007). The decision on membership for any given aspirant country at any given time rests with the members of the respective organizations, but the commitment to an open-ended process nonetheless had a political effect.

Russian elites, however, would not accept wholesale adoption of Western rules as the price of joining these organizations. Despite the economic woes of the 1990s, they still saw themselves as the leaders of a great power and would not remake their country to fit standards that they had no say in setting. In their view, Russia was (and is) a rulemaker not a rule-taker. And the organizations were not prepared to undertake the fundamental transformations that would have been required to accommodate Russian membership on those terms.

As a result, the Euro-Atlantic institutions were in a position in principle to absorb all of Russia's neighbors but not Russia itself. This dynamic put Russia and the West on course for a clash when the institutions reached states that Moscow considered core to its security and prosperity. However, both Russia and the West could afford to ignore this reality when the membership candidates were to the west of Russia's immediate periphery in post-Soviet Eurasia and when Russia and the Euro-Atlantic institutions had otherwise productive partnerships.⁶

After 2004, this uneasy equilibrium began to come undone. By that year, NATO and the EU had moved from the inner German border eastward to what, in the Soviet period, were nominal administrative boundaries between the Baltic republics and Russia. Following the 2004 "big bang" enlargement, both NATO and the EU were now bordering Ukraine, the most strategically significant former Soviet republic. The new members from Eastern Europe were pushing for greater engagement with these new neighbors, particularly Ukraine and Georgia. Partly for these reasons and partly for others discussed later, Moscow's relationships with both institutions grew more contentious. Coupled with the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, post-Soviet Eurasia had become the central region of contention between the United States and Russia.

Tensions over NATO Membership Action Plans for Ukraine and Georgia

In 2007 and 2008, tensions flared around the specific issue of NATO membership action plans (MAPs) for Ukraine and Georgia. MAPs are procedural documents that lay out the steps required by the Alliance to consider an aspirant's membership bid. A MAP in itself does not necessarily lead to membership, but all MAP recipients in the past had become members. In any case, Moscow made it clear to Washington that granting MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia would be a red line for Russia.⁷ Despite Russia's threats, the United States pushed for the two MAPs in the run-up to the April 2008 Bucharest Summit of NATO leaders. President Bush publicly endorsed Ukraine and Georgia's bids, cajoling reluctant allies in Western Europe, particularly Germany and France, to grant the two MAPs. During a highly contentious summit, NATO leaders agreed to a compromise: They issued a statement promising

⁶ *Post-Soviet Eurasia* is used here to refer to the former-Soviet republics, except the three Baltic states.

⁷ William Burns, who was U.S. ambassador to Russia at the time, recalls Putin telling him directly in June 2008 that even Russian liberals would be forced to react if Ukraine moved toward NATO (William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal*, New York: Random House, 2019, p. 240).

that Ukraine and Georgia “will become” members of the Alliance at some unspecified point in the future but did not grant the MAPs.⁸ It was a messy diplomatic attempt to paper over differences within the Alliance caused by the issue; NATO had never promised membership to aspirant states. Soon it became clear that the Bucharest declaration had convinced many in Moscow that NATO was determined to bring in the two countries. At a NATO-Russia summit the next day, Putin made it clear that “the appearance of a powerful military bloc” on Russia’s borders was “a direct threat . . . The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice.”⁹

Confrontation in Georgia

Security dynamics between Russia and Georgia went downhill rapidly after Bucharest. Following an intensification of fighting around the breakaway province of South Ossetia, where Russian peacekeepers had been stationed since a conflict in the early 1990s, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered all-out assault on the South Ossetian provincial capital on August 7, 2008. The Russian peacekeepers came under fire. Russia soon launched a massive counterattack, pushing the Georgians (both the uniformed military and ethnic Georgian civilians) out of South Ossetia. They also crossed into Tbilisi-governed territory, destroying facilities and equipment of the Georgian armed forces. After five days of fighting, the war was over. Around 500 people died, and tens of thousands were displaced. At least in part as retaliation for U.S. recognition of Kosovo six months earlier, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Georgia’s other breakaway region, Abkhazia, on August 26. It remains the only major state to have done so. Although the spark for the conflict was local, once the fighting began, Moscow took the opportunity to further its broader objective of ruling out the country’s NATO membership. As Dmitri Trenin writes, “For Moscow, the war was not about Georgia as much as about the United States, with Georgia no more than a proxy.”¹⁰ The United States did not intervene in the conflict. It engaged in what amounted to symbolic gestures, such as flying Georgian troops home from Iraq during the war.

The confrontation in Georgia underscored the limits of U.S. power in post-Soviet Eurasia, but it also demonstrated that Russian power had not yet recovered from its post-Soviet implosion. The Russian military, even as it crushed the Georgians, demonstrated severe shortcomings. Its command and control and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, enablers, and air support were all found to be lacking.¹¹ These shortcomings were the

⁸ NATO, “Bucharest Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of North Atlantic Council in Bucharest, April 3, 2008,” May 8, 2014.

⁹ “Zayavlenie dlya pressy i otvety na voprosy zhurnalistov po itogam zasedaniya Soveta Rossiya–NATO,” transcript, April 4, 2008.

¹⁰ Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011, p. 98.

¹¹ Michael Kofman, “Russian Performance in the Russo-Georgian War Revisited,” *War on the Rocks*, September 4, 2018; Carolina Vendil Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, “Russia’s War in Georgia: Lessons and Con-

spark for the New Look military reform that dramatically improved Russian military capabilities. Russia's legacy Soviet systems allowed it to maintain strategic nuclear parity with the United States, but the distribution of power was lopsided in Washington's favor in essentially all other domains. In terms of economic power, the disparity was even more significant. Russia had experienced almost a decade of economic boom following the 1998 crisis. From 1999–2008, Russian gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 94 percent and per capita GDP doubled. The value of the economy rose from \$210 billion to \$1.66 trillion.¹² Despite all that, Russian GDP was 9 percent of U.S. GDP.

Strategic Stability at Risk

And even within the strategic domain, where Russia enjoyed nominal parity, Moscow was increasingly worried about losing ground. The United States withdrew from the 1972 ABM Treaty in June 2002, a document that Moscow had come to see as crucial to maintenance of the bilateral nuclear balance. That balance had been based on mutual limitations on both strategic offensive and defensive arms since the early 1970s, and those limitations had created a state of mutually assured destruction—i.e., both sides would be vulnerable to devastating retaliation if one attempted a disarming first strike. Effective missile defenses could theoretically blunt a retaliatory strike and thus undermine mutual vulnerability. Russia, with far fewer resources to spend on missile defenses *and* modernization of its offensive forces, had become deeply invested in the ABM regime. The Bush administration, by contrast, saw it as a Cold War relic that was preventing the United States from pursuing a limited missile defense to guard against threats from so-called rogue states. Although Moscow's objections to the U.S. withdrawal were relatively muted, tensions spiked when the United States began deploying part of its emerging global missile defense system to Europe in 2007. The plan was to install ground-based interceptors in Poland and a radar in the Czech Republic to counter missile threats from Iran. Moscow objected vigorously. Attempts by the Bush administration to cooperate with Russia on missile defense failed to produce results; the negotiations seemed to produce even more tension.¹³ Although the planned capabilities of the Bush-era missile defense plan would not have posed an immediate threat to Russia's deterrent, Gates notes that "[t]he Russians' real worry [was] about the possibility that at some point in the future we might introduce additional capabilities that would threaten their deterrent."¹⁴ The specifics of the system itself also raised suspicions. The ground-based interceptors were designed to counter potential Iranian ICBM launches against the U.S. homeland, but Iran did not possess ICBMs, nor did it appear to be close to producing them. And the radar in the Czech Republic

sequences," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2009.

¹² Ben Aris and Ivan Tkachev, "Long Read: 20 Years of Russia's Economy Under Putin, in Numbers," *Moscow Times*, August 19, 2019.

¹³ Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, pp. 436–446.

¹⁴ Gates, 2014, p. 433.

was powerful enough to see into Russian territory.¹⁵ By the end of the Bush administration, the ballistic missile defense (BMD) issue had become a significant source of tensions.

Other Issues of Concern

The issues above were the primary stressors on the U.S.-Russia relationship. However, the United States and Russia were at loggerheads over a number of other issues as well, including

- **U.S. bases in Central Asia.** After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Russia had blessed U.S. use of bases in Central Asia as a waystation for U.S. soldiers and materiel en route to Afghanistan. In subsequent years, the Bush administration had treated the basing arrangements as an exclusively bilateral issue with Kyrgyzstan, partly because some in the administration considered the bases to be a tool of U.S. influence in the region that could counter Russia's role. (Moscow also had a base in Kyrgyzstan, a Russian treaty ally.)¹⁶ This approach had convinced Moscow that the United States was more interested in using the base as part of a modern great game or an anti-Russia encirclement strategy.
- **Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO).** Although not the core source of tension in the relationship, U.S. stipulations on the particulars of Russian accession had been one factor inhibiting Russia from entering the WTO. (There were also mixed views within Russia on the merits of joining).¹⁷ The accession process had dragged on since 1993.
- **Iran's nuclear program.** The United States was increasingly concerned about Tehran's nuclear ambitions and sought to impose tough sanctions to force Iran to cease enrichment and related activities. Russia, although sharing U.S. interest in ensuring that Iran did not acquire a nuclear weapon, was not prepared to agree to further sanctions at the UN Security Council. Furthermore, Moscow had signed a contract to deliver the S-300 advanced air defense system to Tehran in 2007, which, if delivered, would have limited U.S. and Israeli military options.

¹⁵ Michael A. McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, p. 179.

¹⁶ For example, a representative of the contractor for the Defense Logistics Agency at the U.S. airbase at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, justified his use of complex schemes to avoid a direct agreement with Russian suppliers, saying, "We got one over on 'em. I am an old 'Cold Warrior,' I'm proud of it, we beat the Russians, and we did it for four or five years." See U.S. House of Representatives, *Mystery at Manas: Strategic Blind Spots in the Department of Defense's Fuel Contracts in Kyrgyzstan*, Washington, D.C.: Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2010, p. 45.

¹⁷ William H. Cooper, *Russia's Accession to the WTO and Its Implications for the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R42085, June 15, 2012.

Perceptual Context

U.S. Threat Perceptions

U.S. perceptions of Russia varied significantly among senior officials during the reset period. There was significant debate, for example, regarding the nature of the Russian political system and its trajectory, the prospects of strategic partnership, and the extent of Russia's ambitions for reintegrating (or threatening) its neighbors. Yet certain core views were widely held. For one thing, Russia was seen as an ailing power, still suffering the consequences of the Soviet collapse and subsequent economic contraction and political chaos. Russia was not, therefore, considered a significant threat to U.S. interests outside its immediate periphery in post-Soviet Eurasia.

The reset's architect, President Obama, devotes considerable space in his memoirs to downplaying Russia's power and global significance: "Russia wasn't a superpower anymore . . . Russia's economy remained smaller than those of Italy, Canada, and Brazil, dependent almost entirely on oil, gas, mineral, and arms exports . . . According to various international indicators, the levels of Russian corruption and inequality rivaled those in parts of the developing world, and its male life expectancy in 2009 was lower than that of Bangladesh . . . Few, if any, young Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans looked to Russia for inspiration."¹⁸ He goes so far as to explain Russia's "increasingly combative foreign relations" as a function of the "gap between the truth of modern-day Russia and Putin's insistence on its superpower status."¹⁹ Obama's characterization of Russia as a weak and increasingly irrelevant power was (and remains) quite widespread in Washington.²⁰ This dismissive attitude toward Russia was even more common before the Russian intervention in Syria in 2015, when Moscow demonstrated its renewed global power projection capabilities. In short, the United States was wary of Moscow's assertiveness, particularly after the Russo-Georgian War, but did not consider Russia to be a threat or even a significant challenge.

This view of Russia as weak and inconsequential had practical implications for U.S. behavior; the United States was largely unwilling to make concessions to Russia. As Burns notes, "Restraint and compromise seemed unappealing and unnecessary, given our strength and sense of mission. They seemed especially unappealing with Putin's Russia, a declining power with a nasty repressive streak."²¹

Still, the Obama team was concerned that the war in Georgia had brought the United States and Russia too close to a direct clash—especially over an issue that was not a core U.S.

¹⁸ Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2020, p. 462.

¹⁹ Obama, 2020, p. 462.

²⁰ For example, Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona called Russia a "gas station masquerading as a country." Burgess Everett, "McCain: Russia Is a 'Gas Station,'" *Politico*, March 26, 2014. Analysts frequently make the same arguments. See S. Enders Wimbush and Elizabeth M. Portale, eds. *Russia in Decline*, Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2017.

²¹ Burns, 2019, p. 242.

interest. The public U.S. response to the war included cutting off all contact between officials at the US. Department of Defense and their Russian counterparts, suspending the work of the NATO–Russia Council, and pulling an agreement on civil-nuclear cooperation back from congressional consideration. Subsequent reporting has shown that the Bush administration—at the highest level—considered a direct military response during the conflict that August. The National Security Council’s Principals Committee met during the war to consider using military force to prevent Russia from continuing its attack on Georgia. Options considered included aerial bombardment of the Roki Tunnel (which Russian forces were using to cross into South Ossetia) and other “surgical strikes.”²² Although these options were rejected, even the fact of senior-level consideration of direct conflict with a major nuclear power indicated that the intensity of the U.S.-Russia competition in post-Soviet Eurasia was now increasing the chance of direct conflict over an issue that most at the time saw as a peripheral U.S. interest.²³

Russian Threat Perceptions

Russian threat perceptions vis-à-vis the United States were becoming more acute in the period immediately before the reset. Three specific concerns came to the fore: U.S. ambitions regarding Russia’s neighbors, U.S. intentions to establish military predominance over Russia, and U.S. regime change intentions.

Perceived U.S. ambitions regarding Russia’s neighbors. The color revolutions, particularly the Orange Revolution (2005) in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution (2003) in Georgia, came to be seen in Moscow as a tool of U.S. foreign policy, not genuine popular uprisings to oust unpopular leaders. It became conventional wisdom among the Russian elite that the United States was deliberately fomenting color revolutions in the region to remove governments friendly to Moscow and replace them with pro-American, anti-Russian ones without firing a shot. The color revolutions allegedly furthered U.S. security interests under the guise of democracy promotion. By the 2010s, the Russian military had developed a PowerPoint presentation, replete with flow charts, describing the U.S. policy of training of opposition movements and making efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the sitting government until a puppet regime could be installed.²⁴

It is true that the United States provided training to some of the activists and parties that came to power following the revolutions, and the postrevolutionary governments were cer-

²² Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 186.

²³ As Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense at the time, recalls, “Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching . . . Were the Europeans, much less the Americans, willing to send their sons and daughters to defend Ukraine and Georgia? Hardly.” (Gates, 2014, pp. 418–419)

²⁴ See Russian Ministry of Defense, “Presentations by Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chief of the General Staff Valerii Gerasimov,” 3rd Moscow Conference on International Security, 2014.

tainly more pro-Western than their predecessors.²⁵ But this Russian narrative wildly overstated U.S. intentions and overestimated the effectiveness of U.S. policy in the region. For the most part, the United States was a spectator to these popular uprisings, which were sparked by discontent with corrupt and ineffective ruling elites.²⁶ Nonetheless, by the mid-2000s, a guiding U.S. role in these developments was widely believed in Russia.

Concerns about color revolutions were but one element of the broader Russian worry about U.S. ambitions in its neighborhood. As noted previously, Washington began in 2006 and 2007 to push for Ukraine and Georgia to be granted NATO MAPs, which would have put the two countries on a path to accession to the Alliance. The Georgian and Ukrainian militaries both fought alongside the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. government openly threw its political and financial support behind GUAM, a regional grouping among Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova that pointedly excluded Russia.²⁷ The United States seemed, in Moscow's view, to be intent on minimizing Russian influence in the most important and sensitive region for the country.²⁸

Perceived U.S. intentions to establish military predominance over Russia. Following the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty in 2002 and the plans for the missile defense in Europe, a Cold War-era threat perception returned to the fore in Russian thinking: The United States was seeking to obtain strategic invulnerability by nullifying Russia's deterrent. The fear was not only that the United States could achieve strategic dominance during a potential conflict but also that it could engage in nuclear blackmail—threatening a disarming counterforce first strike unless its demands were met—during peacetime to achieve geopolitical goals. If Washington were able to credibly threaten a successful disarming strike, Moscow would be forced to concede. As Anatoly Antonov, then a deputy minister of defense and later Russian ambassador to the United States, put it, “The U.S., having effectively neutralized the nuclear weapons in a country, objectively would be able to impose its dictates on it.”²⁹ This notion—that Washington seeks strategic invulnerability to impose its dictates on countries that do not do its bidding—is widespread in Russian strategic writings.³⁰

Perceived U.S. regime change intentions. Both the color revolutions and perceived U.S. efforts to achieve strategic invulnerability heightened Russia's fears that it might become a

²⁵ Michael A. McFaul, “Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Fall 2007.

²⁶ Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *FY 2007 U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with Eurasia*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 2009.

²⁸ See Charap and Colton, 2017, Ch. 2.

²⁹ Anatoly Anin, “Vliyanie strategicheskikh nastupatel'nykh vooruzhenii v neyadernom osnashchenii na strategicheskuyu stabil'nost',” *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, Vol. 6, 2011, p. 50.

³⁰ See Vadim Kozyulin, “Soedinennye Shtaty na puti k strategicheskoi neuyazvimosti,” Russian International Affairs Council, July 1, 2020.

target of what some in Moscow began to view as a global U.S. regime change agenda. Increasingly prominent voices made the case that Western-inspired political change in post-Soviet Eurasia was not just a tool to compromise Russia's security interests and undo its influence; it also could be used to undermine the foundations of the Russian government itself.³¹ With this significant threat to domestic stability looming on the periphery, and with creeping U.S. efforts to undermine mutual vulnerability, some in Moscow reached the conclusion that Russia, surrounded and defanged, could become a target for U.S. regime change.³² Increasingly pointed U.S. critiques of Russia's authoritarian turn in this period served to reinforce this view.

Motives of Each Side

Tables 5.1 describes the various U.S. and Russian motives during the reset period.

TABLE 5.1
Each Side's Motives for Cooperation During the "Reset"

Motive	Description
United States	
Stabilize relations with Russia	The Obama administration felt that the Bush administration's policies toward Russia had been counterproductive.
Prioritize nonproliferation, arms control, and nuclear security	Improved relations with Russia were believed to be a prerequisite to achieving these goals. For example, Russia's role on the UN Security Council made the country's support critical to enacting stronger UN sanctions on North Korea and Iran.
End Russian opposition to U.S. bases near Afghanistan	Improved relations with Russia would also facilitate U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.
Russia	
Encourage the United States to sustain a more accommodating approach	Moscow believed that Washington had made a "course correction" and sought to do business with Russia as equals, based on respect for each other's interests.
Support domestic recovery and economic modernization in Russia following global financial crisis	A protracted, antagonistic bilateral relationship would have significant negative consequences for the Russian economy.

³¹ As one of Putin's close advisers put it in 2008, "Not long ago, 'color revolutions' were taking place around our borders. Inspired by their success in the near abroad, [the organizers] then tried to penetrate into Russia" ("Ugroza 'tsvetnykh revolyutsii' v Rossii preodolena—Surkov," Interfax, July 21, 2008).

³² Elena Chernenko, "Za destabilizatsiei Ukrainy skryvaetsya popytka radikal'nogo oslableniya Rossii," *Kommersant*, June 22, 2015; Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, Washington, D.C., 2017; Paul Sonne, "U.S. Is Trying to Dismember Russia, Says Putin Adviser," *Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2015.

Stronger State: The United States

The Obama administration had several motives in launching the reset. The first was a conviction that the previous administration's policy, particularly toward the end of Bush's second term, had become counterproductive to U.S. interests. The new administration was not convinced of the wisdom of Bush-era policies of pushing NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine or cutting off engagement with Russia after the Russo-Georgian war. Moreover, those policies had contributed to the dead end that Obama inherited. As Obama put it following his first meeting with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev in April 2009, "over the last several years, the relationship between our two countries has been allowed to drift." A fresh approach that would "allow us to work on issues of mutual interest" seemed sensible.³³

Improving relations with Russia was necessary to make progress on the U.S. administration's other priorities. Obama prioritized nonproliferation, arms control, and nuclear security—all issues on which Moscow was Washington's key interlocutor. The new president and his team "reasoned that [their] options for changing Russian behavior either through isolation or coercion were limited. Instead, we had to create incentives to induce cooperation."³⁴ Obama also wanted to create broad international consensus and engender multilateral action on such issues as curbing Iran's nuclear ambitions. Because Russia is a permanent, veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, the country was key to enacting stronger UN sanctions, for example, on North Korea and Iran. A renewed focus on the war in Afghanistan also seemed to make the improvement of relations with Russia a priority. Moscow had assisted U.S. efforts to counter the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the early months (and then years) following the 9/11 attacks by acquiescing to U.S. military bases in post-Soviet Central Asia. However, Russia seemed more concerned in subsequent years about the threats to its security posed by those bases than by the terrorist threat stemming from Afghanistan. Moscow actively pushed the region's leaders to eject the Americans.³⁵

Obama administration officials were not particularly concerned about the reset inducing Moscow to pursue more-expansive aims—both because they did not see Russia as a rising power and because they did not see the reset as a significant accommodation. Senior officials described the reset as a means to an end, not an attempt to reconcile core differences in the relationship. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton describes the reset as a means to "achieve key U.S. national interests with Russia" by "finding specific areas for cooperation where our interests aligned [and] standing firm where our interests diverged."³⁶ Emphasis on the persistence of the divergence of interests on certain issues—and the intention to hold

³³ Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and Russian President Medvedev After Meeting," Washington, D.C.: White House, April 1, 2009.

³⁴ McFaul, 2018, p. 89.

³⁵ Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 123–124.

³⁶ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices: A Memoir*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014, p. 555.

firm on those issues rather than seek common ground—was commonplace during the reset period. Then–Vice President Joe Biden, in the speech in which the Obama administration officially debuted the “reset” term, said, “We will not agree with Russia on everything. For example, the United States will not . . . recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. We will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances. But the United States and Russia can disagree and still work together where our interests coincide.”³⁷

Support for the reset was not, however, universal in the United States. One prominent line of attack alleged that the reset came at the expense of U.S. relations with Russia’s neighbors and U.S. allies. As David J. Kramer, a former Bush administration official, wrote, “The administration seems to have moved toward a ‘Russia only’ approach, neglecting and even abandoning other countries in the region.”³⁸ Columnist Robert Kagan claimed that the Obama administration’s policy had “produce[d] a wave of insecurity throughout Eastern and Central Europe and the Baltics, where people are starting to fear they can no longer count on the United States to protect them from an expansive Russia.”³⁹ Kramer also alleged that the United States was refraining from condemning human rights abuses in Russia for the sake of better relations, and that “such attitudes signal to Russian officials that there are no consequences for behavior such as cracking the heads of protesters.”⁴⁰ These critics argued that the administration sacrificed important U.S. interests for the sake of improving relations with Russia, and got little in return. Kagan compared the results with a “used rug.”⁴¹ This criticism appeared to create pressure on the administration to take a harder line on Russia.⁴²

Weaker State: Russia

The changed U.S. policy toward Russia was the primary driver of the improvement in relations that began in 2009. Moscow was responsive to the shift in Washington’s approach, however (as described later in this chapter). Russian policies did change, becoming more accommodating to U.S. interests. There were several factors driving Russian behavior.

First, from Moscow’s perspective, the reset was, as Stent puts it, “an American course correction” deemphasizing the elements of U.S. policy that Moscow found most objectionable.⁴³

³⁷ Joe Biden, “Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy,” Washington, D.C.: The White House, February 7, 2009.

³⁸ David J. Kramer, “U.S. Abandoning Russia’s Neighbors,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2010a.

³⁹ Robert Kagan, “A Hollow ‘Reset’ with Russia,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 2010b.

⁴⁰ David J. Kramer, “America’s Silence Makes Us Complicit in Russia’s Crimes,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2010b.

⁴¹ Kagan, 2010b.

⁴² McFaul, 2018, p. 160.

⁴³ Stent, 2014, p. 366.

As Foreign Minister Lavrov said in 2009, “The U.S. administration has drawn very important conclusions from the negative experience that has accumulated in bilateral relations during the Bush administration and declared its readiness to do business with Russia on an equal basis, on the basis of respect for each other’s interests, on the basis of mutual trust.”⁴⁴ It was only natural, from the Russian perspective, to respond positively when the more powerful state adopted a less-hardline approach. As Lavrov said in November 2009, “Everything that we are now doing with our American partners we were ready to do with the Bush administration. Whatever domain you take, everywhere Russia was ready for it.”⁴⁵

Second, the structural reality of the power differential between the two states certainly incentivized Russia to be responsive to the reset. The consequences of a protracted, antagonistic bilateral relationship would have been significant for Moscow. Ultimately, the United States is “probably the only superpower,” as Putin has said.⁴⁶ Russia had been recently humbled by the effects of the global financial crisis and the simultaneous steep decline in hydrocarbon prices—its GDP fell by nearly 8 percent in 2009. In addition to post-crisis recovery, Medvedev was pushing an ambitious economic modernization agenda and stated openly that it would be impossible to make good on it without improved relations with the West. As he wrote in 2009, “The issue of harmonization of our relations with Western democracies is not a matter of taste or personal preferences. Our domestic financial and technological capabilities today are inadequate to really raise our quality of life.”⁴⁷

Third, Medvedev’s personality and domestic political circumstances predisposed him to be more receptive to Obama’s reset. Unlike Putin, who by that time had become quite jaded about U.S. foreign policy, Medvedev came to the table with no such baggage. Obama and Medvedev also had more in common personally: They were of similar age, and both had been lawyers before entering public life.⁴⁸ Whereas Putin had the habit of berating his Western interlocutors about Russia’s grievances, as he did for the first hour of his first meeting with Obama in July 2009, Obama and Medvedev “favored a coolheaded and practical approach.”⁴⁹

In addition, the improved U.S.-Russia relationship quickly became one of the few achievements for which Medvedev could take credit. Because his presidency was widely seen as a trial run with Putin waiting in the wings as prime minister, he had to prove himself if he had any chance of remaining for a second term. As Burns recalls, “It was clear from the start that

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Stenogramma Vystupleniya i Otvetov Ministra Inostrannykh Del Rossii S.V.Lavrova na Voprosy v Universitete Mirovoy Ekonomiki i Diplomatii, Tashkent, 22 Dekabrya 2009 Goda,” December 22, 2009b.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Stenogramma Interv’yu Ministra Inostrannykh Del Rossii S.V. Lavrova Telekanalu ‘Vesti’, 11 Noyabrya 2009 Goda,” November 11, 2009a.

⁴⁶ “Putin Says Accepts U.S. Is Sole Superpower, Dilutes Trump Praise,” Reuters, June 17, 2016.

⁴⁷ Dmitrii Medvedev, “Rossiya vpered!,” *Gazeta.Ru*, September 10, 2009.

⁴⁸ Obama, 2020, p. 463.

⁴⁹ Derek Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America’s Role in the World*, New York: Public Affairs, 2016.

Medvedev was eager to build rapport with Obama and try to make some version of the reset an advertisement for his effectiveness as a president and world leader.”⁵⁰

Not all in the Russian establishment shared Medvedev’s views. One colonel, writing in *Military Thought* in 2009, argued that Russia should declare the United States its “primary geopolitical adversary” and dismissed the change in U.S. foreign policy from Bush to Obama, claiming that the “U.S. attempts to dominate the international system” and systematic efforts to counter Russia remained unchanged. Although begrudgingly acknowledging “certain hopes” from high-level bilateral contacts, this officer said that “meetings between U.S. and Russian leaders always initially create optimism, which in fact turns out to be illusory and short-term.”⁵¹ This colonel likely was not the only one in the Ministry of Defense and elsewhere in Moscow who held such views. But that group’s ability to change Russian policy against the will of the political leadership was limited (although not insignificant).

Although Russia generally was responsive to the reset, almost all of the agreements the sides achieved in this period were extremely challenging to negotiate. Because of recent history, Russian policymakers were generally wary of U.S. intentions and were not prepared to go as far or as fast as the Obama administration would have preferred.⁵² Moscow sought to limit U.S. freedom of maneuver as much as possible, particularly in terms of military capability development. This wariness increased the difficulty of negotiating the major arms control agreement of this period, New START, and ultimately doomed efforts to cooperate on missile defense.

Historical Period: January 2009–August 2013

Stronger State’s Policies Toward the Weaker State

The reset was a change in the overall U.S. approach to Russia. The incoming Obama team had concluded that the late Bush-era approach had failed and sought to reverse it in three ways: engagement and dialogue with Russia, rejection of linkage, and reduced emphasis on geopolitical competition.

U.S. Support for Engagement and Dialogue with Russia

The first element of the reset related to the role of dialogue and engagement in U.S. policy. Washington assumed “that the United States and Russia had some common interests, especially regarding our biggest security challenges.”⁵³ Furthermore, “win-win outcomes” were possible when these interests were shared, and “engagement was the primary means for real-

⁵⁰ Burns, 2019, p. 275.

⁵¹ A. Yu Maruev, “Rossiia i SShA v usloviakh protivoborstva: voenno-politicheskii aspekt,” *Voennaya mys’*, Vol. 8, 2009.

⁵² McFaul, 2018, p. 86.

⁵³ McFaul, 2018, p. 88.

izing these outcomes.”⁵⁴ In other words, the United States would seek to work with Russia on shared interests and to do so through direct talks with the Russian government. Such an approach might not seem radical, but it did represent a departure from the previous administration. After the Russo-Georgian War, the Bush administration had frozen all but the most-essential channels with Russia and had little interest in formalized arms control agreements with Moscow, despite Russia’s consistent interest in legally binding instruments. Bush had withdrawn from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and concluded a bare-bones arms control agreement, the Moscow Treaty, only at Putin’s explicit request. Perhaps the two most lasting agreements reached as a result of the Obama administration’s changed approach were New START and Russia’s accession to the WTO.

New START, which reduced deployed strategic warheads by 30 percent, replaced the original START, which expired in December 2009. The treaty was the product of intensive negotiations involving interagency teams stationed in Geneva for nearly a year and half. Obama himself often engaged with Medvedev when the negotiations got bogged down, as did the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with his counterpart. In short, the process was reflective of the new reset policy of engagement and seeking win-win outcomes.

Another key example of the reset principle of engagement on common interests was the U.S. decision to push for Russia to complete its WTO accession process. The Obama administration, as had the two prior administrations, had concluded that Russian membership in the WTO was broadly in the U.S. national interest, both because of the additional economic openness to U.S. businesses that it would entail, and because of the dispute-resolution mechanisms that would become available. But previous administrations had been unable to find agreement with Moscow on several trade-related concerns that the United States sought to resolve before allowing Russia to conclude its accession process. The Obama administration pushed to find common ground with Russia on these issues and was able to do so, overcoming interest groups’ lobbying on both sides. On December 16, 2011, the WTO’s ministerial conference approved Russian membership, 18 years after the process had begun. It was a key example of the administration’s willingness to engage on mutual interests, even when it could have been argued that Russia stood to gain even more than the United States.

Rejection of Linkage

The second core element of the reset was the Obama administration’s explicit rejection of linkage in its approach to Russia. *Linkage* in foreign policy refers to the practice of tying together unrelated issues to create leverage in affecting another state’s behavior. As described in earlier chapters of this report, there is a long tradition of linkage in U.S. policy toward Moscow, particularly during the Cold War. During détente, Nixon and Kissinger sought to use linkage as an incentive by offering the Soviet Union greater cooperation on arms control and trade in return for more-circumscribed support for global communist movements. Hawks in the U.S. government pushed for negative linkage: For example, they called for cutting off arms control

⁵⁴ McFaul, 2018, p. 89.

talks when the Soviets took an unrelated action contrary to U.S. interests. President Carter's across-the-board freeze of relations following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was perhaps the most prominent case.⁵⁵ Taking the linkage argument to its logical conclusion leads to a dead end: As George Shultz (Secretary of State under President Reagan) put it, "it is impossible to see how we might expect to get anywhere with a policy which dictates that nothing can be solved until everything is solved."⁵⁶

The Bush administration did not consistently practice linkage, but it did so often toward the end of its second term. The policy response to the Russo-Georgian War was the most extreme manifestation: The United States cut off all contacts with Russia in response to Moscow's actions and pulled a civil-nuclear cooperation agreement out of the congressional review process. The Obama team rejected that approach: "[I]f we linked Russian progress on democratic reform to our pursuit of a new arms control treaty, for instance, we would never get a new agreement in place."⁵⁷ Punishing Russia or cutting off ties in response to objectionable behavior was not seen as an effective means of achieving U.S. goals. Instead, the administration sought to address each issue on its own merits. The Obama administration argued that disagreements—barring extreme circumstances—should not affect cooperation on issues where interests converge.

Reduced Emphasis on Geopolitical Competition

The third core element of the reset was the Obama administration's approach to competition with Russia. The team's view was that, as McFaul puts it, "we were not destined to compete with Russia" on every issue, and, although this was not made explicit, there was likely to be more cooperation than competition on most core U.S. interests.⁵⁸ Russia was seen as a potential partner on key U.S. global priorities, not an outright adversary; the areas of disagreement, although not insignificant, were more peripheral than the shared interests. As Obama put it in a public address during his visit to Moscow in 2009, "I believe that, on the fundamental issues that will shape this century, Americans and Russians share common interests that form a basis for cooperation."⁵⁹ To the new U.S. administration, bilateral divergences concerned less-fundamental issues; therefore, pursuing them would not be a priority.

This view of competition was a shift from the past. In its second term, the Bush administration tended both in word and deed to be more supportive of policies aimed at countering Russia. Senior officials tended to portray the United States and Russia as equally fundamentally opposed at that time as the United States and the Soviet Union were during the Cold

⁵⁵ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: Diplomacy, Power, and the Victory of the American Deal*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993, pp. 488–489.

⁵⁶ Fred Kaplan, "Shultz Says 'Linkage' Won't Work," *Boston Globe*, February 6, 1988.

⁵⁷ McFaul, 2018, p. 90.

⁵⁸ McFaul, 2018, p. 92.

⁵⁹ Barack Obama, "Read President Obama's Commencement Address at The New Economics School in Moscow, May 7, 2009," *TIME*, June 2, 2016.

War. Vice President Dick Cheney, for example, gave a speech in Vilnius in May 2006 in which he denounced Russia's foreign policy and domestic development and called the Baltic region "the very front lines of freedom in the modern world."⁶⁰ The administration also appeared to consider countering Russia a significant priority in itself. Pushing for Ukraine and Georgia to be granted NATO MAPs was perhaps the most significant example of geopolitical competition during the second Bush term. Even after the divisive Bucharest Summit, *and* the war in Georgia, Washington continued to push allies to grant MAPs to the two countries.⁶¹ But the MAP issue was far from the only case.

The Obama administration reversed this approach. The new team did not believe that a global contest for influence with Russia, particularly one that centered on Russia's periphery, should be a priority for the United States. "Reject idea of 'Great Game' in Central Asia" appeared on an official's slides presenting the administration's Russia policy.⁶² But within days of taking office, the administration was confronted with the consequences of the previous administration's policy: In February 2009, Russia had essentially offered the Kyrgyzstani government a \$2 billion payoff to kick the Americans out of their base.⁶³ "We were scrambling . . . trying to deal with this crisis," recalled McFaul. Obama chose to make the case to Medvedev in their first meeting in April 2009 that the U.S. presence at Manas was a shared interest, arguing that U.S. forces in Afghanistan were "fighting people that, if we weren't fighting them, you would have to be fighting them . . . In other words, this is not a zero sum game. We can talk about some cockamamie [great game] . . . [But] let's leave the 19th century behind and think about the real threats here and what really matters to our interests."⁶⁴ As described below, this particular framing paid quick dividends.

Circumscribed Aims

These three core elements of the reset—a focus on dialogue and engagement, particularly on areas where interests more closely aligned; a rejection of linkage; and a lack of emphasis on geopolitical competition with Russia—defined the policy from its inception soon after the administration took office in January 2009. Yet the reset was circumscribed in its aims from the start. As Chollet, a senior Obama administration official, recalls, "The reset with

⁶⁰ Dick Cheney, "Cheney's Speech in Lithuania," *New York Times*, May 4, 2006.

⁶¹ Less than a month after the war, Cheney told a Western European audience that the "time to begin [Georgia and Ukraine's] Membership Action Plans, I believe, has come." Dick Cheney, "Vice President's Remarks at the Ambrosetti Forum, Villa d'Este, Cernobbio, Italy," Washington, D.C.: White House, September 6, 2008.

⁶² Michael A. McFaul, "Assessing the 'Reset' Past Progress, Future Steps," presentation at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, the Russian Economy and U.S. Russia Relations Conference CSIS/PIIE/NES, Washington, D.C., April 15, 2011a.

⁶³ Michael A. McFaul, "Remarks at the Peterson Institute for International Economics," transcript, the Russian Economy and US-Russia Relations, conference cosponsored by the Peterson Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the New Economic School in Moscow, April 15, 2011b.

⁶⁴ McFaul, 2011b.

Russia was always thought of as a temporary measure, a kind of diplomatic phase, not as a lasting new era in the relationship.”⁶⁵ He and others consistently emphasized that cooperation would be confined to areas where interests aligned most closely; they would not take on the most-fundamental disagreements between the United States and Russia. As Chollet put it, the reset was an attempt “to work with Russia where our interests converged, stand firm where they did not, and engage directly with the Russian people as they continued to press for political freedom and economic reforms.”⁶⁶ (Clinton’s language in her memoir is nearly identical: “[The reset entailed] finding specific areas for cooperation where our interests aligned, standing firm where our interests diverged, and engaging consistently with the Russian people themselves.”⁶⁷) The first part of this three-pronged characterization—engagement with Russia on shared interests—has already been discussed. The second points to the limited nature of the accommodation that the reset represented. The final clause indicated that the reset would not mark the end of U.S. efforts to promote democracy in Russia or U.S. criticism of alleged human rights violations. We explore these two elements in greater detail.

“Standing firm” on issues where U.S. and Russian interests diverged the most appears to be an uncontroversial position for any U.S. administration. But as implemented in the years after 2009, it entailed significant limitations on the scope or extent of less-hardline policies that the United States was willing to pursue, leaving to the side almost all of Russia’s key concerns, as already described. Three key examples of limits of U.S. willingness to accommodate Russia can be seen in its policies on missile defense, the European security architecture, and the intervention in Libya. In this way, the reset differs from the other case studies considered in this report. The implications of these differences from a comparative perspective, including the possibility that a renewed less-hardline approach by the United States toward Russia might more closely resemble the reset than our other case studies, will be discussed in Chapter Six. For the purposes of this case study, we note that the United States was unwilling to change its policies on several issues of central importance to Russia in this period.

Cooperation, Not Limits, on Missile Defense

Upon entering office, the Obama administration reviewed U.S. BMD plans and decided to change them, refocusing efforts in Europe on countering the shorter-range missiles that Iran actually possessed as opposed to the ICBMs that it did not. That entailed forgoing the ground-based interceptors in Poland and the radar in the Czech Republic because the new system would be based on different capabilities. Although the new system was not designed to accommodate Russian concerns, it did not arouse Russian threat perceptions to the same degree as the Bush-era system did. It did not have even a theoretical capability to intercept Russian ICBMs (at least initially), and would be based on platforms farther away from Rus-

⁶⁵ Chollet, 2016, p. 239.

⁶⁶ Chollet, 2016, p. 112.

⁶⁷ Clinton, 2014, p. 555.

sian soil. Although the Russians seemed pleased with the change, they still sought to obtain limitations on the U.S. systems.⁶⁸

In parallel to the revision of its BMD plans, the United States made a new attempt to find a way to cooperate with Russia on missile defense. Moscow was willing to consider cooperation only if it received assurances about U.S. capabilities; Russia's priority remained to procure a U.S. commitment to military restraint. Talks on both aspects continued intensely from late 2009 until mid-2011. In the run-up to an Obama-Medvedev meeting, negotiations on the sidelines of the G-8 meeting in Deauville, France, in May 2011 led to a working-level agreement on the text of a joint presidential statement. Apparently, that statement called for further talks to agree on modalities of cooperation and, at Moscow's insistence, provided assurances that future U.S. missile defense deployments would not adversely affect Russia's nuclear deterrent. Although Medvedev had "expended a lot of political capital to convince Putin and the other hardliners" to approve the statement before the meeting, the U.S. Department of Defense, according to McFaul, objected to the assurances language and Obama concurred.⁶⁹ The statement was never issued. Despite two more years of sporadic talks, the sides never came close to agreement again. In November 2011, Medvedev announced that Russia would take military countermeasures in response to U.S. BMD deployments. The Deauville episode was telling. Moscow's priority was to re-create the limitations on U.S. capabilities that it had lost with the abrogation of the ABM treaty. Washington was willing to consider some cooperation on shared threats but not to commit to the restraint that Moscow had been demanding in one form or another for years.

No Revisions to the Regional Security Architecture

As with missile defense, the United States adopted a less overtly antagonistic approach to the regional security architecture, but this policy had clear limits and hardline elements. In a change toward a less-hardline policy, the Obama administration ceased pushing MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine. Because NATO allies were even more reluctant to grant MAPs in the aftermath of the war, such a step was not seen as particularly radical. The election in February 2010 of Viktor Yanukovich as President of Ukraine made this policy even less contentious: Yanukovich, who was significantly more skeptical of NATO than his predecessor, initiated a law soon after taking office that codified the country's non-bloc status. There was still a good deal of competition between the United States and Russia in post-Soviet Eurasia, but Obama was not interested in pursuing an overtly geopolitical effort to counter Russia.⁷⁰

However, the extent to which Obama was prepared to accommodate Russia on this issue was limited. His administration had no intention of rethinking long-standing U.S. approaches to the security architecture in order to accommodate Russian grievances. The reset happened

⁶⁸ Rose Gottemoeller, *Negotiating the New START Treaty*, Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2021, p. 115.

⁶⁹ McFaul, 2018, pp. 191–192.

⁷⁰ Stent, 2014, pp. 235–238.

to coincide with a renewed Russian effort to change the post–Cold War status quo. Medvedev launched an initiative in 2008 to address Russia–West differences on regional integration in post–Cold War Europe by proposing negotiations on a new pan-regional security treaty. It was an attempt to square the circle of EU and NATO enlargement and Russia’s aspirations to be an equal partner to the West. In November 2009, Russia published a draft treaty text.⁷¹ Western critics pointed to a variety of flaws in the document, such as its seeming incompatibility with existing NATO alliance commitments. But rather than treat the Medvedev proposal as an opening for talks, Washington responded by stating that it saw no need to discuss changes to the security architecture on the continent and suggested that Moscow’s call for change was unwarranted. As Secretary of State Clinton put it in a speech in early 2010, “common goals are best pursued in the context of existing institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the NATO–Russia Council, rather than by negotiating new treaties, as Russia has suggested.”⁷² In short, the United States was uninterested in a serious discussion of a revision of the existing order. The limits of Washington’s willingness to accommodate Moscow were clear. Although Medvedev’s proposals were discussed for some time through the OSCE in the “Corfu process,” the initiatives ultimately went nowhere.⁷³

U.S. Intervention in Libya

The case of NATO’s intervention in Libya was another demonstration of the limits of U.S. willingness to adjust its policies for Moscow’s sake. When the Arab Spring protests came to Libya in spring 2011, the country’s erratic ruler, Muhamar Qaddafi, threatened to massacre his opponents. The Obama administration and its NATO allies quickly began to consider a military response to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. But the administration was intent on garnering a UN Security Council mandate for any action. For that, Moscow’s assent would be needed. Libya therefore topped the agenda for then–Vice President Biden’s long-scheduled visit to Moscow in March 2010. Medvedev, in a one-on-one meeting with Biden, signaled that Russia would support a UN Security Council resolution. As McFaul recalls, “Medvedev shared our analysis about the probabilities of a humanitarian disaster, and the necessity for action. I could tell that this was a tough decision for him. The Russian president carefully presented his reasoning, stressing several times the importance of limiting the military mission. But it was clear to me that he was leaning forward, trying to be cooperative . . . he sought to demonstrate to Obama his commitment to deepening cooperation between the United States

⁷¹ “The Draft of the European Security Treaty,” *Gazeta.Ru*, November 29, 2009.

⁷² Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks on the Future of European Security at the L’Ecole Militaire, Paris, France,” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, January 29, 2010.

⁷³ Philip Remler, *Russia and Cooperative Security in Europe: Times Change, Tactics Remain*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 1, 2019; Andrei Zagorski, “The Russian Proposal for a Treaty on European Security: From the Medvedev Initiative to the Corfu Process,” *OSCE Yearbook 2009*, Baden-Baden, Germany: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, 2010, pp. 43–44.

and Russia.”⁷⁴ On March 17, 2011, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973, which called for “all necessary measures . . . to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack” in Libya.⁷⁵ After the vote, Obama called Medvedev and “went out of his way to underscore that we were not using this UN Security Council resolution to pursue regime change in Libya.”⁷⁶ In the end, however, that was precisely what occurred. The NATO mission quickly morphed from an effort to protect civilians from slaughter to an operation to facilitate Qaddafi’s ouster. Moscow, and particularly Medvedev, considered that evolution both a betrayal of the bilateral understandings that had been reached and a violation of the text of the Resolution itself. For the purposes of this analysis, the important point to underscore is that, at a moment when Washington and its allies could have chosen to engage in restraint in order to address Moscow’s concerns, they chose not to do so—even in a case in which Russia had preemptively made concessions.

Continued Emphasis on Human Rights and Promotion of Democracy in Russia
As indicated by that final clause in Chollet and Clinton’s depiction of the reset, the United States continued its emphasis on human rights and promotion of democracy in Russia during the reset period. U.S. officials regularly met with opposition figures and activists, and the administration adopted “as policy a commitment to criticize human rights abuses and democratic erosion inside Russia.”⁷⁷ U.S. government programming and funding directed at democracy and human rights in Russia also continued. In 2009, the Kremlin begrudgingly tolerated such efforts; in late 2011, when its popular support began to erode, it had come to view them as a threat. On September 24, 2011, Putin announced that he had decided to run for the presidency again—after serving as prime minister during Medvedev’s four-year interlude—in what Russians called a “castling move.” With this move, Putin lost the support of much of Russia’s urban middle class. Protests broke out in several Russian cities following the two deeply flawed elections in December 2011 (parliamentary) and March 2012 (presidential) that followed. During this domestic instability, Putin adopted a harsh anti-Americanism in his campaign and reaction to the protests, including blaming Clinton for instigating them.

Meanwhile, the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 was making its way through the U.S. Congress. Magnitsky was a young lawyer who died in pretrial detention in a Moscow prison in November 2009 after uncovering what was purported to be a massive fraud perpetrated by Russian officials. The proposed legislation sanctioned Russian officials involved in human rights abuses of whistleblowers, such as Magnitsky. The bill was tied to legislation granting Russia permanent normal trade relations status. The United States had little choice but to grant this status to Russia following its WTO membership to avoid violat-

⁷⁴ McFaul, 2018, p. 224.

⁷⁵ United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1973, Adopted by the Security Council at Its 6498th Meeting on 17 March 2011,” S/RES/1973, 2011.

⁷⁶ McFaul, 2018, p. 225.

⁷⁷ McFaul, 2018, p. 117.

ing WTO rules. According to McFaul, the administration did not make much of an effort to oppose the legislation, despite Russian officials' warnings "that they will respond asymmetrically if this legislation passes. Their argument is that we cannot expect them to be our partner in supporting sanctions against countries like Iran, North Korea, and Libya, and sanction them at the same time."⁷⁸ Once the legislation passed and was signed into law in December 2012, Russia retaliated by creating a visa blacklist of its own and adopting a ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian children. The case of the Magnitsky Act demonstrated U.S. unwillingness to downplay its concerns about human rights and democracy in Russia even when the costs to the relationship were clear—particularly in the context of Putin's domestic political turmoil, when any coercive efforts on democracy were seen in a particularly negative light in Moscow.

Effect on the Weaker State's Perceptions and Behavior

Despite limitations and even hardline elements, the reset had a swift and significant impact on Russian behavior for the better part of three years. Within months, Moscow had shifted course on several issues central to U.S. interests. Yet many in the Russian establishment never shed their views that the United States posed significant threats to Russia's national interests. The quick reversion to a more confrontational stance even before U.S. policy became more-hardline was facilitated by the persistence of these views. We focus here on behavior because there is scant evidence regarding Russian perceptions.

Russia certainly noticed that U.S. policy had shifted from Bush to Obama. In May 2009, Lavrov said, "We appreciate the sincere desire of the new U.S. administration to develop a constructive bilateral relationship. It was important to get the signal that the United States has made its strategic choice and intends to stop the drift in our relations."⁷⁹ The resulting shift in Russian policies was most evident on three issues: the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan; the U.S. operation in Afghanistan; and the Iranian nuclear program.

Russian Support for U.S. Base in Kyrgyzstan

As already noted, the Obama administration was faced with a crisis almost immediately on entering office when Moscow provided the Kyrgyzstani government a \$2 billion loan as an incentive for Bishkek to eject the United States from Manas. When Obama first met Medvedev, he tried "to explain why . . . our presence in Manas was good for the United States and good for Russia" which amounted to a "radical reframing" consistent with the reset.⁸⁰ Medvedev was receptive; two months later, the Kyrgyzstani government walked back its previous decision and allowed the U.S. facility to remain open. It seemed clear that Moscow had given its blessing; the success of its February gambit demonstrated that it could have continued to

⁷⁸ Kathy Lally, "U.S. Puts Russian Officials on Visa Blacklist," *Washington Post*, July 25, 2011.

⁷⁹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Foreign Minister Lavrov on Russia-U.S. Relations: Perspectives and Prospects for the New Agenda," video, Washington, D.C., May 7, 2009.

⁸⁰ McFaul, 2018, p. 107.

block U.S. efforts if it so chose. A further indirect indication of the changed Russian attitude toward Manas came in February 2011, when the commander of the Russian air force base at Kant, Kyrgyzstan, accompanied by fellow officers as well as his wife and son, visited Manas.⁸¹ This was the first meeting between personnel from the two bases despite nine years of living around 20 miles apart.

Angry crowds ousted the sitting Kyrgyzstani president in April 2010. Instead of choosing one of the opposing sides, the United States and Russia cooperated, pursuing back-channel talks to deescalate the situation on the ground. Moscow and Washington even coordinated humanitarian assistance efforts in the aftermath of the unrest. Obama and Medvedev went so far as to issue a joint statement on the situation in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 during Medvedev's visit to the White House.⁸²

Russian Support for U.S. Operation in Afghanistan

The Russian move to oust the United States from the Manas base in late 2008 had been a function of a broader reassessment of the U.S. operation in Afghanistan. Initially supportive of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, Russia had become more concerned with the U.S. military presence in Central Asia than it was with terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan by the end of the Bush administration.⁸³ There was essentially no bilateral cooperation on Afghanistan when Obama took office.

By the end of 2009, however, Russia was actively facilitating U.S. (and NATO) operations in Afghanistan. The United States particularly benefited from the use of Russian rail links and airspace to send personnel and materiel to Afghanistan, one of the most landlocked countries on earth. Obama and Medvedev signed an agreement at the July 2009 summit meeting in Moscow for the transport of lethal materials and troops over Russian airspace en route to Afghanistan. It allowed for up to 4,500 flights a year. Russian railroads were the primary link on the Riga-Termez (Uzbekistan) route, one of two components of the so-called Northern Distribution Network. The rail link carried nonlethal supplies to Afghanistan in only nine days, and provided crucial redundancy to the supply line that came from Pakistan.

At the Moscow summit in July 2009, Presidents Medvedev and Obama also issued a joint statement declaring their mutual interest in stabilizing Afghanistan to prevent the flow of narcotics and the spread of extremism.⁸⁴ The statement also outlined several issues for bilateral cooperation on Afghanistan, including Russia's training of Afghanistan's counternarcotics police. The United States would eventually also procure Russian combat helicopters for

⁸¹ Joshua Kucera, "Russians Make First-Ever Visit to Manas," Eurasianet, February 17, 2011.

⁸² "Joint Statement of the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation in Connection with the Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic," June 24, 2010.

⁸³ Aleksei Malashenko, "Tsena voprosa," *Kommersant*, January 20, 2009.

⁸⁴ "Joint Statement by Presidents of the United States of America and the Russian Federation Concerning Afghanistan," July 6, 2009.

the Afghan National Army.⁸⁵ Russia also provided the United States with information on the Hawala system of informal exchange that the Taliban was using to launder money obtained through the sale of illicit narcotics.⁸⁶

Russian Support for U.S. Effort to Limit Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear program was another crisis that the Obama administration immediately faced on taking office. In Washington, Russia had come to be seen as more of an obstacle than a partner in dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions. Moscow had signed a lucrative deal with Tehran in 2007 to deliver its S-300 air defense system. The Israeli government had made clear to Washington that delivery of the system would be a *casus belli*.⁸⁷ To avoid another war in the Middle East, Obama sought to persuade the Russians to cancel the sale. In the final years of the Bush administration, Moscow had also begun to resist U.S. efforts to increase the pressure on Iran through sanctions introduced at the UN Security Council. To achieve Obama's goal of reaching a diplomatic settlement to resolve the nuclear issue, the U.S. administration had come to see a new round of sanctions as a necessity. Relatedly, Russia had significant leverage and connections with Iran that the United States lacked, and these could be deployed to reach a deal—but that was not the case when Obama entered office.

As with Afghanistan, the administration found that its new policy contributed to a shift in the Russian position. As Burns recalls, "We moved quickly . . . with Russia to advance one of the president's central priorities—preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Cooperation with Moscow was at the heart of that effort; if we could prevent the Iranians from driving a wedge between us and the Russians, the chances for mobilizing the Europeans, the Chinese, and other players in a united front improved substantially. Medvedev was persuaded by our willingness to work with Russia in good faith."⁸⁸ Moscow worked with Washington directly on an early attempt at a diplomatic solution—the so-called Tehran Research Reactor deal, which would have had Iran transfer most of its low-enriched uranium to Russia for further enrichment and then to France to produce fuel. The United States had obtained evidence that Iran was constructing a second nuclear enrichment facility near Qom. Before making that information public, Obama shared it directly with Medvedev during a meeting in New York in September 2009. As McFaul recalls, "On the most important security challenge of our time, we were now working closely with Russia."⁸⁹ After Iran rejected the Tehran Research Reactor proposal, Washington and Moscow began negotiating a sanctions package.

⁸⁵ Samuel Charap, *Assessing the "Reset" and the Next Steps for U.S. Russia Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, April, 2010, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Charap, 2010, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Stent, 2014, p. 269.

⁸⁸ Burns, 2019, p. 280.

⁸⁹ McFaul, 2018, p. 164.

The two presidents had several phone calls devoted exclusively to the sanctions issue.⁹⁰ It was a challenging issue for Russia because, as Medvedev argued to Obama, “[a]ll the diplomatic and economic costs of new sanctions fell on Russia, not the United States.” When the two met in Prague in April 2010, Obama told Medvedev that he wanted to “make economic relations between the United States and Russia much more lucrative for Russia than Russia’s trade with Iran [and] U.S.-Russia relations more important diplomatically to Russia than Iranian-Russian relations.” He also offered several concrete incentives: He pledged to lift sanctions on Russia’s main arms exporter, resubmit the 123 civil-nuclear cooperation agreement to Congress, and push hard for Russia’s WTO accession.⁹¹

After another two months of talks, UN Security Council Resolution 1929, which contained the landmark sanctions, passed with Russian support. The sanctions were far tougher than past UN resolutions, although Russia rebuffed U.S. attempts to include language banning the S-300 sale. On the same day the sanctions passed, however, Medvedev surprised the Obama administration by announcing that Russia would cancel the S-300 contract unilaterally.⁹² As Obama recalls, “my relationship with Medvedev proved decisive in getting the sanctions finally in place. On the margins of each international summit I attended, he and I carved out time to work through logjams in the negotiations; as we got closer to the Security Council vote, it seemed as if we talked by phone once a week . . . Time and again, Medvedev ended up going further than Burns or McFaul had thought possible, given Moscow’s long-standing ties to Iran and the vast amounts of money that well-connected Russian arms manufacturers stood to lose once the new sanctions went into effect.”⁹³

Broader Effects on Russian Behavior

There is little evidence to suggest that the reset served to embolden Russia to take more-aggressive actions on any issues. Russia did not escalate any of the conflicts in post-Soviet Eurasia, for example, or become qualitatively more aggressive toward Ukraine and Georgia following the U.S. shift on pushing NATO MAPs. Although some of the more-hardline elements of the reset (such as U.S. policy on missile defense) did cause tensions, they were not so significant as to upset the ongoing bilateral cooperation on other issues.

Effect on the Broader Relationship

The U.S.-Russia relationship was (at least for a time) transformed in many ways by the reset. Less than six months before Obama took office, his predecessor had been presented with options to attack Russian forces as they invaded Georgia. Six months after taking office,

⁹⁰ McFaul, 2018, p. 168.

⁹¹ McFaul, 2018, p. 171.

⁹² McFaul, 2018, p. 172.

⁹³ Obama, 2020, p. 484.

Obama's Moscow summit marked the significant progress that had already been made. It was a rapid, even dramatic, shift.

Both sides effectively worked to resolve conflicts of interest over a variety of issues, particularly Afghanistan and Iran. They also made progress on stabilizing the strategic relationship. Drawing on framework agreements between the presidents in April 2009, the sides had signed the historic New START by April 2010, which reduced deployed strategic nuclear warheads by one-third and restored the bilateral inspection, notification, and data exchange regime (in modernized form) after the original START's provisions had expired in December 2009.⁹⁴ The U.S. and Russian militaries even began conducting joint counterterrorism exercises.⁹⁵ NATO and Russia jointly declared in November 2010 that they had "embarked on a new stage of cooperation toward a true strategic partnership."⁹⁶

A secondary goal of the reset policy was to create stability in U.S.-Russia relations that could be sustained over time. To this end, the Obama administration created an institutionalized framework for bilateral relations, the Bilateral Presidential Commission, which included working groups on a wide variety of economic and social issues, including health, science and technology, agriculture, education and sport. The commission, it was thought, would create habits of cooperation and joint efforts that could give the relationship ballast. McFaul also argued that success on such accounts as Iran and New START would create fertile ground to address some of the disputes that divided the parties.⁹⁷

But the reset's positive impact on the relationship faded as the pace of agreements and achievements waned by late 2012; it did not create a lasting stability in the relationship. Once the relatively low-hanging fruit of agreements on overlapping interests had been harvested, what remained were the deeper disputes: BMD; the European security architecture, particularly in Russia's immediate neighborhood; Russia's domestic development; Moscow's demands for U.S. military restraint; and, increasingly, the divergences over such issues as Libya and the Arab Spring uprisings, as well as the issue of regime change more broadly.⁹⁸ All of these disputes rose to the surface in one way or another as the pace of accomplishments faded. As Ruth Deyermond notes, "The reset was predicated on an approach that marginalized the most-serious areas of disagreement in order to make progress in areas where agree-

⁹⁴ See Gottemoeller, 2021.

⁹⁵ Dan Elliott, "Russia, U.S. Chase Jet in Hijack Drill," Associated Press, August 9, 2010.

⁹⁶ NATO, "NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement," meeting held at Lisbon, Portugal, November 20, 2010.

⁹⁷ President Obama was also concerned that the relationship between the countries was too dependent on his rapport with Medvedev. According to Obama aide Ben Rhodes, the President told Medvedev at their last meeting that "relations between the United States and Russia had to be strong enough to outlast their personal relationship . . . Sasha and Malia [his children], Obama joked, could someday get elected and try to start a new Cold War." (Ben Rhodes, *The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House*, New York: Random House, 2018, p. 273)

⁹⁸ Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention," *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 1, February–March 2013.

ment was possible. This could not be an effective, long-term strategy, however, since disagreements remained unresolved and—given their significance to both states—had, eventually, to return to the bilateral agenda.”⁹⁹ Although accurate, this framing obscures the specific nature of the “most serious areas of disagreement”: that they were all core Russian national security interests. The geopolitical status of Russia’s neighbors, Moscow’s ability to ensure retaliation in a strategic exchange, and the security of the Putin regime ranked at the top of Russian strategic priorities. And although Washington did find common ground with Moscow regarding the most-significant issues for U.S. interests, such as Iran’s nuclear program, the United States was not willing to accommodate Russia on its core interests. In short, the circumscribed nature of the reset ultimately limited its sustainability.

Putin’s return to the presidency coincided with this shift in the bilateral agenda, and that change in leadership had an independent negative impact on the relationship as well. Unlike Medvedev, who approached the United States with little personal baggage and eventually saw the relationship as a political asset, Putin returned to the Kremlin clearly fed up with certain aspects of U.S. foreign policy, particularly perceived meddling in Russian domestic politics. He also used anti-Americanism to secure support during his campaign for reelection in early 2012, blaming the protests in major cities on U.S. influence. In his first few months in office, he signaled his intention to make good on this rhetoric by ejecting the United States Agency for International Development from Russia and declining Obama’s invitation to the G-8 summit at Camp David. The violent response to the protests in May 2012 that he oversaw and other repressive measures taken in response to the unrest also dragged down the relationship. It was more difficult politically for the U.S. administration to do business with Russia under these circumstances.

End of Accommodation

The term *reset* is often used to refer to improvements in the bilateral relationship itself that occurred during this period. In that sense, the reset was over some time in 2012. Strikingly, though, in the sense of the Obama administration’s adoption of a less-hardline policy (which was the driver of the improved relationship), the reset remained unchanged for several months while the relationship itself deteriorated.

As noted, the reset was defined by three core components: engagement and dialogue; rejection of linkage; and a reduced emphasis on geopolitical competition. Although the relationship was already on the rocks in mid- to late 2012, the Obama administration continued a policy consistent with these three precepts. McFaul, in his memoirs, recalls advocating (as ambassador in Moscow) against continued U.S. willingness to seek diplomatic solutions with Russia after all the challenges of 2012. He believed that Putin had signaled that Russia was

⁹⁹ Ruth Deyermond, “Assessing the Reset: Successes and Failures in the Obama Administration’s Russia Policy, 2009–2012,” *European Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013.

no longer interested in 2009–2011 levels of cooperation with the United States. “In place of Reset, I advocated a new strategy of selective engagement and selective disengagement If Putin did not want to work with us, if Putin continued to spew vile untruths about us, so be it; we would stop courting him. I argued that a little less engagement—a little less chasing after the Russians—might help us in some of our negotiating positions.”¹⁰⁰ Specifically, McFaul argued against further engagement on missile defense, arms control, and Syria. He appears to have lost all three arguments. National Security Adviser Tom Donilon visited Moscow on May 3–4, 2012, to present new ideas for further strategic arms reductions and missile defense cooperation and a broader framework for “maintaining cooperative relations.”¹⁰¹ He also had an invitation for Putin from Obama to visit the White House before the G-8 summit at Camp David later that month. Not only was Putin uninterested in the arms control and missile defense proposals, he also informed Donilon that he would not be attending the G-8 and thus would be unable to accept Obama’s White House invitation. In spring 2013, Donilon again visited Moscow to provide an even more detailed outline of U.S. arms control proposals. None of his interlocutors, including Putin, appeared particularly interested.¹⁰²

President Obama went public with his nuclear arms control proposal in a speech in Berlin in June 2013, offering a further one-third reduction of deployed strategic warheads—but only in parallel with Russian reductions.¹⁰³ Later that month, at a bilateral meeting during the last G-8 summit (Russia would be removed from the group the following year), Putin rejected Obama’s offer. However, the two leaders issued a joint statement outlining cyber confidence-building measures.¹⁰⁴ They also agreed to a statement on “Enhanced Bilateral Engagement,” which read, in part: “The United States of America and the Russian Federation reaffirm their readiness to intensify bilateral cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, and genuine respect for each other’s interests. Guided by this approach, today we reached an understanding on a positive agenda for relations between our countries. . . . This wide-ranging program of action requires enhanced engagement at all levels.”¹⁰⁵

In another example, despite the continued chasm between U.S. and Russian objectives on the Syrian civil war, Washington “continued to court the Russians . . . chasing, begging and pleading with them,” according to McFaul, an effort he deems “a complete failure.”¹⁰⁶ Yet he

¹⁰⁰ McFaul, 2018, p. 317.

¹⁰¹ McFaul, 2018, p. 325.

¹⁰² McFaul, 2018, p. 325.

¹⁰³ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate—Berlin, Germany,” Washington, D.C.: White House, June 19, 2013.

¹⁰⁴ “Joint Statement by the Presidents of the United States of America and the Russian Federation on a New Field of Cooperation in Confidence Building,” June 17, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ “Joint Statement by the Presidents of the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Enhanced Bilateral Engagement,” June 17, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ McFaul, 2018, p. 342.

documents extensively how Secretary of State Clinton and, later, her successor, John Kerry, both sought repeatedly to engage Lavrov (and Putin) on Syria. The United States was continuing the reset policy even after Russia's cooperation ceased.

McFaul himself in the first half of 2013 sought "to scrape together enough deliverables to justify a two-day [Presidential] visit to Moscow."¹⁰⁷ That spring and early summer, the U.S. attorney general and the directors of the FBI and CIA visited their counterparts in Moscow, principals who rarely visited Moscow, seeking to enhance bilateral cooperation on law enforcement and counterterrorism. McFaul recalls, "We were still looking for common interests or mutual projects that could help us reverse our negative course."¹⁰⁸ As of mid-June 2013, plans were still in place for a U.S.-Russia summit in Moscow following the G-20 meeting in St. Petersburg that September.

But the cumulative effect of the lack of progress on the U.S. agenda and the festering disagreements on such issues as BMD eventually sapped any reservoir of U.S. goodwill. By early summer 2013, the reset policy was still being pursued but without much enthusiasm. On June 23, 2013, the former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden arrived at Moscow's Sheremeteyvo airport. The United States mounted a furious behind-the-scenes effort to persuade the Russian government to hand Snowden into U.S. custody.¹⁰⁹ When Russia decided to grant Snowden asylum the following month—despite explicit U.S. warnings that the summit would be canceled as a result—it was the straw that broke the camel's back. The White House issued a statement on August 7, 2013, canceling plans for the summit, citing both the barren agenda and Moscow's decision to grant Snowden asylum.¹¹⁰

Although the August statement did mention that cooperation "remains a priority for the United States" and pointed to an upcoming "2+2" meeting of U.S. and Russian foreign and defense ministers, the decision to cancel the summit—sparked by the Snowden episode—marked a turning point in U.S. policy.¹¹¹ Regardless of how justified this action was, it was nonetheless a decision to eschew high-level engagement with Russia, the first core pillar of the reset. The turn away from engagement was underscored by Obama's decision not to arrange a formal bilateral meeting with Putin even though both officials would be in Putin's hometown, St. Petersburg, for the G-20 the following month. Second, the decision was a clear case of linkage. The United States used linkage to try to coerce Russia to hand Snowden over by threatening to cancel the summit and then followed through on the threat. The bilateral agenda—Syria, arms control, missile defense, nonproliferation, etc.—was now linked to the

¹⁰⁷ McFaul, 2018, p. 371.

¹⁰⁸ McFaul, 2018, p. 374.

¹⁰⁹ McFaul, 2018, pp. 374–377.

¹¹⁰ "Following a careful review begun in July, we have reached the conclusion that there is not enough recent progress in our bilateral agenda with Russia to hold a U.S.-Russia Summit in early September" (Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the Press Secretary on the President's Travel to Russia," Washington, D.C.: White House, August 7, 2013).

¹¹¹ Office of the Press Secretary, 2013.

Snowden asylum decision. In retrospect, the Russian decision on Snowden seems overdetermined; it would have been shocking had Moscow handed him over to Washington, particularly after mounting public pressure to do so from the Obama administration and members of Congress.

The decision to cancel the September summit was not in itself an act of geopolitical gamesmanship, the eschewal of which was the reset's third pillar. But other elements of U.S. policy were simultaneously drifting in that direction. That July, while Snowden's fate was being decided in the Kremlin, Moscow began making it clear to Kyiv and to Brussels—by imposing punishing tariffs on imports from Ukraine—that it was prepared to take extreme measures to stop Ukraine from signing an Association Agreement with the EU.¹¹² Later that fall, a leaked recording of U.S. officials discussing the crisis demonstrated that the reset was over: Washington was trying to forge a settlement to Ukraine's deepening domestic political crisis before Russia had time to react and to deliberately do so without Moscow's involvement.¹¹³ A comparison with the U.S.-Russia coordination during similar unrest in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 demonstrates that the third pillar of the reset—deemphasizing geopolitical competition—had also collapsed by the third quarter of 2013. Kyrgyzstan was an easier case for both sides—its economic and geopolitical importance pales in comparison with Ukraine's—but the lack of even an attempt to find common ground in 2014 is indicative of an overall hardening of the U.S. approach.

Longer-Term Implications

On the surface, the relationship between the United States and Russia was so dramatically transformed by Russia's invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022—and the reset's legacy thus so rapidly erased—that it would seem the reset had no longer-term implications. But certain elements of the reset did survive, at least for a time. For example, U.S.-Russia cooperation on Iran's nuclear program continued through the negotiations to conclude the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Iran nuclear deal, in 2015. New START implementation was unaffected by the 2014 Ukraine crisis and continued for years afterward until Russia effectively pulled out of the treaty in February 2023. Even a visa facilitation agreement, signed in late 2011, remains in force, easing the process for citizens of both countries to receive long-term, multiple-entry visas.

Yet events that occurred after the reset so deeply changed U.S.-Russia relations that the long-term impact of the reset itself (as opposed to the outcomes, such as New START, that it facilitated) is hard to identify, even over eight years after it ended. The annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014, and the U.S. and EU sanctions imposed on Russia as a result, transformed the relationship, entrenching a highly adversarial dynamic. The Rus-

¹¹² Charap and Colton, 2017, p. 123.

¹¹³ "Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of Leaked Nuland-Pyatt Call," BBC News, February 7, 2014.

sian intervention in Syria's civil war in 2015 further reinforced the view in Washington that Moscow represented a strategic competitor. Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and U.S. retaliation—which included multiple rounds of sanctions, closures of diplomatic facilities, and expulsion of diplomatic personnel—cemented the view on both sides that a new period of confrontation had begun. And the definitive rift came in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The reset's harshest critics have argued that it emboldened Russia to intervene in Ukraine in 2014. As Volker writes, "President Barack Obama came into office hoping for a 'reset' with Russia, to the dismay of Georgia, whose territory remained occupied, as well as U.S. allies in the Baltic states, Poland, and the Czech Republic, who feared further Russian aggression . . . The result? By 2014, Russia had illegally seized Crimea from Ukraine [and] started a war in eastern Ukraine."¹¹⁴ Yet there is little evidence to support this claim. What we do know about Russia's motives in 2014 suggest that the intervention in Ukraine was a policy set in reaction to the Maidan Revolution in Kyiv and the perceived implications for Russia. A counterfactual also underscores the point: If there had been no reset policy pursued by the United States and relations improved little after the post-Russo-Georgian War nadir, it seems likely that Russia would have reacted equally and perhaps even more harshly to the Maidan Revolution.

Subsequent attempts to pursue a less-hardline approach to Russia were mostly criticized and resisted in light of Russian actions in 2014 and later, particularly Moscow's interference in the 2016 elections, and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Perhaps it was the reset's relative success—at least in terms of engendering Russian cooperation on issues of importance to the United States—that had a longer-term impact on U.S. foreign policy rather than its ultimate failure. The reset demonstrated that the United States was able to obtain significant concessions from Russia without addressing Moscow's core security concerns. If the lesson learned—though perhaps not articulated—was that partial accommodation can deliver for U.S. interests, then the question logically follows: Why bother addressing the more-challenging issues at the core of U.S.-Russia disputes? As relations further deteriorated between 2014 and their ultimate unraveling in February 2022, we have not seen an increased U.S. willingness to engage on core Russian security concerns, particularly Ukraine and related regional order issues. In the run-up to the February 2022 invasion, the Biden administration demonstrated openness to discussing certain arms control issues on Russia's agenda but explicitly rejected any discussion of Ukraine's NATO membership prospects. The implicit premise was that the United States can still advance U.S. interests by pursuing selective accommodation (or more accurately, selective cooperation) while still allowing acute disputes to persist. The case can be made that this premise has been definitively disproven by the events of 2022.

¹¹⁴ Volker, 2020.

Conclusion

This case study highlights four key points regarding the effects of less-hardline approaches following the 2009 reset.¹¹⁵ First, the reset, although certainly less-hardline than the U.S. policy that came before it, was circumscribed from the start. It was not an attempt to transform the U.S.-Russia relationship. Instead, the reset sought to revive cooperation on issues where there was common ground between the two countries. Many of these, as it happened, were priorities of the Obama administration. But Washington quite deliberately avoided accommodating core Russian security concerns on such issues as the regional order and missile defense.

Second, although circumscribed, the reset nonetheless produced important—if time-limited—results. The United States and Russia concluded a wide array of agreements and arrangements during this period, from cooperation to rein in Iran’s nuclear ambitions to New START. Several of these survived the end of the reset, although it remains to be seen whether any will ultimately survive Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Third, the limited nature of the accommodation is a significant factor in explaining the relative short period of improved relations created by the reset. Once the positive momentum created by the deliverables faded, the core disputes came to the fore. Because these disputes tended to be relatively more important to Russia than to the United States, it is unsurprising that Moscow took the first steps back from enhanced cooperation.

Finally, the reset did not incur the kinds of costs traditionally feared to be associated with accommodation. There is no evidence that Moscow was emboldened to pursue a more aggressive stance during the reset, even in arenas where Russian goals had clearly not been met, and the instances of Russian aggression that followed the deterioration in relations, including the 2014 and 2022 invasions of Ukraine, do not appear to be rooted in a perception of U.S. weakness.

¹¹⁵ As noted in the introduction to this case study, direct accounts of Russian perceptions and thinking at this time are more limited, including in comparison with other case studies in this report where there has been more time for such accounts to become public. Nonetheless, we believe the available evidence clearly supports these points.

Conclusion

As of this writing, a postwar U.S. decision to pursue a less-hardline approach toward Russia seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. However, long-term pressures—such as competition with China and fiscal challenges—could prompt U.S. policymakers in the future to consider alternative approaches to the U.S. relationship with Russia as a way to reduce costs and risks. The analysis in this report is intended to inform future decisions regarding what U.S. policymakers should expect if they decide to pursue a less-hardline approach to Russia.

The historical case studies that we conducted in Chapters Two through Five allowed us to identify several patterns in the benefits, costs, and durability of less-hardline approaches that might be applicable to these decisions. This chapter summarizes these findings and identifies recommendations for U.S. policymakers.

Findings

The key findings and patterns we identified from our case studies can be divided into two main categories: those that speak to the likelihood that a less-hardline approach toward Russia could be successful in advancing U.S. interests, and those that speak to the best timing for such an approach.

Prospects for Stabilizing the U.S.-Russia Relationship and Advancing U.S. Interests

Our case studies highlighted several findings regarding how less-hardline approaches might advance the interests of the stronger state pursuing them. Here, we summarize these findings and discuss their implications for U.S. policymakers who might consider such approaches toward Russia in the future.

Less-Hardline Approaches That Do Not Address Core Russian Concerns Are Unlikely to Stabilize the U.S.-Russia Relationship in the Medium to Long Term

In all of our case studies, the stronger states sustained hardline policies on some issues even as they adopted less-hardline approaches on others. The reasons for sustaining hardline policies in some areas varied. For example, as Britain attempted to pursue a less-hardline approach toward Russia by engaging St. Petersburg in negotiations to reduce tensions in Central Asia,

it pursued an alliance with Japan—Russia’s rival in East Asia—to help address the threat of further Russian expansion into China.¹ In 1945–1946, the United States pursued negotiations and was willing to make some concessions to address Soviet interests in Europe, where the Soviets occupied several countries. However, in Asia, where the United States controlled the military situation, the United States adopted a hardline approach, excluding the Soviet Union from decisions about Japan’s future. During détente, the United States pursued arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union to reduce the costs of the arms race but continued to pursue such hardline policies as the development and fielding of new nuclear systems, a conventional arms buildup in Europe, economic and materiel support to anti-communist partners globally, and the imposition of U.S. and international human rights sanctions against the Soviet Union. In part, these policies were intended to increase U.S. leverage in negotiations or to respond to domestic pressure within the United States. But these hardline policies also reflected the fact that U.S. policymakers remained wedded to the long-term objective of containing communism and defeating the Soviet Union, even as they sought to lower the risk of conflict and reduce the financial costs of competition. Relatedly, the Obama administration rejected Russian requests for nonbinding commitments to limit U.S. missile defenses, even as the administration was still seeking a more cooperative approach with Russia in other areas.

Any future less-hardline approach by the United States toward Russia would likely operate under similar conditions. Even in the 2009 reset, the United States was unwilling to address core Russian demands for a revised European security order or limitations on the further expansion of the EU or NATO. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has likely made the United States and its allies in Europe less willing to provide such fundamental concessions than before. If U.S. policymakers attempt to pursue a less-hardline approach toward Russia at some future point, there are likely to be clear limitations as to its scope.

If this proves to be the case, U.S. policymakers should be realistic about how durable and successful such a limited less-hardline approach has the potential to be. For example, future strategic stability talks may produce a new arms control agreement. But if questions surrounding the security architecture in Europe are left unresolved, future escalations in tensions between the United States and Russia are likely. As a result, U.S.-Russia relations would likely remain unpredictable and unstable if a less-hardline approach remained highly circumscribed.

A Less-Hardline Approach to Russia of Limited Scope Could Still Lead to Limited but Durable Gains

As noted already, all our case studies of less-hardline approaches were limited in nature. Even so, the limited negotiations between stronger and weaker states either resolved or created mechanisms to better manage one or more conflicts of interests.² These resolutions or man-

¹ White, 1995.

² We also identified some instances where a stronger state proposed negotiations or otherwise adopted a more conciliatory approach but was rebuffed by the weaker state (i.e., the Soviets in the early 1960s, the Rus-

agement mechanisms, in turn, helped achieve some of the goals that the stronger state had sought in pursuing the less-hardline approach in the first place.

Many of these gains proved to be durable, surviving a deterioration of relations on other issues for years or more. For example, the settlement on Afghanistan that was part of the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement held even as competition in Persia reignited in the years that followed. Similarly, the U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russia arms control agreements that resulted from détente and the reset held for many years, even as relations later deteriorated over regional disputes. In 1945, the de facto division of Europe into different spheres of influence, acquiesced to by both Soviet and U.S. leaders during their postwar negotiations, proved to be durable and likely served to limit the risk of direct conflict in Europe throughout the Cold War even as numerous crises still occurred regarding the precise definitions of these spheres, which had not been agreed to at the time (such as in Berlin). New START, signed during the U.S.-Russia reset, did survive the subsequent collapse in relations, as did U.S.-Russia cooperation over the Iranian nuclear program, although the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine appears to be unraveling these gains a decade later.

Our case studies illustrate how limited less-hardline approaches can lead to similarly limited but often durable gains for the stronger state. This does not mean that a future limited outreach to Russia would necessarily have this effect, nor does it mean that policymakers should assume that every agreement reached during a period of less-hardline approaches would survive a subsequent breakdown in relations. Several agreements made during the less-hardline periods in the case studies did not. Still, it does suggest that there is a potential for lasting, if narrow, gains from a limited less-hardline approach should the United States choose to pursue one toward Russia in the future.

In a Peacetime Context, There Appears to Be Little Evidence That Negotiating with Russia or Making Limited Concessions Will Embolden Moscow to Become More Demanding or Aggressive

Our case studies all involved peacetime limited less-hardline approaches between rivals that occurred outside the context of an acute crisis or conflict. In these case studies, we found no evidence that such policies made a rival more demanding or aggressive. For instance, the Soviet Union did not increase its demands on other issues after the Nixon administration consented in 1972 to the Soviet “Basic Principles” text that, in a major concession to Soviet interests, affirmed the principles of “sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual advantage” and granted the Soviet Union the recognition it desired. To the contrary, the concession assured the Soviet leadership that genuine negotiations were possible and encouraged active participation, including Soviet concessions, in the following arms limitation talks. In the case of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention, there is no evidence that Russia became more demanding or aggressive in response to Britain’s

sian Empire in the early 1900s). So, the ability for the stronger state to encourage the weaker state to enter into substantive negotiations should not be assumed, as we will discuss in greater detail.

less-hardline approach. In the years that followed the convention's negotiation, Russia did continue to pursue some competitive behavior in Central Asia and attempted to leverage domestic crises in Afghanistan and Persia to its advantage. However, St. Petersburg's policies were primarily motivated by events on the ground that it perceived as threats to Russian interests, and its behavior was at most a continuation of Russian strategy in the region from before 1907 rather than any expansion or escalation of its objectives. Following the 2009 reset, U.S. willingness to engage in negotiations on areas of mutual interest did not appear to lead to any expansion in Russian aims. Although Moscow would have preferred to expand the scope of the negotiations to cover its core security concerns, its policies on those concerns did not become more aggressive or expansionist during the reset.

U.S.-Soviet negotiations in 1945 and 1946 provide a somewhat more complex case. At the time, U.S. policymakers viewed Soviet demands as expanding throughout the course of the negotiations. Soviet frustration at a perceived lack of U.S. consideration of its interests in the Middle East and Asia led it to undertake policies in those regions that the United States saw as evidence of an implacably expansionist Soviet Union, which in turn led to a fundamental U.S. reappraisal of Soviet intentions and behavior. Yet it seems clear from examining Soviet thinking in this period that it was not U.S. concessions that led to more-aggressive Soviet probes in other regions; rather, it was the lack thereof. Stalin remained frustrated by the consistent U.S. unwillingness to accommodate Soviet concerns in regions outside Europe and sought to have Soviet interests respected in Iran, Turkey, and Japan.

Given the 2022 Russian war in Ukraine, caution regarding whether Russia might be emboldened by future U.S. policies to undertake yet further aggression is certainly warranted. Russia has clearly demonstrated a willingness to use force to achieve its goals, even in the face of substantial costs. The question for future U.S. policymakers, however, is whether a less-hardline approach would make Russia more or less likely to pursue the types of aggression or other escalating demands of which it has clearly demonstrated it is capable. On this score, our case studies provide limited evidence for concern. Russia may remain an aggressive, revisionist state, but so too were all the weaker states in our case studies. There is no evidence that these states became more demanding or aggressive when a stronger state adopted a less-hardline approach toward them.

Attempting to Implement Less-Hardline Approaches Could Create Domestic Constituencies Committed to Their Success in Both the United States and Russia

Less-hardline approaches have often been unpopular for stronger states to pursue. Given the levels of hostility between Washington and Moscow, this seems likely to apply to any future U.S. decision to pursue a less-hardline approach toward Russia. For example, following the 1907 agreement with Russia, the British government came under fire from both the right and left for conceding too much to Russia and for being willing to provide any concessions at all to an autocratic regime that mistreated its people. In the 1970s, détente was met with sustained domestic political opposition to U.S. willingness to legitimize and provide concessions

to its longtime adversary. The Obama administration's 2009 reset policy was consistently criticized by Republicans as tantamount to appeasement and became an issue in the 2012 presidential campaign. As discussed elsewhere, anticipation of these domestic political costs does appear to affect state willingness to undertake less-hardline approaches.

Once leaders decide to undertake less-hardline approaches, however, they become publicly identified with their success or failure. This can make them strong advocates for the continuation of less-hardline approaches, as they perceive that their own political standing has become tied to the success of the policy. This dynamic was particularly in evidence in the 1907 case study: Both the British and Russian leaders that had negotiated and approved the agreement sought to prove that it was delivering its promised benefits, including improved relations between the two states. This led them to be more willing to overlook minor violations of the agreement and assume good faith from their counterparts as they worked through the challenges in implementing the far-reaching accord, which proved to be important factors in the qualified success of the agreement. A similar dynamic can be seen following the 2009 reset, when President Medvedev proved willing to deliver on key U.S. requests over the objections of Russian hardliners, at least partly because he perceived that the success of the improved relationship with the United States was directly tied to his own political fortunes and his prospects of receiving a second term.

In the future, such a dynamic could make a less-hardline approach toward Russia more durable or successful than might otherwise have been anticipated. Although political pressures are likely to create strong disincentives for U.S. policymakers to pursue less-hardline approaches toward Russia, ensuring that such policies produce a visible success would be politically essential should they decide to proceed regardless. This, in turn, could prompt them to be more patient and flexible in implementing the policy in ways meant to improve Russian perceptions of the sincerity of the U.S. approach. These dynamics were present in several historical case studies where the less-hardline approaches nonetheless remained limited in their success and duration, so we should not expect these political calculations to overcome other factors that could undermine these approaches. But anticipating them might help explain why and how a future less-hardline approach could still achieve realistic limited gains.

Factors That Could Affect Russian Response to a Less-Hardline U.S. Approach

We also identified several findings across our case studies that have clear implications for how Russia is likely to respond to a less-hardline approach by the United States in the future. In particular, we highlight the circumstances under which a favorable Russian response to such a U.S. approach might be more likely.

Russia Might Be More Willing to Reciprocate Offers of Negotiation by the United States During Periods When It Believes That International Trends Are Moving Against It

Less-hardline approaches by the stronger state can lead to substantive negotiations and related agreements only if they are reciprocated by the weaker state. However, there is no guarantee that a weaker state will be willing to engage with a less-hardline approach pursued by a stronger state, particularly if the weaker state believes that it is benefiting from the status quo. Even in the examples we considered—when less-hardline approaches by the stronger state ultimately did lead to substantive negotiations—we still found periods in which weaker states sometimes rebuffed less-hardline approaches. In two of our case studies, weaker states initially chose not to reciprocate accommodation when they felt events were moving to their advantage. At the end of the 19th century, St. Petersburg did not pursue London's offer of negotiations over Central Asia because Russia believed that it had a relative advantage in the region—particularly in Persia—while Britain was weakened and distracted by the Boer War. In the mid-1960s the Soviets were hesitant to engage in arms limitations talks until they secured a rough strategic parity with the United States.

In both those case studies, however, the weaker state ultimately shifted its position when it faced a higher priority threat or the perceived costs and risks of the status quo were high or growing. For the Russian Empire, it took the costly and humiliating loss of the war with Japan in 1905 and instability at home for it to accept British offers to negotiate over disputes in Central Asia. For the Soviet Union, heightened tensions with China and mounting economic concerns contributed to the decision to engage more actively in negotiations with the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Our other two case studies similarly illustrate how feared or escalating costs can incentivize weaker states to respond favorably to offers of negotiation by the stronger state. In 1945, a war-weary Soviet Union engaged in negotiations over the future of Europe because it perceived an opportunity to achieve security guarantees and because it feared a high risk of return to conflict in Europe if the wartime allies did not work together to ensure Germany could not regain the ability to threaten the Soviet Union or its neighbors again. Prior to the 2009 reset, Russia perceived costs and risks from U.S. hardline policies related to NATO's role in its immediate periphery, particularly the push for MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia, and the Bush administration's broader decision to shut down bilateral engagement following the war in Georgia. So, when the Obama administration ended these particular hardline policies, Moscow quickly reciprocated U.S. offers of greater engagement, even though some core Russian security concerns were not on the table.

Although the outcome of the 2022 Ukraine war is uncertain at the time of this writing, the conflict has already imposed dramatic costs on Russia that may continue to reduce the country's military and economic capabilities for some time. Should these costs continue to be felt in Russia in subsequent years, they could help create incentives for Russia to accept any less-hardline approaches offered by the United States. The attractiveness of these incentives might be mitigated by the fact that the United States and its allies are imposing many

of the costs that Russia is experiencing (through economic sanctions and military support to Ukraine). These efforts—and the Russian invasion of Ukraine that prompted them—have sharply increased hostility in the U.S.-Russia relationship and could affect Russian willingness to offer any reciprocal concessions. U.S. policymakers considering the pursuit of less-hardline approaches toward Russia should be aware that both incentives may be operating simultaneously in the years to come.

The Combination of Antagonistic U.S.-China Relations and Close Russia-China Relations Will Decrease Russian Willingness to Make Concessions in Negotiations with the United States

As discussed in Chapter One, U.S. analysts have floated the possibility of pursuing less-hardline approaches toward Russia as a means of splitting Russia from China. However, the hardening of U.S.-China tensions is likely to reduce Moscow's incentive to respond favorably to less-hardline approaches by the United States, particularly those that are limited in nature. During *détente*, it was Soviet anxiety about the emerging rapprochement between the United States and China (coming shortly after the Sino-Soviet split) that encouraged Moscow to pursue closer relations with Washington for fear of being sidelined or facilitating a clear U.S.-China axis opposing its interests. Similarly, in the early 1900s, Russia's concern about Britain's alliance with Japan and rapprochement with France made St. Petersburg more concerned about becoming isolated and increased its willingness to negotiate with London.

The arrangement of the U.S.-Russia-China triangle is roughly the opposite of what it was during *détente*, however, and it has likely been hardened by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. With little apparent prospect for serious U.S.-China accommodation and increasingly close Russian-Chinese alignment on a variety of issues, Russia has few if any fears that China might abandon it in favor of greater engagement with the United States and its allies. Without this strategic pressure, Russia can afford to be more judicious in responding to less-hardline approaches from the United States. As a result, the Russian "alternative" to greater accommodation with the United States is comparatively strong: a close and growing partnership with China.

The absence of Russian concern about Chinese abandonment does not preclude Russian acceptance of less-hardline approaches from the United States. But it does remove a potential incentive that has motivated weaker states to reciprocate in the past, and it could mean that the United States has to make a comparatively better offer to Russia in such negotiations to prompt a favorable response. If the United States wishes to pursue a more cooperative relationship with Russia, whether on that relationship's own merits or to increase the distance between Moscow and Beijing, Washington will not have the same systemic pressures working in its favor as it did during *détente*.

Recommendations

U.S. goals in its relationship with Russia are in flux and could change over time. Therefore, we make recommendations about how U.S. policymakers should think about less-hardline approaches depending on their objectives. We also make recommendations for future research.

If the United States Wishes to Adopt a Less-Hardline Approach to Russia as a Means of Stabilizing the Relationship, Then It May Need to Engage in Negotiations over Core Russian Security Concerns, Including the Security Order in Europe

The United States has often sought greater stability in its relationship with Russia and been willing to negotiate and make compromises to achieve it in such areas as arms control. However, other sources of instability in the relationship, especially the European security order, have often been left off the table. In our historical case studies, the source of future conflict often remained in areas like this, where rivals had not resolved or even attempted to address their differences. When the stronger and weaker states did address core issues, there were fewer issues over which the relationship could deteriorate. These experiences suggest that a less-hardline approach that addresses core security concerns is more likely to stabilize relations than one that touches only on secondary areas of dispute or matters of shared interest to both sides. In the context of the U.S.-Russia relationship, this would likely mean a less-hardline approach that includes a U.S. willingness to negotiate and compromise on such issues as missile defense and the regional order in Europe and Eurasia.

Adopting this type of less-hardline approach would come with costs. There has long been resistance from the U.S. Congress to any concessions made to Moscow that might limit U.S. missile defense capabilities. Moreover, NATO allies, particularly those in Eastern and Central Europe, would strongly resist any policies that suggested a weakening of NATO principles, such as the “open door” to potential new members—especially in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. This could, in turn, threaten alliance cohesion.

In the past, the United States assessed that such costs were too high and therefore either sought to stabilize the U.S.-Russia relationship in other ways or accepted a less-stable relationship as the price of achieving other U.S. goals. If the United States hopes to use a less-hardline approach to stabilize its relationship with Russia in the future, however, and if it has changed course to prioritize this stability over other goals, it will likely need to broaden the scope of issues beyond the highly limited negotiations that took place during the 2009 reset to talks that address more-fundamental conflicts of interest.

If the United States Adopts a Limited Less-Hardline Approach to Achieve Narrower Goals, then It Should Remain Alert That the Relationship Will Likely Deteriorate over the Unresolved Issues

The United States could pursue a limited less-hardline approach to Russia that does not address Russia's core concerns if the goal is to achieve narrower aims rather than a more general stabilization of the relationship. Such an approach might produce some successes. But history suggests that the source of future conflict often remains in areas where rivals have not resolved or even attempted to address their differences. If the United States adopts a limited approach, U.S. policymakers should be prepared for future deterioration of—and perhaps crises in—the U.S.-Russia relationship.

The Best Timing for U.S. Outreach to Russia May Be During a More Constructive Period in U.S.-China Relations or When There Are Tensions in the Sino-Russian Relationship

Russia's relationships with China and the United States, while substantively revolving around very different issues, are not entirely divorced from one another. In past periods of tension with China, such as in the 1970s, Moscow has sought more-constructive relations with the United States and NATO as a hedge against the possibility of facing off against coordinated great power rivals. Conversely, the recent nadir in U.S.-Russia relations has been accompanied by the closest China-Russia relations in recent memory, as Russia has set aside persistent concerns regarding China's growing power and influence on its borders.

The high level of tension between the United States and China, which appears to be hardening into a more durable antagonism on both sides, greatly reduces any concerns that Russia might have about any prospective U.S.-China entente that would leave Russia isolated on the global stage. Of course, Russia retains strong interests in negotiating with the United States to address its core security concerns, but it can increasingly approach these negotiations with greater confidence in its relationship with China and therefore a reduced willingness to compromise. If U.S.-China relations were more constructive, Russia might feel greater insecurity regarding its global standing and therefore approach negotiations with Washington from a more constructive perspective.

As Policymakers Evaluate Less-Hardline Approaches, They Should Consider the Entire Picture, Including the Effects of Any Hardline Policies That They Sustain Simultaneously

Critics often point to any aggression by a rival that follows a less-hardline approach as evidence of the policy's failure. However, these critiques often fail to consider the broader set of factors that might have shaped the rival's motivations for aggression. For example, critics of détente pointed to continued Soviet support to communist groups in the global south, blaming cooperative elements of U.S. policy for such outcomes. But these critiques ignored

that (1) this was a continuation of Soviet policy prior to détente rather than an escalation, and (2) the hardline elements of other U.S. policies, including continued U.S. support for anti-communist forces in the global south, also affected Soviet behavior. Moreover, such criticisms discounted the importance of factors beyond U.S. control—including political turmoil in recipient countries and competition within the communist camp—that created opportunities and incentives for Soviet intervention. Similarly, critics of the reset argued that it emboldened Russia to annex Crimea in 2014. But such analyses generally ignored the continued efforts by the United States and its allies to contest the geopolitical orientation of countries on Russia’s periphery, particularly Ukraine and Georgia. Furthermore, they neglect to account for the impact of the dramatic shift in Ukraine’s domestic politics, when a relatively Russia-friendly leadership was displaced by an anti-Russian (or at least extremely pro-Western) group essentially overnight during the Maidan Revolution. The Russian operation in Crimea began days after the change of power in Kyiv, and years after the reset in U.S.-Russia relations had already deteriorated.

Evaluating the effects of less-hardline approaches needs to include an accounting of the full set of U.S. policies that a rival experiences, as well as other factors, such as domestic politics and relations with other countries. Focusing only on correlations between cooperative gestures and undesirable behavior by U.S. rivals can lead to unfounded assessments about the costs and benefits that should be expected from less-hardline options.

Analysts Should Generate and Compare Options for Less-Hardline Approaches

As already noted, China’s rise and U.S. domestic challenges mean that the United States could consider less-hardline approaches toward Russia in the future. After the war in Ukraine ends, U.S. analysts should consider which specific approaches would be viable given U.S. and Russian interests, the preferences and behavior of the countries directly affected by U.S.-Russia competition (e.g., Ukraine), U.S. alliance dynamics, and other factors. It would be useful for analysts to generate options for U.S. policymakers to weigh as well as to have these options available should an opportunity to employ a less-hardline approach emerge.

We have focused in this report on the trade-offs associated with less-hardline approaches within the U.S.-Russia relationship. But U.S. policy toward Russia will also have effects—whether positive or negative—on global issues and other U.S. relationships. These would certainly include U.S. alliance and partner relationships in Europe, as well as U.S. strategy and options regarding China. Research on specific U.S. options should consider this broader set of trade-offs.

Scholars Should Determine Whether There Are Conditions Under Which Less-Hardline Approaches Embolden Rivals

A belief that conciliatory approaches to rivals emboldens them is widely held in the United States. Our research suggests that emboldenment is unlikely—at least, in the type of strategic

environment in which a limited U.S. accommodation of Russia would take place. However, there might be other conditions or larger concessions that would make a rival more demanding or aggressive. Identifying these conditions would be helpful for informing not just the debate over U.S. strategy toward Russia but also toward other U.S. rivals.

Final Thoughts

In the midst of so much violence and destruction stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the prospect for changes in U.S. policy toward Russia in the years ahead appears remote. But a variety of domestic challenges and China's continued rise will likely place pressure on the United States to prioritize its defense spending and foreign policy attention in the years to come. Our findings offer insights into potential trade-offs that the United States would face if, at some future date after the current war, it were to seek to reduce tensions with Russia to free up resources for Asia and domestic priorities.

Our examination of the effects of less-hardline approaches in situations with strategic similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship in 2021 ultimately found that less-hardline approaches present the opportunity for limited gains. Gains from both tacit and formal agreements, perhaps surprisingly, often proved enduring even when the relationship between rivals deteriorated in other areas. This does not mean that the benefits are always present—we describe examples in which the weaker state initially declined to negotiate, and some areas of cooperation can and have deteriorated. At the same time, however, the costs and risks of taking a chance on making such gains appeared to be limited, at least in terms of the bilateral relationship between the two powers when undertaken in a peacetime context. There are always costs to less-hardline approaches, including the issues on which a state concedes and, in some cases, negative reactions from domestic groups and allies that prefer a more-hardline approach. Still, we found no evidence of one of the most commonly cited risks—making a rival more demanding or aggressive—in our four case studies of peacetime less-hardline approaches that share many features of the prewar U.S.-Russia relationship.

Abbreviations

9/11	September 11, 2001
ABM	antiballistic missile
BMD	ballistic missile defense
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
MAP	membership action plan
MIRV	multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Whenever and however Russia's invasion of Ukraine ultimately ends, the U.S.-Russia relationship is likely to remain hostile in its aftermath. Over the long term, however, the United States will have incentives to reduce the risks and costs of its relationship with Russia in order to focus on other challenges, such as China. Future U.S. policymakers might therefore wish to again consider a limited less-hardline approach toward Russia. Supporters of such approaches contend that limited less-hardline approaches can reduce an adversary's insecurity, moderate its behavior, and reduce the costs and risks associated with competition between the two countries. Critics are reluctant to make concessions to U.S. rivals and worry that softening the U.S. stance could embolden a rival to become more demanding and aggressive.

The authors used four historical case studies of limited less-hardline approaches with strategic similarities to the U.S.-Russia relationship before the war in Ukraine to evaluate these competing claims. These cases were (1) negotiations between Britain and Russia over Central Asia from 1899 to 1914 (2) U.S.-Soviet negotiations on the post-World War II order from 1945 to 1946, (3) the U.S.-Soviet détente from 1969 to 1975, and (4) the U.S.-Russia reset from 2009–2013.

The authors found that such approaches have led to durable but narrow gains without emboldening the rival to be more demanding or aggressive. These limited policies also have limited effects. They only reduce a rival's threat perceptions modestly and do not prevent future deterioration of the relationship over outstanding conflicts of interest.

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