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Richard Nixon, Détente, and the Conservative Movement, 1969-1974

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

By

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B.A., Defiance College, 2004

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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

12/13/06

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Eric Gilliland ENTITLED Richard Nixon, Détente, and the Conservative Movement, 1969-1974 BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Gilliland, Eric Patrick. M.A., Department of History, Wright State University, 2006.
Richard Nixon, Détente, and the Conservative Movement.

This work examines the relationship between President Richard Nixon and the American conservative movement (1969-1974). Nixon's anti-communist persona proved pivotal in winning the 1968 Republican Party's and winning over the conservative base. The foreign policies orchestrated by Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, however, which sought to reduce tensions with China and the Soviet Union, infuriated the conservatives. In 1971-72, they suspended their support of the administration and even drafted their own candidate, the Ohio congressman John Ashbrook, to challenge Nixon in the 1972 primary campaign. Although the Ashbrook campaign had a minimal impact, it set a precedent for conservative opposition to détente in the 1970s and 1980s. The Watergate scandal that cut Nixon's second term short also revealed the strained relationship with the right, which decided to withdraw support of Nixon. The conservative reaction to détente also led to a convergence with neoconservatives, an alliance of anti-communist liberals, who united behind Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

The thesis argues that Nixon and the conservative developed fundamentally different approaches to diplomacy. Although both regarded communism as the gravest threat America ever faced, they disagreed on the proper means to deal with the threat. Nixon realist outlook on world affairs allowed the United States to make substantial

progress in relations with China and the Soviet Union, on the belief that all sides had mutual interests. Conservatives saw communism as a monolithic force intent on curbing America's influence in the world made them favor a more aggressive foreign policy. The work concludes that anti-communism remained a major force in American politics in the post-Vietnam era, largely in response to détente, which is evident in the strong conservative reaction to the policy.

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I – INTRODUCTION

Richard Nixon's (1913-1994) relationship with the postwar American conservative movement directly shaped the domestic foreign policy debate in the 1970s. The relationship merits far more than a mere footnote to recent American history since it changed the course of its politics in the final quarter of the 20th century. Americans of all political persuasions agreed upon the need to confront the Soviet Union and the spread of communism, but often disagreed on the proper means to deal with the threat. This internal debate elevated to an intense level during the Nixon presidency (1969-1974). Détente, the term given to the approach to world affairs formulated by Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger (1923-), that aimed to reduce cold war tensions, alienated the administration from conservatives. The main argument of this thesis is that détente drove the conservatives away from Nixon and led to a resurgence of anti-communism in the 1970s that manifested itself in the convergence of the conservative and neoconservative movements.

Almost every aspect of the Nixon administration has undergone scrutiny from journalists and historians. Many of these accounts, however, barely mention or completely ignore Nixon's troubled relationship with the conservative movement. The main reason for this consistent omission is that the differences seemed trivial. The disagreements, however, are relevant to the era. Détente triggered a fierce debate that changed the course of American foreign policy. The words and actions of conservative leaders, and their decision to challenge Nixon in 1972, and their rejection of the

administration during Watergate, all attested to their dissatisfaction. Nixon and détente led to a new political alignment in American politics.¹

This thesis poses and offer answers to the following questions: How did Nixon's relationship with the conservative movement evolve in the 1960s and 1970s? Why did the two sides drift apart in the first term and seperate in the second term? What did the term détente mean to Nixon, and how did his definition differ from that of the conservative movement? The key to answering those questions is in the foreign policy of Nixon and Kissinger. Their shared belief in a realistic approach to international relations to build a balance of power perplexed the conservatives who distrusted any accord with communist nations. Détente brought anti-communism back to the forefront of American politics in the post-Vietnam era.

The second chapter, "Nixon and an Age of Transition: From the Sixties to the Seventies," examines the era and the complex relationship between Nixon and the conservative movement. Many Americans began to vote conservatively in response to the counterculture. While the counterculture challenged fundamental American values in foreign policy and civil rights, conservatives held fast to their anti-communism. The Vietnam War (1964-1973) did much to destroy the bipartisan consensus of foreign policy and divided the country along generational lines. Nixon's 1968 election and the rise of conservative politics were in direct reaction to the counterculture.

¹Stephen E. Ambrose, Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), Nixon: The Ruin and Recovery of a Politician, 1973-1990 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); John Robert Greene, The Limits of Power: The Nixon and Ford administrations (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), Joan Hoff, Nixon Reconsidered (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Richard Reeves, President Nixon: Alone in the White House (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Melvin Small, The Presidency of Richard Nixon (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999).

The third chapter, “Nixon, Kissinger, and the Quest for a New Balance of Power,” is an appraisal of the strategy behind détente, and the important breakthroughs it achieved during Nixon’s first term. Nixon and Kissinger had two foreign policy objectives: The short term objective was to end the Vietnam War and, on a much grander scale, forge a new global balance of power. A bipolar world, one with two superpowers, had guided the thinking of American policymakers since the onset of the cold war. By the 1970s, however, Nixon and Kissinger believed the world had become multipolar, with more than two dominant superpowers. Nixon believed that Europe, Japan, and China all had then achieved great power status. While the Nixon administration never broke entirely with the cold war framework, they did begin the process.²

The administration’s endeavor to connect détente with ending Vietnam met with mixed results. Nixon and Kissinger were both determined to extend the conflict to save America’s credibility. Linkage, the method applied by the administration to end the war, involved offering rewards and punishments to North Vietnam’s main benefactors, China and the Soviet Union. Linkage had little success in settling the Vietnam War, but did change the dynamics of cold war diplomacy. Despite their failure to achieve a lasting settlement in Vietnam, the opening of relations with China and signing of SALT I with the Soviet Union served the nation well. Ironically, Nixon’s momentous achievements in great power diplomacy estranged him from the Republican Party’s conservative base.

² Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley, Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938 (New York: Penguin, 1997); H.W. Brands, The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War (London: Oxford University Press, 1993); John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War. (London: Oxford University Press, 1982,2005); John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War: A New History (New York: Penguin, 2005); Walter Lefeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002). The above works are all general histories of the Cold War that offer differing viewpoints on Nixon and détente.

The fourth chapter, “Détente and the Conservative Movement,” establishes the historical framework of the conservative movement’s opposition to détente.

Conservative opposition to the containment policies adopted by the United States dated back to the start of the cold war. They regarded the policy as defensive and inadequate in defeating communism. National Review, the leading conservative journal, routinely railed against the government’s attempts to stop communism. Many examples attest to this, such as their condemnation of President Eisenhower’s decision not to aid the 1956 Hungarian uprising. James Burnham (1905-1987), the leading conservative foreign policy intellectual, always advocated the destruction of communism. Conservatives in the Nixon era attacked détente from the standpoint of Burnham’s arguments, whose influence persisted throughout the cold war.

In 1969, the right wing of the Republican Party decided to support Nixon based on his past anti-communist reputation. Détente left them disappointed. It incited some of them to withdraw their support from Nixon. While they gave lukewarm support to Nixon’s policy of gradual withdraw from Vietnam, they had reservations with détente. Nixon’s February 1972 visit to China, which ended 23 years of silence between both nations, angered the right. They recognized Taiwan, the base of the Chinese nationalists, as the legitimate Chinese government. In regards to the Soviet Union, arch nemesis of the anti-communists, they strongly believed that America’s survival rested on its military superiority over the Soviets. The SALT I agreements, which recognized Soviet nuclear parity with the United States, delivered another blow to the right. While many aspects of Nixon’s domestic program also bothered them, détente remained the major point of contention. The combined effect of these developments turned them against Nixon.

John Ashbrook (1928-1982), a congressional representative from Ohio, articulated a devastating critique of détente that foreshadowed the criticisms that emerged later in the decade. Ashbrook campaigned against Nixon for the 1972 Republican nomination on the basis that the administration had deserted conservative principles. While the campaign had a minimal impact on the 1972 Nixon reelection campaign, it did set the foundation for an anti-détente coalition, which gained influence later in the decade. Détente damaged Nixon's relationship with conservatives, and in a larger sense, it signifies the perseverance of anti-communism in 1970s America, and the centrality of the cold war to all conservatives.

The last chapter, "A Growing Alliance against Détente," explains the significant effect détente had on the conservative political alignment. The Watergate scandal encompassed the Nixon administration also accelerated the end of détente. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson (1912-1983) of Washington, attacked détente on moralistic grounds, specifically its indifference to human rights issues. Jackson represented the views of the emerging neoconservative movement. They developed an alternative conception of conservatism, which in their view better suited the modern world. Neoconservatives believed that conservative ideas must evolve with the growth of democracy. Like the traditional right, however, anti-communism defined their ideology. In the mid 1970s, they began to converge with the conservative movement.

Richard Nixon, who played the central role in postwar American politics, left a tragic legacy of corruption that forced him to resign the office in disgrace. In diplomacy, however, Nixon left another legacy of realism and moderation. Nixon took a major political risk in opening relations with China, as well as beginning the process of arms

control with the Soviets. Détente hurt Nixon's credibility in the conservative ranks.

Nixon saw the necessity of engaging with the communist world to reach areas of mutual agreement, while the right viewed it as appeasement.

Richard Nixon's relationship to the conservative movement is integral to understanding postwar American politics. The Vietnam War broke the bipartisan foreign policy consensus, and left the Nixon administration in a highly charged political environment. The realist philosophy of détente, as designed by Nixon and Kissinger, gradually moved the conservatives away from the administration. In time, they joined forces with neoconservatives, based on their shared anti-communism. This convergence was in response to détente, a pivotal development of the Nixon years.

II – NIXON AND AN AGE OF TRANSITION: FROM THE SIXTIES TO THE SEVENTIES

Richard Nixon was President of the United States (1969-1974) in a time of transition in American society on many levels. Politically, the American electorate shifted to the Republican Party. On the global front, the Vietnam War (1964-1973) sharply divided the country and raised fundamental questions about its foreign policy. At the same time, the Soviet Union had achieved military parity with the United States in the nuclear arms race. These changes and many other cultural shifts altered the national psyche: the optimism of the early 1960s gave way to a new age of cynicism and pessimism in the 1970s that is evident in the popular films and music of the period. Nixon's victory in the 1968 election signified a triumph for all conservatives who, despite their differences, decided to support him that year. Pragmatic considerations and the charged atmosphere of 1968 brought Nixon and the right together, but the diplomacy of his administration later sparked divisions in the party that persisted throughout the seventies.

Tragic events in 1968 put the nation in a state of chaos not seen since the Civil War. In January after North Vietnam launched the Tet offensive against American forces, opposition to the war at home grew. An end to the conflict seemed a remote possibility, and even the pro war Wall Street Journal editorialized: "everyone had better be prepared for the bitter taste of a defeat beyond America's power to prevent."¹ President Lyndon Johnson (1908-1973), due to poor health and a perceptions that he had lied about the war's progress, announced on March 31 his decision not to seek reelection,

¹Myron A. Marty. Daily Life in the United States, 1960-1990 Decades of Discord (Westport: Greenwood, 1997), 109.

which left a power vacuum in the Democratic Party.

Assassinations and riots in 1968 intensified the climate of crisis. The shooting of Martin Luther King (1929-1968), the leader and conscience of the Civil Rights Movement, destroyed hopes of racial unity. Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968), the Democratic Party's most popular and charismatic candidate for president, emerged as a voice of reconciliation to heal the national divisions. On June 6, after winning the California Primary, an assassin killed Kennedy. In August, the violence continued at the Democratic convention in Chicago that nominated Vice President Hubert Humphrey (1911-1978), amidst rioting outside the convention hall, due to Humphrey's pro war position on Vietnam. These events traumatized the American public and contributed to the backlash that benefited the candidacy of Richard Nixon.²

Nixon took advantage of the anger and fear Americans had toward the cultural changes of the sixties. Later named the silent majority, this large constituency closed ranks behind Nixon. To them, the anti-war protestors were un-American and cowardly, afraid to serve their country as their parents had done a generation before. The new assertiveness and demand for rights that came from women, minorities, and the poor also distressed Middle America. Nixon used these issues to draw new groups into the Republican Party, appealing to blue collar workers in the North and middle class whites in the South who had traditionally voted for Democrats. George Wallace (1919-1998), the American Independent Party candidate, also used backlash to win votes, but failed to win Northern states. Nixon envisioned a new conservative majority to end the

²Jules Witcover, The Year the Dream Died: Revisiting 1968 in America (New York: Time Warner, 1997), xii.

Democratic Party's dominance and to challenge the counterculture.³

The counterculture of the 1960s challenged the American way of life. In every American institution, young people saw hypocrisy and corruption. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a student political movement, looked with dismay at the state of America in the 1960s, especially the threat of nuclear war. The SDS envisioned an America that protected the liberties of all its citizens in a participatory democracy as outlined in their Port Huron Statement (1962). Popular music of the era gave expression to the new attitude of the youth, most notably, the Beatles, whose music offered an upbeat message of love, peace, and understanding. The Woodstock Music Festival of 15-17 August 1969, a mass gathering of young people, marked the high point of the counterculture.⁴

Popular perceptions of the 1970s, evident in historical surveys of the era, argue that the Nixon years killed the optimism of the sixties and inaugurated a new age of doubt and cynicism. As Nixon withdrew American troops and ended the draft, the counterculture lost its appeal and young people turned away from politics. The twenty-sixth amendment to the constitution, ratified in 1971, lowered the legal voting age from 21 to 18, but failed to mobilize the youth vote. In the 1960s, the counterculture popularized the use of recreational drugs as a means to achieve a higher state of consciousness. By the 1970's, however, drugs revealed their dark side, when rock icons of the era – Janis Joplin (1943-1970), Jim Morrison (1943-1971), and Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970) – all died of drug overdoses. The seventies, popularly labeled as the Me Decade, indicated a decadent, self-indulgent culture, in contrast to the message of unity

³Marty, *Decades of Discord*, 95-97.

⁴Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 14-18.

of the sixties. Even the Beatles disbanded and pursued their own solo careers. Rock music in the 1970s - heavy metal and later punk rock - moved in a much darker direction. These trends reflected the general distrust to anyone in a powerful position.⁵

Most of the memorable historical events of the 1970s reflected the sense of decline. The Watergate scandal, the fall of South Vietnam, the energy crisis, and the Iranian hostage crisis at the end of the decade, created a cultural mood of pessimism. In popular films, alienation and corruption were the major themes. *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974) traced the rise and fall of an Italian-American family's underworld empire that mirrored the corruption of the Nixon administration.⁶

Themes of decline affected all aspects of the politics and culture. Nixon's foreign policy, the one area where even his harshest critics gave him some credit, symbolized to conservatives a retreat before global communism. Like the counterculture, whose members lamented the erosion of their movement in the 1970s, the right feared that America lacked the will to continue the fight against communism. If the counterculture and conservative Republicans had anything in common, it was that both viewed Nixon as an unprincipled leader who left the nation in a sorry state.

Richard Nixon's political career coincided with America's emergence as a superpower after the Second World War (1939-1945). The Cold War (1945-1991) with the Soviet Union that dominated American history in the postwar era, defined Nixon's long political career that spanned five decades. As a young congressional representative and senator from California (1946-1952), Nixon built a reputation as an anti-communist who championed traditional American values. In the 1952 campaign, Dwight

⁵Schulman, *The Seventies*, xii.

⁶Mark Feeney, *Nixon at the Movies: A Book About Belief* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 299-300.

Eisenhower selected Nixon as his running mate; Nixon then served two terms as Vice President. Nixon identified himself as “practical liberal” on most issues, which did not always endear him to the party’s conservative wing. On foreign policy, Nixon supported the Marshall Plan (1948) and the NATO alliance (1949), key components of the Truman administration’s containment policy. These positions set Nixon apart from the strong isolationist’s wing of the party led by Robert Taft (1889-1953).⁷

In Six Crises, Nixon’s memoir of the Vice Presidency, the Cold War played a central role. The 24 July 1959 “Kitchen Debate” with the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971), forever enshrined Nixon as a cold warrior. An entire chapter in Six Crises described the impromptu debate with the Soviet ruler. Nixon relished the honor of debating the leader of the Soviet Union with the whole world watching: “My encounter with Khrushchev was one of the major personal crises of my life. But, far more important, it was a fascinating case study of the continuing crisis of our time - a crisis deliberately maintained by World Communism.” The confrontation with Khrushchev helped Nixon win the 1960 Republican nomination, only to lose to another anticommunist, John F. Kennedy (1917-1963).⁸

Nixon’s loss in the 1960 election to Kennedy changed the course of his career. In 1962, many wrote Nixon’s political obituary after he lost the California gubernatorial race. After the latter defeat, Nixon left public life. Next followed Nixon’s wilderness period, the years when he returned to private life at a Manhattan law firm and planned his political comeback. Nixon stayed in the background of Republican Party politics. All Republicans sought Nixon’s endorsement and he always remained in the running for

⁷Melvin Small, The Presidency of Richard Nixon (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 8-9.

⁸Richard Nixon, Six Crises (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), 287.

president.⁹

In his years out of office, Nixon closely followed international events. The Kennedy administration received generous support from Nixon in their conduct of the cold war. In April 1961, after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, when the CIA trained Cuban exiles to overthrow Cuban leader Fidel Castro, Nixon defended Kennedy's decision to approve the invasion. Nixon also agreed with Kennedy's decision to increase American troop commitments in South Vietnam. As the war escalated, Nixon never wavered from his hawkish position.¹⁰

Sino-American relations especially interested Nixon. The People's Republic of China, long considered an enemy to the United States, broke with the Soviet Union. In 1964, Nixon still opposed any recognition of the People's Republic. When Senator William Fulbright, Democrat from Arkansas, called for a reassessment of China policy in 1964, Nixon denounced such a move as "disastrous to the cause of freedom," at a press conference. In the mid sixties, nothing suggests that Nixon changed his attitude concerning China.¹¹

The 1964 campaign marked a watershed for American conservatives. As the election loomed, Nixon decided not to run again and supported Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater (1909-1998). Goldwater represented the right wing of the Republican Party. In 1962 Goldwater published The Conscience of a Conservative, a short work that enunciated conservative principles in concise, clear language. Goldwater called for an aggressive foreign policy designed to combat the expansion of communism everywhere

⁹Stephen Ambrose, Nixon Volume. II: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 13.

¹⁰Ibid, 43-45.

¹¹Ibid, 44.

in the world. The book transformed the stereotypical image of conservatives from greedy country club members into modern day crusaders against the evils of communism. Goldwater and the enthusiasm of his supporters brought a renewed vigor to American conservatism.¹²

Goldwater's nomination put the conservative movement at the forefront of Republican Party politics. The message in Goldwater's acceptance speech alienated the party's moderates and troubled the Democrats. After Nixon introduced him at the convention, Goldwater went on to deliver a tirade against the American left that alienated many in the party, including Nixon. The memorable quotation from the speech, "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice; Moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue," did little to heal party rifts. Nixon was bitter in his memoir: "To my dismay, Goldwater preceded to deliver a strident, divisive speech. . . . I felt physically sick as I sat there on the platform. Not only did Goldwater fail to close the rifts in the party . . . he opened new wounds and rubbed salt in them."¹³ Nixon argued that Goldwater distorted party's image as "reactionary," "racist," and "reckless."¹⁴ Nevertheless, Nixon remained loyal to the party and campaigned for Goldwater. Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory over Goldwater came as no surprise to Nixon, who realized the party's future rested with the moderates. Nixon began to prepare for the 1968 campaign.

The first indication of Nixon's changed thinking towards China appeared in an October 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Asia After Vietnam." In light of later events, the article indicated a change his views toward China. The article expressed the need for

¹²Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2001), 61-68.

¹³Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1978), 260.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 268.

America to disengage from Asian conflicts. Whether the United States liked it or not, it had to accept the communist regime as the legitimate government of China. Nixon urged policymakers to build an alliance on the non-communist nations of Asia to counter Chinese imperialism. The Asian nations had to bear the responsibility of containing China. Nixon hinted at the direction of his thinking: "Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China outside the family of nations . . . The world cannot be safe until China changes . . . Thus our aim should be to induce change."¹⁵ The goal of American foreign policy toward China was twofold: to give China an incentive to restrain its aggressive diplomacy and to focus on its own problems.

The article established Nixon as a serious foreign policy analyst. In preparation for the 1968 campaign, Nixon made several trips abroad and met with world leaders to consult them on regional issues. As a realist, Nixon saw the potential benefits of a new relationship with China as a way to pressure the Soviets on many issues, and to expand trade between both nations. Nixon was not the first to suggest a new China policy, but the first influential Republican to make the recommendation. Hardliner conservatives, many with ties to the China lobby, remained committed to the legitimacy of Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists government in Taiwan. Nixon, a long time supporter of Taiwan, realized that any change in policy left the possibility of a conservative revolt.¹⁶

In the first months of 1968, Nixon reevaluated his stance on the Vietnam War. Before the 1968 campaign, Nixon had supported the American effort in Vietnam, and even at one point compared the conflict to the struggle to end slavery in the Nineteenth century. Even when public support for the war evaporated, Nixon never faltered from his

¹⁵Richard Nixon, "Asia After Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967, 121-122.

¹⁶Ambrose, *Triumph of a Politician*, 115-117.

hawkish position, but questioned the Johnson administration's war strategy. In the aftermath of the Tet offensive, Nixon ruled out the possibility of a decisive American victory in Vietnam. The war objective suddenly shifted, from Nixon's vantage point, from one of victory to ending the war with honor.¹⁷

In 1968, the year of assassinations, the Republican Party was a divided institution. As James Reichley suggested, four factions competed for power in the party. The four factions included the stalwarts, fundamentalists, moderates, and progressives. In 1964 moderates and progressives opposed the nomination of Goldwater, but in 1968 decided to support Nixon. Where did these factions stand on the issues? Where did they disagree? Why did they decide to place the party's future with Nixon?

Stalwarts typified the image most had of the Republican Party. Their ranks consisted of businessmen, white collar workers, and homemakers from the Midwest. They favored traditional laissez faire economics and less government regulation. Stalwarts were isolationist on foreign relations in the tradition of the Ohio statesman Robert Taft. By the 1960s, however, the cold war led them away from doctrinal isolationism. The stalwarts formed the core of Nixon's constituency and the heart of the silent majority.¹⁸

The position of Nixon in the party is difficult to identify, but most contemporaries placed him in the moderate camp. Domestically, moderates supported limited reform and an efficient government. They saw cooperation between business and government as essential to maintaining a modern economy. Likewise, they favored policies designed to

¹⁷Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power (New York: Vintage, 1972), 76-77.

¹⁸James Reichley, Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981), 23-26.

expand trade overseas, including communist nations. Nixon wanted to open communist economies to American goods as a means to reduce tensions and help the world economy. Moderates looked with distaste at the growing number of conservative ideologues in the party, namely the Young Americans for Freedom and other pro-Goldwater groups. They were skeptical of Nixon, especially about his anti-communism, but still supported for his moderate views in other areas.¹⁹

Progressive Republicans held a minority status in the party. Unlike most conservatives, they supported an active federal government. Unlike liberals, they favored reform as a means to preserve the system, not to alter the system. They took a dovish position on the Vietnam War, and favored a moderate, cautious foreign policy, as opposed to the anti-communism of the far right. Nelson Rockefeller (1908-1979) led the Progressives, who in 1968 decided to support Nixon. Rockefeller respected Nixon as a moderate instead of the fanaticism of a Goldwater.²⁰

The fundamentalists were the most conservative wing of the party. They deplored the expansion of the federal government that began with the New Deal. On foreign policy, they believed in American Exceptionalism, and were hostile to the United Nations or any organization they perceived as a threat to American sovereignty. Anti-communism stood at the center of their ideology. To the fundamentalists, the USSR and other communist countries threatened the very existence of Western Civilization. They favored aggressive foreign policies designed to resist the spread of communism. After Barry Goldwater lost the 1964 election, they turned to California governor and former actor Ronald Reagan (1911-2004) as their national leader. As for Nixon, they respected

¹⁹Ibid, 28-31, 58.

²⁰Ibid, 31-34.

him for standing by Goldwater in 1964, but never trusted him. During Nixon's five and a half years in office, they constantly criticized his foreign and domestic policies.²¹

John Ashbrook (1928-1982), a conservative congressional representative from Ohio, who later challenged Nixon for the 1972 nomination, in 1968 worked to secure his nomination. An early leader in the conservative movement, Ashbrook took part in the formation of the Young Americans for Freedom, a group that organized conservatives on college campuses. The son of a Democratic congressman, Ashbrook won his congressional seat in 1960, as representative of Ohio's fifth district. A graduate of Harvard and the Ohio State Law School, he was publisher of a small town Ohio newspaper the Johnstown Independent. From 1962-1964 Ashbrook helped organize the Draft Goldwater movement, which secured financing for his campaign. Ashbrook summed up his personal philosophy with a simple slogan: "An American first, a conservative second, and lastly a Republican."²²

Ashbrook campaigned for Nixon in 1968 and helped swing the Ohio delegation to the Nixon camp. During the primary campaign, Ashbrook urged all Republicans to support Nixon or Reagan. If the party failed to unite behind one candidate, a liberal Rockefeller had a chance to win the nomination, whom the right despised. Rockefeller's refusal to support Goldwater in 1964 still embittered the right-wingers. Conservatives still considered Nixon "one of them," preferable to a liberal Republican. They accepted the fact that a conservative candidate stood no chance in a general election and that Nixon provided the best opportunity for a Republican victory and the conservative

²¹Ibid, 26-28.

²²Charles Moser, Promise and Hope: The Ashbrook Presidential Campaign of 1972 (Washington DC: Free Congress Foundation, 1985), 1-2.

movement.²³

Ideologically, Republican conservatives looked to California Governor Ronald Reagan. Why did they decide to support Nixon? William Rusher (1923-), a conservative political theorist and publisher of National Review, concluded that conservatives accepted Nixon as an anti-communist. They respected Nixon as a loyal soldier who campaigned for Goldwater in 1964 and many other conservative candidates in the past. Reagan showed promise for the future, but in 1968, he lacked experience. Nixon's wealth of experience and promise to put the country back on track convinced the right to support him. With the benefit of hindsight, Rusher remained bitter: "At a minimum the nation would have been spared Watergate and the resignation of a disgraced president . . . it is certainly arguable that Reagan might have brought about a far more satisfactory resolution to Vietnam than the disaster Nixon and Ford presided over in the wake of Watergate."²⁴ This statement reveals the animosity in the conservative movement toward Nixon, but fails to acknowledge the pragmatic considerations that made Nixon the best choice at that time.

Where did Nixon fit in this picture? From 1965-1967, Nixon campaigned for Republicans all over the country who aided his chances of acquiring the 1968 nomination. Many in 1968 owed favors to Nixon and that helped played a pivotal role in his nomination. When the convention convened at Miami in August, Nixon commanded most of the delegates from his successes in the primaries. Nixon's rhetoric in 1968 attempted to heal rifts in the party, as he toned down his previous anti-communism and

²³Donald Janson, "Strategy Shaped by Conservatives," New York Times, 16 February 1968.

²⁴William Rusher, Rise of the Right. (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 209-210, 216.

campaigns as a “man for all factions.”²⁵ On the controversial issue of Vietnam, Nixon walked a tightrope. Conservatives hoped for a settlement that ended the war on American terms. Nixon promised to end the conflict to assuage the doves, but only ‘peace with honor’ for the hawks.²⁶

Nixon ran a smart campaign that left no rifts in the party. Stalwarts, the base of Nixon’s support, liked his traditional image and the hope of restoring stability to American society. Moderates had doubts about Nixon’s foreign policy, especially on how Nixon planned to manage the Vietnam War and the Soviet Union. Progressive Republicans believed Nixon had the potential to be an effective reformer. The right wing Republicans expected Nixon to reverse the tide of the Cold War abroad and the “Great Society” at home.²⁷

Nixon gave the Republicans the best chance to regain the White House, since all factions shared some of his views. The events of 1968 - riots, war, assassinations, and racial unrest - called for a candidate who promised stability. Nixon’s campaign message, aimed at traditional Midwesterners and middle class Southern whites who were weary of the counterculture, resonated with them. This same constituency had also rejected Goldwater in 1964, a strong right wing candidate. Why the sudden shift? In 1968, a conservative message had more resonance with the American electorate in the chaotic atmosphere of that year. Goldwater’s blunt rhetoric in the 1964 campaign, and Democratic efforts to portray Goldwater as a warmonger bent on starting a third world war also accounted for his defeat. Nixon epitomized the values of the silent majority, hardworking, patriotic, and traditional. The two campaign themes of the Nixon campaign

²⁵Small, *Presidency of Nixon*, 23.

²⁶Ambrose, *Triumph of a Politician*, 168-169.

²⁷Reichley, *Age of Change*, 57-58.

- law and order at home and peace abroad - promised a new moderate course to American politics.²⁸

Richard Nixon's brand of conservatism differed in many ways from the conservatives. They favored a dismantling of most government programs and policies that freed individuals from government regulations. Nixon shared their concerns about big government, especially the bureaucracy, but hardly wanted to overhaul the entire system. The progressive direction of Nixon's thinking was evident in the appointment of Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003) as a close advisor on domestic policy in January 1969. Both wanted to reform the welfare system and streamline the federal bureaucracy. A student of history, Nixon looked to the Victorian era British statesman Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) as the model conservative reformer. Nixon's willingness to experiment and allow opposing views in his administration put a wall between him and the right. Their differences on domestic policy paled in comparison to conservative indignation at detente.²⁹

The conservative movement often refused to compromise on matters of principle. They tolerated Nixon, but did not admire him. Once elected, they felt, who knew what direction his administration would take? They realized one of their own had no chance, but saw Nixon as an acceptable substitute. This dilemma plagued the conservatives in the Nixon years. They wanted to voice their disagreements with the Nixon administration, but never offered any alternatives. Nixon threatened to destroy the entire

²⁸Small, Presidency of Nixon, 27.

²⁹Robert Mason, Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6-7; Small, Presidency of Nixon, 45.

movement with moderate conservatism, which put them in a difficult position.³⁰

Nixon's narrow victory over Democrat Hubert Humphrey gave the Republicans the White House, yet Democrats retained majorities in both Houses of Congress, 243-192 in the House of Representatives, and 58-42 in the Senate. In foreign and domestic policy, the administration faced countless problems. At home, divisions threatened to tear the nation apart. Abroad, Nixon wanted to restore coherence to American diplomacy, which eventually alienated the conservative movement from Nixon.³¹

³⁰Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time For Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5, 11-12.

³¹ Witcover, *Year the Dream Died*, 437. The popular vote for the 1968 election went as follows: Nixon, 43.4 %, Humphrey 42.7%, Wallace, 13.5%.

III - NIXON, KISSINGER, AND THE QUEST FOR A NEW BALANCE OF POWER, 1969-1972

Richard Nixon presided over an unusually fluid time in world politics. In short, the bipolar power structure of the postwar era, dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, had shifted to a multipolar world with several strong states. Western Europe, Japan, and China, all regions devastated by the Second World War, had revitalized their economies in the late Sixties. Although the United States remained the predominant world power, the Vietnam War had revealed the limits of its strength. Nixon and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger (1923-), applied a grand strategy, known as *détente*, to adjust America's foreign policy to the new multipolar system. Their response to any situation reflected their strategic goals. The major accomplishments of the Nixon administration: ending the Vietnam War, and the signing of SALT I the first major arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, and reestablishing a relationship with China were all momentous achievements. Nixon's failure, however, to convince anti-communists on the left and right of the merits of *détente* opened the administration to criticism.

Nixon entered the presidency with more knowledge on foreign affairs than previous presidents. In a statement before the election, Nixon made his priorities clear, "I've always thought this country could run itself domestically without a president. All you need is a competent cabinet to run the country at home. You need a president for foreign policy; no secretary of state is really important; the president makes foreign

policy.”¹ That was true only to an extent: Nixon took an interest in all matters of domestic policy, especially economic policy. Foreign policy, however, commanded most of his attention.² Global developments in the late 1960s presented challenges to any new American president, regardless of their interests in the world.

Henry Kissinger, born in Bavaria, Germany, knew from firsthand experience the evils of a totalitarian system. In 1938, his family, being Jewish, emigrated from Germany to flee the Nazi persecutions. After four years in the army, Kissinger enrolled at Harvard to study philosophy, political science, and history. A star student, Kissinger quickly climbed the academic ranks, earning a Ph.D. with his 1954 dissertation, A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-1822. The work analyzed how European diplomats achieved stability in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. For Kissinger policymakers in the cold war faced the same dilemmas. China and the Soviet Union, both revolutionary states, threatened to upset the postwar peace.³

Nixon’s decision to appoint Kissinger as his National Security Advisor surprised many at the time, but because of their shared conviction in a realist foreign policy, the choice made sense. No stranger to politics, Kissinger served as a consultant to the National Security Council (NSC) in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and was an advisor to Nelson Rockefeller. As for Nixon, they had met a few times, and had not impressed each other. After the election, Kissinger again met with Nixon and they found

¹Melvin Small, The Presidency of Richard Nixon (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999) 59; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power (New York: Vintage, 1972), 11.

²Joan Hoff, Nixon Reconsidered, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 4. In Hoff’s revisionist history of the Nixon administration, she maintained that Nixon’s most lasting accomplishments were in civil rights, environmental policy, and other areas of public policy.

³Walter Issacson, Kissinger: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1989), 59-82; Jussi Hanhamaki, The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-16.

themselves in agreement on most issues. Whatever the motive behind Nixon's decision to appoint Kissinger, the most plausible explanation is the simplest: Nixon recognized that Kissinger shared his worldview and had the intellect to execute his strategy.⁴

From the moment Nixon took office, both he and Kissinger tried to circumvent the foreign policy bureaucracy. Nixon wanted every vital decision to come from the White House, not the State Department. Instead, Nixon considered the State Department a liberal organization out to sabotage his diplomacy; Kissinger posited that all bureaucracies were too cautious, incapable of creativity. Nixon utilized the NSC to serve as the main policymaking body, led by Kissinger. The NSC, created in 1947, advised the president on all matters relating to national security and to present options to him. Nixon rarely attended NSC meetings and conferred frequently with Kissinger. Although the secretive system of Nixon and Kissinger made many historic accomplishments, their undemocratic methods created an unhealthy atmosphere that outweighed the system's benefits.⁵

Developments in every region of the world in 1969 required reassessments by policymakers. The new state of affairs in the world was a situation that neither began nor ended with the Nixon presidency. Nixon understood the changes in world politics and used the new climate as a basis for an opportunity to construct a new global balance of power. Ending the Vietnam War presented the most pressing problem. Nixon believed that America's credibility rested on reaching a favorable solution to Vietnam. The

⁴Stephen Ambrose, Nixon Vol. II: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 213-233; Hanhamaki, Flawed Architect, 15, 27.

⁵Robert S. Litwak, Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 65-73. Hanhamaki, Flawed Architect, 17-18.

Vietnam War frustrated the administration and took a serious psychological toll.⁶

China and the Soviet Union both presented immense challenges. The arms race had reached a pivotal point since the Soviet Union equaled the United States in military power and had achieved parity in nuclear weapons. Soviet suppression of dissidents after the invasion of Czechoslovakia exemplified their growing confidence. The Brezhnev Doctrine resulted, which stated the Soviet Union had the right to interfere in the internal affairs of any Marxist nation. China, in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, was mixed in a violent social upheaval and seemed dangerous and unpredictable to the West. These dual threats presented both threats and opportunities: the failure or success of détente rested on a stable relationship with China and the Soviet Union.⁷

Relations with allies also required policy reassessments. The Western European nations and Japan, fully integrated into the world economy, now competed with American markets. European allies also showed more independence, best evident in West German Chancellor Willy Brandt (1913-1992) policy of *Ostpolitik*, which began normalizing relations with East Germany. Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), President of France, withdrew his country from NATO and developed its own nuclear deterrent to a Soviet invasion. The new self-assurance of European nations presented further challenges for Nixon.⁸

Fears of decline tend to accompany any time of upheaval and transition, but it also presents new opportunities. In 1969, both Nixon and Kissinger held this belief about the international climate. Nixon believed that a world with many powers, instead of two preponderant superpowers, while more complex, made the world safer: "I think it will be

⁶ Hanhamaki, Flawed Architect, 28-37.

⁷Ibid

⁸Ibid

a safer world and a better world if we have a stronger, healthy, United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, an even balance.”⁹ The purpose of détente was to adapt America to the new environment. Conservatives often misinterpreted détente as a retreat before world communism.¹⁰

Perceptions on the meaning of détente often differed among its participants and critics. In the early 1970s, some Soviet communists concluded that America’s determination to wage the Cold War had wrecked the U.S. economy. From the Soviet viewpoint, détente provided a way continue its ideological imperialism without intrusion from the United States. Détente reflected this decline of American power, as the United States acknowledged its failure to stop the Soviet Union from achieving parity. American conservatives feared that this is what détente looked to the Soviets. They urged the administration to regain superiority and oppose Soviet imperialism in the third world. These differing perceptions on the nature of detente led to misunderstandings between Nixon, the right wing, and eventually the Soviets in the second term. Much of this was due to Nixon’s reluctance to articulate the purpose of détente to the public and his political base.¹¹

Each year, the Nixon administration released detailed foreign policy reports to the public that set forth their foreign policy objectives. The first document, A New Strategy for Peace, issued 18 February 1970, attempted to describe the new administration’s

⁹John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War (London: Oxford University Press, 1982, 2005), 278.

¹⁰Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 287-291; Corel Bell, The Diplomacy of Détente (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 1-9.

¹¹John Lewis Gaddis, “Rescuing Choice from Circumstance: The Statecraft of Henry Kissinger,” in The Diplomats, 1939-1979, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 566; Raymond Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation: American Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), 45.

diplomatic strategy. The document declared an end to the postwar era, and thus an end to the ideological cold war of prior decades. Nationalism had influence over political ideas. This was evident in the Sino-Soviet split. In 1969, China and the Soviet Union were in a quasi-war, as their armies clashed on the Manchurian border. The non-superpower nation refused to choose between the Soviet and American model of government, hence, “the isms [had] lost their vitality.” These developments gave the United States a grand opportunity to establish a new global balance of power. The situation allowed the United States use the divide between the Soviet Union and China to its advantage.¹²

Scholars and former colleagues of Kissinger attest that détente resembled a revamped version of the containment policy. George Kennan (1904-2004), the architect of the policy in the 1940s, agreed that Nixon and Kissinger implemented many of his ideas. The key similarity was that they targeted the Soviet Union, not global communism, as America’s most pressing threat. Détente was to exploit divisions within communist world, namely between China and the Soviet Union. In 1969, border skirmishes between Soviet and Chinese forces nearly resulted in full-scale war. Nixon and Kissinger planned to act as the honest broker to diffuse the situation. They did not morally condemn the USSR, but used a system of sticks and carrots to win concessions. This realpolitik approach all stemmed from Kennan’s containment strategy.¹³

Nixon’s anti-communist image helped détente move forward. It also protected him from the charge of being soft on communism. In every international crisis the administration faced, Nixon took a cautious, pragmatic approach, very different from the

¹²Richard Nixon, U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s. A New Strategy for Peace A report to the Congress by Richard M. Nixon President of the United States, 18 February 1970, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1970. 2-3; Henry Kissinger, White House Years, (New York: Little Brown, 1979), 164-194.

¹³Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 304-305.

“madman” persona many historians have placed on him. The idea in the “Madman Theory” is that Nixon wanted the North Vietnamese to question his mental stability, but the entire approach was a myth perpetuated by Nixon’s Chief of Staff, H.R. Haldeman in a 1968 campaign interview. A case study is the first diplomatic emergency the administration faced. On 14 April 1969, in the EC-121 incident, North Korea shot down a U.S. Air Force reconnaissance plane, killing thirty-one Americans. After days of consulting the NSC, Nixon did not retaliate, but continued the surveillance missions. The combination of Nixon’s past reputation and his pragmatic approach to foreign affairs gave him more room to maneuver than a right wing president.¹⁴

The success of détente, however, rested on ending the Vietnam War. Plans to achieve an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union and an opening of relations with China all hinged on reaching a settlement to the war. To achieve peace, Nixon pressured the Soviets and Chinese to stop supplying North Vietnam, and to pressure them to a cease-fire. This triangular diplomacy played upon the Sino-Soviet disputes, which Nixon used to America’s advantage. If the administration accomplished its goals, Nixon and Kissinger hoped to reinvigorate American diplomacy.¹⁵

Nixon and Kissinger feared that domestic backlash to the Vietnam War threatened to revert America to an isolationists’ foreign policy. It also caused policymakers to lose confidence and made them reluctant to take risks, especially those in the East Coast establishment that designed the containment policy after the Second World War.

Kissinger saw a parallel between America’s disillusionment after the First World War

¹⁴ Hoff, Nixon Reconsidered, 173-178; Small, Presidency of Nixon, 61.

¹⁵Small, Presidency of Nixon, 65.

and that of Vietnam.¹⁶

Richard Nixon played no role in the Johnson administration's decision to stake American credibility on the Vietnam War, but he faced the task of ending America's involvement in the conflict. In 1969, Nixon faced a difficult situation of maintaining America's credibility on the world without a decisive victory. As a model, Nixon looked to President Eisenhower's handling of the Korean War. Eisenhower secured a cease-fire agreement that preserved the status of South Korea, which maintained the status quo. Nixon wanted the same arrangement for South Vietnam.¹⁷

The Nixon administration had three options on Vietnam. The first entailed a massive escalation, which called for more troops, and increased attacks on North Vietnam's infrastructure. For political and humane reasons, this approach had no feasibility. Another option, equally dramatic, was to agree to an immediate cease-fire and withdraw all American troops. Like the previous choices, the political risk outweighed the gain. The last option entailed the gradual withdraw of U.S. ground forces and to train the South Vietnamese army to defend themselves. This strategy, later named Vietnamization, was the course Nixon chose to follow.¹⁸

From 1969-1973, the administration tried many methods to end the war, within the confines of Vietnamization. Kissinger's negotiations with Le Duc Tho (1911-1990) made little progress. Linkage failed to bring a swift conclusion. The Soviets refused to pressure the North Vietnamese in return for American willingness to begin arms talks. Nixon's secret bombing campaign on North Vietnam's supply line in Cambodia failed to change the course of the war, and reignited the antiwar movement. On 4 May, 1970, four

¹⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 65.

¹⁷ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 349.

¹⁸ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 593-684.

students at Kent State University were killed by National Guard troops during a protest to the Cambodian invasion. The secret bombings of Cambodia in 1969-1970 also raised constitutional questions on the parameters of presidential power. On 27 January 1973, Nixon and Kissinger finally achieved fragile cease-fire.¹⁹

To what extent did détente affect the course of the Vietnam War? Nixon and Kissinger greatly overestimated the influence of China and Soviet Union over North Vietnam. Détente, however, continued despite Nixon's determination to wage the war. Nixon preserved American credibility in the world, but at a very high cost. Vietnam dragged on for four more years at great cost to the country and to Nixon's hope of leaving a legacy of peace. In the end, Vietnam had less to do with détente, as ending the war became an end in itself.²⁰

On 25 July 1969, Nixon made a major policy announcement concerning Asian policy. Nixon promised to limit American military intervention in Asian conflicts, "except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons." The Vietnam War had unveiled the limits of American power to influence in Asian disputes. In the future, Nixon promised to aid anti-communist movements economically, but not militarily. The Nixon Doctrine expressed Nixon's realist approach to diplomacy for the post-Vietnam era.²¹

Nixon made a summit with the Soviets a priority of his first term. The Soviets also indicated their interest in an arms control agreement. In his 27 January 1969 press

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid

²¹Richard Reeves, President Nixon: Alone in the White House (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 104. The statement laid out the Vietnamization strategy in these terms: "the United States is going to encourage and had a right to expect that this problem (communism) will increasingly be handled and the responsibility taken for by the Asian nations themselves . . . and if the United States just continues down the road of responding to requests of assistance . . . they are never going to take care of themselves"

conference, he revealed his decision to pursue détente and linkage. Linkage forced the Soviets to cooperate in other areas as precursor to negotiations. On the question of arms control, Nixon implied that progress in other areas might lead to more agreements, the first indication of linkage. Nixon shifted his position of military superiority over the Soviet Union to one of “sufficiency.” Nixon explained his position: “Let me put it this way; when we talk about parity, I think we should assume that wars occur, usually, when each side believes it has a chance to win.”²² If either side believed it had military superiority, or that they were in a weak position, the chance of conflict increased. The Republican right was enraged by the statements, which broke his campaign promise. The press, on the other hand, criticized Nixon’s aim to link arms control to other issues.²³

Attempts to open negotiations with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms control, a major aspect of détente, had begun with the Johnson administration (1963-1969). For the pivotal breakthroughs, however, the credit must go to Nixon. President Johnson made several minor agreements with the Soviets that paved the way for more substantive progress during the Nixon years: reductions on supplies of U-235 plutonium (1964), the Outer Space Treaty (1966), and the Non Proliferation Treaty (1968) were all issues where the superpowers agreed. From 1967-68, Johnson made serious efforts to begin arms negotiations, but the combined effect of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and Vietnam halted progress. Unlike Nixon, Johnson never applied linkage to give the Soviets an incentive to the table. Neither did the Johnson administration attempt to open relations with China. Nixon’s strategic outlook made SALT an integral part of détente,

²²Richard M. Nixon, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon 1969, The President’s News Conference of January 27, 1969 (Washington: GPO, 1971), 321.

²³Kissinger, White House Years, 130-134.

not an end in itself.²⁴

By the late 1960s, the arms race reached a more complex, and more dangerous phase. American superiority in nuclear weapons, as compared to its advantage in the 1940s and 1950s, disappeared. Three categories of nuclear weapons figured into the arms negotiations: long-range bombers, nuclear-armed submarines, and Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). While the United States had more bombers and submarines, the Soviets were closing the gap on ICBM's. Conservatives viewed this as an unacceptable situation and a sign of American weakness.²⁵

New weapons systems complicated the arms talks for both sides. The MIRV (Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles) allowed one missile to contain up to twelve warheads with the capability to strike many targets. Technology also allowed for defensive missiles, the ABM's (Anti Ballistic Missiles), to strike down incoming missiles. If either side gained an advantage in either of these weapons, each side feared one might achieve a first strike capability.²⁶

The SALT talks dragged on for most of the first term. In February 1969, Kissinger began 'backchannel' talks with Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States. The official talks began in November 1969 in Helsinki headed by Gerald Smith, of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). Meanwhile, secret talks went on between Kissinger and Dobrynin. Nixon played a passive role in the negotiation process and left much of the responsibility to Kissinger, who angered the Pentagon for his lack of knowledge on arms control. Nevertheless, as the 1972 campaign

²⁴Hal Brands, "Progress Unseen: U.S. Arms Control Policy and the Origins of Détente, 1963-1968", *Diplomatic History* 30 no. 2 (2006): 253-285.

²⁵Small, Presidency of Nixon, 101-110; Reeves, Alone in the White House, 486-487.

²⁶Issacson, Kissinger, 425-438.

loomed, Nixon pushed for a summit meeting that symbolized progress in Soviet-American relations.²⁷

On 26 May 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the SALT I agreements. The official agreement required each side to limit the size of their nuclear arsenals, not reduce them. The treaty limited the Soviets to 1600 ICBM and the United to 1054. Each side agreed to limit ABM to only two locations, and left MIRV for future talks. The treaty, like the China visit, enhanced Nixon's reputation as a peacemaker.²⁸ The four years of talks that preceded the treaty are an epic story, full of bureaucratic intrigue. The administration went to great lengths to conceal the talks between Kissinger and Dobrynin. Advances in nuclear weapon technology, which allowed both sides to annihilate each other several times over, made arms control an especially pressing issue.

All parties to any agreement had to walk a tedious balance of not relinquishing too much, but also a willingness to control the arms race. Nixon and Kissinger planned to offer trade deals to the Soviets in return for a promise to stop supplying North Vietnam and to cooperate in other regions. The China angle also compelled the Soviets to improve the relationship. Therefore, Nixon used SALT as a way to gain further concessions, while at the same time limiting nuclear arms. A nuanced strategy that met with mixed results.²⁹

Nixon and Kissinger saw SALT I set a precedent for superpower cooperation in areas they shared common ground. The Soviets realized they did not want a strained relationship with America and China, so they now had a reason to restrain their behavior.

²⁷Small, *Presidency of Nixon*, 97-112.

²⁸Stephen Ambrose and Douglas Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 229-232.

²⁹Issacson, *Kissinger*, 316-333.

The ABM treaty meant that both sides agreed to leave their people as hostage to a nuclear attack and restored deterrence as a way to avoid such a calamity. Critics of the SALT agreement saw little to celebrate since the treaty placed no limits on MIRV deployments. The caps placed on the deployment of missiles did not apply to warheads. The SALT agreements, however, were a first step to more comprehensive ones. On a larger level, SALT symbolized a new era of the cold war when both sides agreed on the need to communicate.³⁰

The success of détente with the Soviet Union hinged on reaching an arms agreement with them. Conservatives viewed any arms control agreement as appeasement. The right opposed any arms control agreement, and preferred the U.S. to match the Soviets in nuclear arms. They believed the nation's national security in the future rested with the superiority in MIV and ABM. Advocates of arms control argued that the building of ABM and MIRV only heightened tensions. If one side ever developed the ability to defend against nuclear missiles, the entire principle of deterrence would collapse. The conservative critique of détente stemmed from that basis.³¹

What did Nixon hope to gain from SALT? Nixon believed that if America accepted parity with the Soviet Union, and managed it properly, it could work to America's advantage. Nixon realized that the Soviets planned to surpass them in nuclear weaponry, but, if negotiations started that permitted each side to establish some common ground, chances of future confrontations abated. In the course of reaching an agreement, Nixon's tactics fluctuated, but never veered from the goal of using parity as a springboard

³⁰Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 213-216; Nixon, *RN*, 617-618; Kissinger *White House Years*, 1252-1257; Issacson, *Kissinger*, 407-438..

³¹Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991), 453-454.

for cooperation with the Soviets. Nixon's strategy was neither one of retreat nor victory, but intended to prevent the Soviet Union from achieving supremacy while building a structure of peace.³²

Neither Nixon nor the electorate in 1968 expected an opening in Sino-American relations, much less a visit by an American president. As shown in the previous chapter, Nixon made vague references about opening China during the 1968 campaign. In 1969, the prospect of Nixon visiting China seemed remote and preposterous. A complex chain of events, however, ended with Nixon's visit in February 21-28, 1972, pretentiously dubbed 'the week that changed the world.' Perhaps the most profound consequence of the China trip was Nixon's successful handling of the conservatives, who did not revolt when it happened.³³

The China lobby, one of the most powerful in Washington, worked for the preservation of Taiwan, the refuge of the Chinese nationalists. By the seventies, however, this once prominent lobby failed to sway public opinion. Columnist Joseph Kraft wrote that the lobby had "been proven to be one of the all time historical paper tigers. There is almost no resistance to the not very gentle let down of Chiang Kai shek." The China lobby failed to influence public opinion or Nixon's decision to visit China. Instead, Nixon's visit to China solidified his image as a master diplomat who changed the cold war's direction.³⁴

Nixon made an opening with China a priority for a few reasons. An opening with China made a settlement to the Vietnam War more likely, since the Chinese provided

³²Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 28-40.

³³Reeves, *Alone in the White House*, 432-457; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 227-279.

³⁴Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: "China Lobby" Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 269-270; Small, *Presidency of Nixon*, 125.

economic and military support to North Vietnam. Nixon also saw an opportunity to exploit the Sino-Soviet tensions to the advantage of the United States. In late 1969, few Americans knew of the deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship. Triangular diplomacy also depended on a breakthrough with China. Nixon made cautious steps at first through intermediaries in Pakistan, Romania, and France. When the Chinese Central Committee met in August-September 1970, it recognized the Soviet Union as their greatest threat, and their desire to open relations with America.³⁵

On 15 July 1971 in a television address Nixon announced his intention to visit China to begin the process of normalization of the relationship. Nixon told the world audience that the purpose of the trip was “to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views of concern on both sides.”³⁶ The American Conservative Union and the Young Americans for Freedom, both influential right wing organizations, denounced Nixon. Barry Goldwater stated, “Nothing Nixon did surprised me anymore. He had contradicted himself so often that I was beginning to expect it.”³⁷ Although Goldwater never challenged Nixon over the issue, he privately opposed the policy.³⁸

The Shanghai communiqué, the joint statement that resulted from the China meetings, laid out general guidelines for the future of Sino-American relations.³⁹ In one section of the joint message, China and the U.S. agreed to oppose the hegemony of any nation over Asia, an indirect message to the Soviets. The document intentionally

³⁵Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 246-254.

³⁶Reeves, *Alone in the White House*, 345-346.

³⁷Ambrose, *Triumph of a Politician*, 453-454.

³⁸Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 265-266.

³⁹Richard M. Nixon, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1972*, “Joint Statement following Discussions with Leaders of the People’s Republic of China, February 27, 1972 (Washington: GPO, 1974).

sidestepped the Taiwan issue. Both sides agreed to disagree on Taiwan and left the issue for the future. Although Nixon promised to reduce U.S. forces in Taiwan, as a reward to China for pressuring North Vietnam, conservatives hated the idea of abandoning Taiwan. To the right it sounded like Nixon set the eventual abandonment of Taiwan.⁴⁰

Why did Nixon risk inflaming the conservatives over China? His anti-communist reputation blunted much of the criticism. In China, Nixon took notice of the conservative position on Taiwan, “if the Chinese made a strongly belligerent claim to Taiwan in the communiqué, I would come under murderous crossfire” from conservatives.⁴¹

Conservatives refused to believe that two communist powers would destroy each other, much less ally with the United States. The status of Taiwan, a sensitive issue with conservatives who regarded it as the legitimate government of China, disliked Nixon’s assertion that “the national security interests of the United States lay in developing our relations with the People’s Republic of China.”⁴² Ashbrook surmised Nixon’s new China policy, “set up the framework to abandon 15 million people to the tender mercies of a regime that during its tenure in office has managed to slay 34 million of its own citizens.”

Nixon showed much foresight by his decision to begin a relationship with Communist China.⁴³ Nixon wisely decided not to announce any policy change towards Taiwan. The trip dazzled television audiences and received support from the media. It was the high point of Nixon’s entire presidency and built his reputation in history as a statesman. Some have even placed Nixon’s visit to China as the end of the cold war. Most were aware of the brutalities committed by Mao’s regime, but the size and

⁴⁰Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation*, 268.

⁴¹Nixon, *RN*, 570-571.

⁴²Ibid, 556.

⁴³Ibid, 571.

influence of China in Asia made it impossible for the United States to ignore it any longer.⁴⁴

Why did the right have so many objections to détente when Nixon aided the conservatives in other areas? Nixon appeased the right in many areas of domestic policy, including civil rights and court appointments. Nixon pleased the South with his opposition to the forced busing of students to enforce integration. The conservative Supreme Court appointments, made by Nixon, promised to roll back the liberal decisions of the Earl Warren court on civil rights, crime, and states' rights. New Federalism, an ambitious plan of Nixon administration to grant more power to state and local governments and cut the power of the bureaucrats in Washington, also indicated his conservative leanings. This argument, that Nixon's domestic postures allowed the right to tolerate détente, often underestimates the power of anti-communism in the conservative movement. A balance of power that included revolutionary states, to the right, was not only naïve, but dangerous. Kissinger concluded that these states were longer revolutionary, in the sense they were determined to spread their ideas all over the globe. Détente enraged the conservative movement more than any other issue and that is why they challenged Nixon in 1972, and abandoned him during Watergate.⁴⁵

The right wing Republicans supported Nixon in 1968, based on his promises to roll back the 'Great Society' and the excesses of government spending in the sixties. Nixon, never friendly to big government, wanted to streamline the federal bureaucracy. With the advice of Moynihan, Nixon championed an ambitious plan to reform welfare by aiding the working poor. Nixon modeled his plans for welfare from that of nineteenth -

⁴⁴Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 267; Wicker, *One of Us*, 598; Hanhamki, *Flawed Architect*, 197.

⁴⁵Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1995), 135-136.

century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), a conservative reformer. As shown, many of the administration's policies aided conservative causes, especially on social issues. The combined effect, however, of deficit spending, price controls, and welfare reform perplexed the right more than it angered them. To conservatives, the domestic policies of Nixon were a mixed bag. Détente clearly pushed the right over the edge since it offended anti-communist principles.⁴⁶

Close advisors to Nixon attested to progressivism in conservative form. Moynihan recalled the administration as “the most progressive” of the post war era. Nixon described his own moderate approach to an aide, “You know very well that it is the Tory men, with liberal policies who have enlarged democracy.”⁴⁷ In 1968, Nixon stated his politics as “liberal on race, conservative on economics, and pragmatist on all else.” The preceding presidents whom Nixon looked to as models - Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Wilson – were all moderates. That he clashed with an increasingly dogmatic conservative movement is no surprise in light of Nixon's positions.

Outside events, in addition to détente, contributed to the atmosphere of decline in the Seventies. Détente, in their view, was symptomatic of decline – that spread into other areas. On the economic front, public opinion turned against the viability of free markets with the onset of environmental regulations, which thwarted economic growth. American manufacturing from 1967-1977 increased by 27 percent, while France, West Germany, and Japan all were over 70 percent. Conservatives blamed this on high taxes and government regulation. The growing dependence on oil from the Middle East allowed Arab countries to set the price of oil. Middle East countries penalized the United

⁴⁶Evans and Novak, Nixon in the White House, 41; Reeves, Alone in the White House, 45.

⁴⁷Small, Presidency of Nixon, 154.

States for supporting Israel during the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, by implementing oil embargos. These were two examples of America's decline in the decade. To the conservatives, détente reflected the weakening of United States.⁴⁸

Nixon and Kissinger misjudged the influence of anti-Communism on the left and right. Their goals of ending the Vietnam War, reaching an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, and opening relations with China all were part of a strategy to build a new global balance of power. The administration took conservative support for granted in the first term and unrealistically expected them to fall in line behind the administration. The right did not see Nixon as a traitor, but as an opportunist who took the wrong approach. They saw the cold war as epic struggle and believed that the United States needed to show resolve and strength. In 1972, the conservatives offered their own candidate, John Ashbrook, to challenge Nixon. The Ashbrook candidacy was not a reactionary response to détente; rather it expressed positions on the cold war from conservatives ideas developed since the 1940s. As the administration unraveled in the second term, the critics of détente gained a wider hearing, due both to Nixon's fall and to the quality of their arguments.

⁴⁸Paul Johnson, Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 659-696. Johnson provides a devastating conservative critique of the 1970s.

IV – DÉTENTE AND THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

Détente represented a radical departure from the foreign policy favored by the right. In 1968, President Richard Nixon promised to restore American military superiority over the Soviet Union, but détente, a word the American political right came to despise, seemed to move in the opposite direction. The postwar conservatives developed their own distinct ideas in cold war foreign policy, with the goal of defeating communism. The right wing's indignation at détente compelled them to draft a candidate to challenge Nixon for the 1972 nomination. John Ashbrook, a congressman from Ohio and former ally to Nixon, articulated a conservative critique of détente, faithful to the principles of the conservative movement. Nixon's control of the party machinery, and the popularity of détente, prevented any serious challenge from the right, but set the stage for his permanent estrangement in the second term.

American conservatism underwent a renaissance in the postwar era. Intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic – historians, philosophers, journalists - who were appalled at the state of Western civilization, tried to discover where the West went wrong and how to restore individual dignity in the wake of German fascism and Soviet communism. All conservatives agreed that the expansion of state power and the prevailing view of American liberals that it was the government's responsibility to solve all social inequalities. This set the stage for some form of totalitarianism, since more power went to the government. Only a return to individualism, the heart of western thought, assured the recovery of freedom. This idea united scholars from diverse fields to create a movement in response to the violence of the Twentieth century.¹

¹Gregory L.Schneider, Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 7-31.

The Road to Serfdom, (1944) by Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) had a massive influence on the American right. Hayek, an Austrian economist, challenged conventional views on the proper relationship between the individual and the state. Loss of individual economic freedom threatened all freedoms. In his view, only if governments in Europe and the United States moved away from state planning could they avoid the fate of Germany and the Soviet Union, where governments stamped out individualism. Hayek's thesis struck a chord with conservatives who were weary of FDR's New Deal policies in the 1930s and 1940s. They feared the growing power of the federal government and the ramifications it had for individual rights. As the world learned of the atrocities committed in the 1930s and 1940s in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the message took on a new significance since displayed the results giving the state too much power. Hayek's economic theories influenced many conservatives. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration based its economic policies on Hayek's ideas. ²

In the 1950s, three groups merged to form the modern conservative movement: traditionalists, libertarians, and anti-communists. Traditionalists blamed secularism for the moral decay of the West, which led men to put their faith in ideas, instead of God. In their view, modern thinkers felt free to put their ideas into action, regardless of the consequences. Libertarianism stemmed from the idea that any government worked against the individual, and that any relinquishing of power to the state endangered individual liberty. Albert Jay Nock (1870-1945), the most influential libertarian, wrote two classic books, Memoirs of a Superfluous Man, and Our Enemy, the State that lamented humanity's willingness to let governments solve every problem. Anti-

²George H. Nash, The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945 (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 5-8.

communists, an assorted group of Protestants, and Catholics, and former Marxists, all saw the Soviet Union as the greatest threat to civilization. These three groups, often at odds with each other, put their differences aside, and challenged conventional wisdom on the role of government.³

In 1955, William F. Buckley (1925-), motivated by this emerging conservative sentiment, founded National Review. The weekly magazine gave a conservative perspective to current events as an alternative to the liberal slant of other mainstream journals. Human Events, the only other right wing periodical, only focused on politics, while Buckley wanted National Review to cover all aspects of American culture. National Review allowed conservative ideas to reach a wider audience and represented different schools of thought in the movement. Anti-communism was the one issue that united all conservatives. National Review wrote in its statement of purpose, “We consider coexistence with communism neither desirable, nor possible, nor honorable; we find ourselves irrevocably at war with communism and shall oppose any substitute for victory.”⁴

The spiritual dimension of the cold war also reenergized American conservatism. Whitaker Chambers, in his memoir, Witness, described the extent of Soviet spy activities in America. An editor for Time Magazine and an ex-communist, Chambers left the party in 1939, and became a fervent anti-communist. The book is a suspenseful account of the Soviet spy apparatus in the United States that revealed the extent of their activities.

³Gregory L. Schneider, ed., Conservatism in American Since 1930: A Reader (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 29. An excerpt from Our Enemy, the State that explains Nock’s philosophy: “It is unfortunately none too well understood that, just as the state has no money of its own, so it has no power of its own. All the power it has is what society gives it . . . Therefore, every assumption of state power, whether by gift or seizure, leaves society with so much less power; there is never, nor can be, any strengthening of state power without a corresponding and roughly equivalent of depletion of social power.”

⁴ *Ibid*, 204.

Chambers came to the public's attention in 1949 for accusing Alger Hiss, a State Department official, of spying for the Soviet Union.⁵ In Witness, Chambers reduced the cold war down to a struggle for the very soul of Western civilization: "Faith is the central problem of this age. The western world does not know it, but it already possesses the answer to this problem - but only provided that it faith in God and the freedom he enjoins is as great as communism's faith in man."⁶ The arguments of Hayek and Chambers redefined traditional conservatism from an ideal for the privileged to one for all who valued freedom.

The Soviet Union, to the right was the symbol of evil in the world. The nature of communism and its connection to totalitarianism made the cold war an ideological conflict above all else to conservatives. Anti-communist intellectuals, many of them former Marxists, wrote devastating critiques of Marxism. The American right believed that Communism threatened freedom everywhere. The cold war to the anti-communists took on the significance of a religious crusade, since it threatened to destroy all the sacred values of the West particularly, individual freedom, democracy, and capitalism. Anti-communists put foreign policy at the forefront of their attention, as they developed their own theories on defeating the Soviet Union. Their view often placed them at odds with the Truman administration, and all the presidencies that followed, with the exception of Reagan. Geopolitical thinkers on the right formulated a strategy intended not to contain, but to annihilate the Soviet Union.⁷

⁵Ibid, 105.

⁶Whittaker Chambers, Witness (Washington: Regenery, 1952), 17.

⁷Jonathan M. Schoenwald, A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism (London: Oxford University Press), 24-27; John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War (London: Oxford University Press, 1982, 2005), 24-87.

James Burnham (1905-1987) emerged as the chief geopolitical strategist for the conservative movement. With the publication in 1947 of The Struggle for the World, he argued that the containment policy of the Truman administration neither restrained Soviet ambitions, nor took account of the communist mindset. George Kennan, who developed containment, argued that national character, not communism, influenced Soviet foreign policy. All anti-communist movements deserved military and economic aid from the United States to confront Soviet expansion. Burnham argued for a policy that aimed for the destruction of the Soviet Union, not its mere containment, for freedom to triumph.⁸ Historians credit Burnham with formulating a logical conservative critique of containment.⁹

Burnham continued to disparage containment in the ensuing decades. Later books, The Coming Defeat of Communism (1950), Containment or Liberation (1953), and Suicide of the West (1964), all dealt with the nature of communism and the inadequacy of American foreign policy. Policymakers, according to Burnham, gave too much emphasis to military superiority. The United States had to use all its resources, political, economic, and cultural, to defeat communism and to rally support around the world for democracy. Despite Burnham's alarmism, his books set the standard for a conservative conception of the cold war's meaning and the stakes the conflict involved.¹⁰

Conservatives in the fifties and sixties continued to chastise the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. Eisenhower's reliance on massive retaliation to deter a Soviet attack only protected the United States, while the Soviets expanded their influence

⁸Daniel Kelly, James Burnham and the Struggle for the World (Wilmington: ISI, 2002), 123.

⁹Nash, Intellectual History, 97.

¹⁰James Burnham, The Coming Defeat of Communism (New York: Cornwall Press, 1950), 21-27; James Burnham, Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism (New York: Regnery, 1964), 265-274. Kelly, Burnham, 131-133; Nash, Intellectual History, 92-97.

everywhere else, especially in Asia and Africa. After the 1956 Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt, conservatives took Eisenhower's decision not to aide the Hungarians, as a moral outrage. During the Kennedy years, the right called for the overthrow of Cuban ruler Fidel Castro (1926-), the communist ruler of Cuba. The 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia showed a new boldness and proof they had not reformed. By the late 1960s, conservatives felt further apprehension at the Soviet missile build up. In their view, America had to respond by maintaining its missile superiority. This is how the right saw the international situation at the time of Nixon's election.¹¹

Frank Meyer (1909-1971), along with Burnham, emerged as one of earliest critics of détente in the pages of National Review. The primary contribution of Meyer to the conservative movement, What is Conservatism?, attempted to reconcile the traditionalists and libertarian wings of the movement. In his column, Meyer offered commentaries on Nixon and Kissinger's realist foreign policy. Détente, to Meyer, seemed like a rear guard action against a tidal wave of communist aggression: "There can be no question of our moral obligation to resist, to counterattack, to destroy, this powerful and proclaimed enemy of man and God." The diplomacy of the Nixon administration assumed the Soviets sought stability, when instability suited their designs.¹²

Burnham and Meyer understood the logic behind détente, but questioned its basic premise. They thought the concept of a "balance of power", as formulated by Kissinger, did not apply to the Cold War, since it disregarded the influence of ideology among Marxists. Reduced tensions with the West allowed them to expand their influence without interference from their enemies. China and the Soviet Union showed no sign of

¹¹Nash, Intellectual History, 257.

¹²Nash, Intellectual History, 98, 269.

restraint, despite their rhetoric on peaceful coexistence. A balance of power worked only when all nations agreed to act with caution. Conservatives believed that communism was a monolithic force, and they never turned on each other. Détente with communist nations only handed them the opportunity to persist in their plans for expansion. America needed to stand up for its democratic values, and to lead the democratic nations, instead of making efforts to assuage its enemies. For the right, the cold war was a battle between good and evil. Their argument resembled the neoconservative critique that emerged later in the decade.¹³

Nixon and Kissinger met opposition from conservatives who saw little to gain from opening relations with China, as a way to counter the Soviet threat. When American missile superiority over the Soviet Union disappeared in the late 1960s, the right trusted Nixon to close the missile gap. To the right, arms control talks with the Russian equaled appeasement, since they believed any formal recognition of parity was a strategic retreat. Nixon and Kissinger, however, believed that the fissures in the communist movement allowed the United States to act as a balancer between the Soviets and the Chinese. Recognition of China and an arms agreement with the Soviets made American a partner to its enemies, and therefore minimized the missile gap's importance, in the conservative point of view. Conservatives, however, saw foreign relations through the prism of ideology, and saw any accommodation with revolutionary states a tragic blunder.¹⁴

Nixon's decision to open talks with the Chinese communists delivered a blow to the anti-communists. Ever since the Chinese communists took power in 1949, the

¹³John Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectual and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1992, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 22.

¹⁴Nash, Intellectual History, 271-272.

American right led the way in support for the nationalists in Taiwan. The right refused to believe that the Chinese and the Russians had serious disagreements with each other. To the right, China had everything to gain in a rapprochement with America, such as access to raw materials and technology. The military and material support that China gave to North Vietnam, which was killing American soldiers, made the new approach counterproductive and immoral in their view.¹⁵

The missile gap was another major concern of the right in the Nixon-Ford era. National Review picked apart every aspect of the SALT talks. Meyer and others feared that the recognition of parity with the Soviets endangered America's national security in the long term. Meyer called upon Nixon and Kissinger to insure American security, regardless of the consequences: "No programs, no expenditure, for education, for welfare, for control of population, makes or can make sense until the first things are taken care of."¹⁶ From the conservative viewpoint, the Soviets never posed a graver threat than at that time. They believed that détente with the Soviet Union was a contradiction since it assumed that both sides had mutual interests.

Meyer also questioned the logic of building a balance of power with communist nations. Since China and the Soviet Union saw the United States as their enemy, they had no reason to engage in détente. Kissinger's admiration for the European diplomats at Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, who restored stability to Europe after the Napoleonic Wars, did not compare to the cold war reality. In Meyer's view, stability came only after Napoleon's defeat, just as a true peace was not possible until the Soviet

¹⁵Kevin J. Smant, How Great the Triumph: James Burnham, Anticommunism and the Conservative Movement (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1992.), 143.

¹⁶Frank Meyer, "Principles and Heresies," National Review, January. 26 1971.

Union collapsed.¹⁷ A balance of power, while a noble concept, only worked when all sides showed restraint. These positions did represent extremism, but a sound critique of détente.

In July-August 1971, a group of conservatives who called themselves the Manhattan 12 decided the time had come to break with Nixon.¹⁸ The Manhattan 12 consisted of the intellectual leadership in the conservative movement. The 10 August 1971 issue of National Review announced its suspension of support for the Nixon administration. Détente provided the impetus for the bold conservative move, and drove them apart from Nixon. The combined effect of Nixon's announcement of a visit to China, an arms control summit with the USSR, and his adoption of Keynesian economic policies, pushed them over the edge. Prominent conservatives had no voice in the administration, with the exception of speechwriter Patrick Buchanan, and that increased their sense of isolation. Any chance of splitting the Republican Party was remote, but the conservative actions revealed their sense of desperation and isolation from the White House.¹⁹

Kissinger often consulted with conservatives to address the right wing critics of détente. One such meeting took place on 12 August 1971, possibly due to the criticisms of the Manhattan 12. Kissinger addressed their concerns, and tried to explain the difficult obstacles faced by the administration. The National Security Advisor blamed the

¹⁷Frank Meyer, "Principles and Heresies," National Review, August 10 1971.

¹⁸Lee Edwards, The Conservative Revolution (New York: Free Press, 1999), 170. The twelve signers of the official statement consisted of key leaders in the conservative movement: Jeffery Bell, Director of the American Conservative Union, William F. Buckley, founder and editor of National Review, Anthony Harrigan, Southern States Industrial Council, John Jones, American Conservative Union, Daniel Mahoney, New York Conservative Party, Neil McCaffery, President of the Conservative Book Club, Frank S. Meyer, National Review, William A. Rusher, publisher of National Review, Allan Ryskind, editor of Human Events, Randall Teague, Young Americans for Freedom, and Thomas S. Winter, Human Events.

¹⁹Edwards, Conservative Revolution, 169-170; Nash, Intellectual History, 337.

intransigence of Congress, bureaucracy, intellectuals, and the media for undermining the goals of the administration, and appealed to the conservatives for support from their quarter. The hostility of congress to increased defense spending and their threats to cut funding for the Vietnam War, gave Nixon a limited set of options. The conservatives had to give the administration more leeway and take note of all their accomplishments, despite the obstacles it faced.²⁰

Kissinger also explained the administration's position on the SALT talks: "It is simply a joke - a ridiculous joke - to suggest the White House . . . has been giving anything away on SALT. We are in a daily fight for our lives with Congress, with the press, and within the bureaucracy."²¹ Kissinger explained that an arms control agreement prevented a further Soviet missile production, which is what the conservatives wanted. The United States had more than enough missiles, and had the potential to build more ABM's if the Soviets broke their treaty commitments. Kissinger also revealed the secret talks with the Soviet ambassador, and that he took a much tougher line than the official negotiators in Helsinki. The conservatives found themselves in a difficult position: Did their relentless attacks on the administration hurt their own cause? Their ambivalent attitude toward Nixon divided their ranks, as some believed they had to support him, while others felt compelled to voice their principles regardless of who was president.

On China, Kissinger also tried to blunt their attacks. Nixon's decision to pursue détente with China had broken the stalemated arms negotiations. The Soviets feared that the United States planned to ally with China against them. Kissinger stated, "Since July 15 (the announcement of Nixon's visit) we have had their [the Soviets] full attention.

²⁰“Memorandum of Conversation with Conservative opinion leaders, 12 August, 1971,” National Security Archive, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchive/NSAEBB193?index.htm.

²¹ Ibid

Necessity has brought us together with the Chinese, and necessity will dictate the future of our relationships.”²² China also opened an avenue to end the Vietnam War, since the Chinese also wanted to settle the conflict to end the instability in Southeast Asia.²³

The meeting ended with heated exchanges. When asked why Nixon did not go over the heads of Congress and appeal to the people on the national security crisis, Kissinger refused to answer. Kissinger argued that Nixon pushed a reluctant Congress to fund MIRV and ABM, but received little credit from conservatives. Since the Nixon White House was receiving assaults on all fronts, they hardly needed it from the right. Kissinger ended by saying, “I just hope you will stop yelling at us and start yelling at our enemies.”²⁴ From the perspective of later events, the meeting failed to heal the rifts created by détente, as the right continued to question the policy.

A lack of public support for conservative positions made them sound like extremists or warmongers, since they seemed to favor increasing cold war tensions. This perception became their chief dilemma in the early years of détente. Nixon knew this and expected their support, since they were in no position to challenge the administration. Nevertheless, National Review urged all conservatives to voice their disagreements with Nixon despite the damage it may cause, and to continue to fight for their principles. After all, Nixon needed their support, especially as the 1972 election neared. The possibility of a conservative revolt always lingered in the back of Nixon’s mind. The omission of Taiwan from the Shanghai Communiqué was partly a gesture to the right, showing Nixon remained committed to protecting them.²⁵

²³Ibid

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Frank Meyer, “Principles and Heresies,” National Review, June 29 1971.

Détente, and the leftward tilt of Nixon's domestic policies, deficit spending and a plan to reform welfare, left conservatives without a leader to voice their qualms on a national stage. The right felt marginalized and forced to support a president who did not share their philosophy. Patrick Buchanan (1938-), a conservative speechwriter for Nixon, also expressed discontent in a memo to Nixon. In the memo, Buchanan complained the conservatives only received rhetoric, "while the liberals got the programs." From Nixon's standpoint, his Supreme Court appointments and his conservative positions on social issues such as abortion were enough to keep the right at bay. This approach downplayed the influence of anti-communism in the conservative movement.²⁶

Many in the conservative movement feared that any challenge to Nixon threatened their credibility. Their principles, however, compelled them to voice their disagreements, even toward a Republican chief executive. Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan refused to question Nixon, and distanced themselves from anyone who did. They decided that 1972 was not the time to start a revolt, but the arguments were set in place for a critique of détente.²⁷

John Ashbrook, conservative Ohio congressman, regarded China as a dangerous state and opposed a normalization of relations. Ashbrook and the conservative movement viewed foreign policy from a moralistic perspective. In his rhetoric and correspondence, Ashbrook compared the rulers of communist China with those of Nazi Germany. He felt that Nixon's visit not only legitimized a tyrannical regime, but also

²⁶Stephen Ambrose, Vol. 2 Nixon: Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 405.

²⁷Charles Moser, Promise and Hope: The Ashbrook Presidential Campaign of 1972 (Washington DC: Free Congress Foundation, 1985), 22-25.

devastated all the anti-Communist regimes in Asia, Ashbrook told Congress: “President Nixon’s planned trip to Red China can serve no useful purpose for the people of the United States or the free people of Asia. It will only serve to encourage the aggressive intentions of the Red Chinese and their client regimes in North Vietnam and North Korea.”²⁸ Nixon and Kissinger did see the opportunity, and believed it strengthened America’s geopolitical standing. More fundamentally, the struggle between Nixon and the right went to a deeper level of two different ideas on foreign policy.²⁹

In the fall and winter of 1971, the Manhattan 12 drafted Ashbrook to challenge Nixon. In December, Rusher and Buckley, the leaders of the Manhattan 12, frequently met with Ashbrook in Washington and persuaded him to challenge Nixon for the New Hampshire primary at a 13 December 1971 dinner meeting. While Ashbrook lacked the name recognition of a Reagan or Goldwater, he did have the courage to take a principled stand against Nixon. Ashbrook had worked to secure Nixon’s nomination in 1968, in the belief that Nixon was conservative. Everyone involved knew their chances of success were dim, but the ultimate decision to challenge Nixon reveals the extent of their discontent.³⁰

John Ashbrook gave speeches on the House floor that picked apart Nixon’s diplomacy. On 15 December 1971, Ashbrook delivered an extended speech to Congress, “The First 1000 Days: A Legislator’s Viewpoint,” a clear and succinct conservative appraisal of the Nixon administration. The speech deconstructed détente as a sign of American weakness, and a losing strategy that did not restore military superiority. Ashbrook attacked Nixon for breaking most of his campaign promises to his party and his

²⁸Ibid, 5.

²⁹Ibid, 6

³⁰Ibid, 7-9.

refusing to stand for conservative principles. In Ashbrook's view, Nixon put "liberal policies in the verbal trappings of conservatism."³¹ Ashbrook urged Nixon to abandon détente and regain strategic superiority over the Soviets, despite the obstacles placed by the Democratic Congress. The times called for new vigilance from the West, not compromise.

Ashbrook supported the administration's Vietnamization policy, but added that détente aided North Vietnam's war effort. Trade deals with China and the USSR, a selling point for détente, undermined the American effort, since American truck firms built trucks in the USSR, which eventually ended up in North Vietnam. According to Ashbrook, Nixon's policies benefited America's enemies more, which presented a greater threat in the future. The address ended with a plea that Nixon show more attention to America's allies and all the states resisting communism aggression.³²

Conservatives deemed Nixon's visit to China a cold war defeat. Ashbrook maintained that Nixon had undermined all anti-Communists movements in the world. Nixon had "handed the communists a monumental victory, gratuitously, and with barely a sign of struggle."³³ The right wing, with their loyalty to Taiwan, preferred to recognize the nationalists as the legitimate government of China. At some point in the future, the United States had to recognize China, whether they liked it or not. A new relationship with China served the interests of both nations, but if the distance continued, the chance of conflict increased. A bitter pill for the right to swallow, they had no other choice.

³¹Congress, House of Representatives, Representative John Ashbrook, "The First 1,000 Days: One Legislator's Viewpoint," 92nd Cong., 1st sess. Congressional Record 117, (15 December 1971): 47,230.

³²Ibid, 47,231.

³³Ibid, 47,232.

Ashbrook also questioned Nixon's conservative principles stating that Nixon had "nearly decapitated American conservatism" and instead moved on a moderate course. The reluctance of other conservative leaders to criticize Nixon, according to Ashbrook, showed a lapse of judgment on their part. Ashbrook noted the growing number of Americans who defined themselves as conservative as evidence of the collapsing liberal consensus, evident in the 1968 election. Public opinion polls showed a growing disapproval of big government of at least 49 percent. Nixon had squandered a historic opportunity to build a new conservative majority to replace the Democratic New Deal majority with his middle of the road policies. Otherwise, it will "frustrate for years to come the emergence of the conservative majority."³⁴ This pessimism of conservatives in the early 1970s reflected their own concern about the movement's future in the Nixon era: "Now American conservatives must ask themselves not what their role will be in 1972 . . . election but whether . . . they will have any role at all. It has come down to just that."³⁵ Ashbrook's correspondence expressed the way most conservatives stood during the Nixon era.

The Nixon administration did take some measures to stop the Manhattan 12 and Ashbrook. Vice President Agnew met with Buckley and Rusher and tried to convince them not to challenge the White House. Nixon refused to meet with conservatives to discuss their differences, and preferred to discuss them through intermediaries. Nixon vetoed the Child Development Act, a social program for young single mothers that conservatives opposed, but that gesture failed to assuage the Ashbrook movement. Another deal was a promise to keep Vice President Agnew on the ticket. Nixon made no

³⁴Ibid, 47,234.

³⁵John Ashbrook, "Those Rumbblings on Mr. Nixon's Right," *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 1971.

compromises on foreign policy, the one issue that drove the Ashbrook campaign.

Compromises on domestic policy failed to sway the right wing anger at the administration.³⁶

Ashbrook formally announced his candidacy on 29 December 1971 in Washington. The core of Ashbrook's statement attacked détente, and some aspects of domestic policy. The speech alluded to Nixon's failure to end budget deficits, stem the growth of the federal bureaucracy, and the welfare reform plan. Ashbrook questioned the merits of détente, and appealed to all conservatives to stand for their principles, regardless of the consequences. On foreign policy, Ashbrook gave an extended statement of his position:

In foreign affairs, the principal impact of the President's Cold War conduct has been to confirm and deepen the illusion of detente. This is being done in direct defiance on his statements across the years and many specific pledges made when running for the presidency three years ago and at the very same time when the Soviet Union and Red China are increasing their aggressive activities throughout the world. We have seen him lead the triumphant charge of the Red Chinese into the United Nations. We have seen our ally of thirty years, Nationalist China, cynically expelled from the United Nations. Most disturbing of all, his failure to exert the necessary presidential leadership has endangered our national security. Our military posture has deteriorated to a point where seven members of the President's own blue-ribbon panel warned, and I quote directly: "It is not so much that in the seventies neither the vital interests of the United States nor the lives and freedoms of its citizens will be secure." End of quote. This grave warning has apparently been ignored.³⁷

Ashbrook ended the speech by appealing to all frustrated conservatives to remind Nixon "of the solemn promises he made during that campaign and the very deep concerns of the people who put him there in the White House in the first place." The speech ended with a promise to restore the "promise and hope" of the 1968 campaign.

³⁶Moser, *Promise and Hope*, 8.

³⁷John Ashbrook, Presidential Nomination Speech, December 29, 1971, John M. Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs Archival Collections, Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio.

Ashbrook offered to abandon his candidacy if Nixon changed the direction of his policies, but carried it on despite the administration's efforts to stop him through intermediaries. No record exists of a meeting between Nixon and Ashbrook, although Agnew did meet with the Manhattan 12. Prominent right wing Republicans refused to endorse Ashbrook, and offered no financial or moral support. The last thing the GOP wanted was a split with a Republican in the White House. The challenge was one of principle, not opportunism.³⁸

Conservatives knew the Ashbrook campaign had little chance of success, but they also believed their grievances deserved a hearing. Burnham provided the best reason for the Ashbrook campaign: "However things turn out in percentage terms, I continue to believe that [Ashbrook's] running is a necessary operation both from the point of view of the conservative constituency and for the historical moral record."³⁹ The key phrase, "for the historical moral record," meant the movement stuck to its principles even with a Republican in office. The comment also revealed the symbiotic relationship between Nixon and the right: Nixon needed their support, and they in turn needed Nixon. In 1972, only eight years after the defeat of Goldwater, a conservative candidate lacked appeal.

William F. Buckley gave Ashbrook a ringing endorsement. Buckley described Ashbrook as "one of an exceedingly rare breed in political life: a man of principle and of skill and experience in practical politics." Buckley went on to praise Ashbrook in a subtle jibe at Nixon, "He [Ashbrook] shows the kind of political courage by which one distinguishes between the automatons who represent us in Washington and those special

³⁸Marjorie Hunter, "Ashbrook Enters Presidency Race," *New York Times*, 29 Dec 1971.

³⁹Smant, How Great the Triumph, 112.

others who are human beings endowed with mind and an active conscience.”⁴⁰

Conservatives respected idealists in politics, and frowned upon Nixon’s pragmatism that put his personal power above the party.

The White House ignored the Ashbrook campaign, and dismissed him as an extremist. One aide said Nixon was, “surprised at Ashbrook’s candidacy.” The aide added that Ashbrook was “a nuisance and a bother more than anything else,” and that only he only represented the opinions of “intellectual ideologues.” Nixon’s inner circle did fear the consequences if Ashbrook did well in the New Hampshire primary and forced them to devote time and effort on the primary campaign. At one point, they considered sending Republicans to New Hampshire to rebut Ashbrook.⁴¹

How did the Republican Party react to the Ashbrook challenge? Prominent Republicans hesitated to criticize Nixon. Ronald Reagan, governor of California, personally endorsed Nixon, and chided Ashbrook with the quip, “the party’s got a big enough umbrella to keep all these people within it.”⁴² Barry Goldwater, despite his own reservations about Nixon, rebuked Ashbrook and called his challenge a “threat to the entire party, the entire country, the entire free world and freedom itself.”⁴³ This must have been especially hurtful since Ashbrook worked tirelessly to insure Goldwater’s 1964 nomination. Republicans closed ranks around Nixon, despite their reservations about détente.⁴⁴

Ashbrook also addressed the objections of conservatives to his campaign and believed they were reluctant to challenge the White House out of fear. To a constituent,

⁴⁰William F. Buckley, “Ashbrook for President,” *National Review*, January 21, 1972.

⁴¹James M. Naughton, “White House Discounts Bid by Ashbrook,” *New York Times*, Jan 2 1972.

⁴²Moser, *Promise and Hope*, 11.

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Ibid, 12-13.

Ashbrook wrote that most conservatives agreed with him, “but they don’t think I should be saying it . . . This is why the public does not trust us. I did not get into public service seeking a soft and protected position.” Ashbrook accused other Republicans of supporting Nixon, who ignored their advice and demanded total loyalty. Conservatives are “right on most issues, but this administration now acts as if we have been wrong all along.”⁴⁵

Why did Ashbrook decide to challenge Nixon? According to his personal correspondence, he believed Nixon had veered away from his past conservatism. Ashbrook called upon all conservatives to reassert their beliefs: “Only by those who truly believe in the historical mandate that our party adheres to its principles and insisting that our party leaders are accountable to us to promote these principles can we ever hope to become a majority party.”⁴⁶ Ashbrook and the Manhattan 12 wanted to influence Nixon, not to overthrow the administration. Nevertheless, in 1972 such a diffuse, misguided approach made any such effort futile in the end.

Did Ashbrook want to split the Republican Party? Did he consider leaving the party? Ashbrook believed the future of the conservative movement rested with the Republican Party. Some charged Ashbrook of being a right wing ideologue. Ashbrook responded, “I certainly do not believe that a party should have a narrow philosophy. At the same time I totally reject the concept that it should be without any philosophy . . . I have always felt a party should enunciate principles and work for them”⁴⁷ It is wrong to write off Ashbrook’s campaign as a “token” challenge. Ashbrook did not represent right wing extremism, but expressed the conservative movement’s discontent with Nixon. The

⁴⁵John Ashbrook to Ray Palmer, 20 January 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

⁴⁶John Ashbrook to Peter O’Donnell, 7 January 1972, Ashbrook Collection

⁴⁷John Ashbrook to Lionel Crocker, 19 January 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

administration repeatedly underestimated their influence, and expected their full support, without protest.

Another Republican, Paul McCloskey (1927-), a congressional representative from California, also challenged Nixon for the 1972 nomination. McCloskey, unlike Ashbrook, campaigned on one issue: the Vietnam War. Unlike Ashbrook, McCloskey had no ties to the conservative movement and or to any constituency in the party. McCloskey attacked Nixon for failing to end the war. It is ironic that Ashbrook supported Nixon's Vietnam policy, his weakest point, but campaigned against Nixon's strongest issue, détente. Historically, the Ashbrook campaign is more significant, since it attacked the entire basis of the Nixon presidency, and echoed the criticisms that came later.⁴⁸

How did Ashbrook conduct his campaign? Ashbrook's private correspondence from the campaign reveals much about his mind set. Ashbrook laid his goals to a correspondent: "to present in the most positive manner possible a serious candidacy in the Republican primaries, eliciting hopefully a positive response." and "to keep pressure of the highest degree on the Administration to induce Nixon to take proper courses of action."⁴⁹ Ashbrook held little chance of gaining the Republican nomination, but did believe the campaign might compel Nixon to respect the anti-communists in the party and to take a harder line on defense.

The Ashbrook candidacy received endorsements from National Review and Human Events, which agreed with its policies. National Review listed five specific grievances against the Nixon administration. Other media outlets gave the campaign a

⁴⁸Moser, Promise and Hope, 7-8.

⁴⁹John Ashbrook to Peter O'Donnell, 7 January 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

passing interest. The Wall Street Journal referred to Ashbrook as “Don Quixote,” and questioned his critique of détente, which had stimulated international trade. As Ashbrook’s star quickly faded in the primary campaign, however, the conservative leadership fell in line with Nixon.⁵⁰

On 3 January 1972, Ashbrook began to campaign in New Hampshire. An unknown congressman from Ohio, Ashbrook lacked the name recognition to pose a serious challenge. Financial and organizational problems also plagued the campaign, as it relied on private contributions. Nevertheless, Ashbrook campaigned all over the state and conducted television and radio interviews to spread his message. The YAF (Young Americans for Freedom), an organization of mostly college students who advocated conservative principles opposed Nixon, and they worked for the Ashbrook campaign. In February, Buckley, a friend of Nixon’s, took to the stump for Ashbrook, which symbolized the conservative movement’s discontent with the administration. Ashbrook’s goal was to gather more votes than McCloskey, but in the end only received 10% to McCloskey’s 19% and Nixon’s 76%⁵¹

Despite the disappointing show in New Hampshire, Ashbrook continued to challenge Nixon in Florida and California, states with substantial conservative voting blocs. Goldwater and other Republican heavyweights campaigned for Nixon in those states, and made Ashbrook’s message sound foolish. Ashbrook displayed his frustration to a supporter, with “Reagan and Goldwater coming to the state in support of Nixon, it is mighty tough to get across the idea Nixon is not conservative.”⁵² Ashbrook only

⁵⁰Moser, Promise and Hope, 14-15.

⁵¹Ibid, 18. The final results of the 1972 New Hampshire Primary went as follows, Nixon, 76%, McCloskey, 19 %, and Ashbrook 10%. Ashbrook played an active role in the founding of YAF.

⁵²John Ashbrook to Neil McCaffery, 18 April 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

gathered ten percent of the Republican voters in those states. In June, he officially ended the campaign. At the Republican convention in August, Ashbrook endorsed Nixon.

The message of the campaign, that détente endangered national security, sounded extremist to most voters. In 1972, neither party debated foreign policy, with the exception of Vietnam. This only added further complications to the conservative position, since they portrayed Nixon as an appeaser. Even Ashbrook supported Nixon on the war: “He had brought about a reversal of our previous policies of escalation and I believe he is doing all he realistically can to bring about a settlement to this war.”⁵³ Anti-communism, as an idea in American politics, lacked resonance in 1972. Vietnam made many Americans skeptical on the communist threat and anyone who opposed détente appear as being stuck in the past. The conservative movement, however, stayed true to their anti-communist principles.

Ashbrook, like many on the right in the 1970s, often expressed anxiety about the movement’s future. Nixon, despite his electoral success, seemed intent to put the party on a course away from traditional conservatism. Ashbrook lamented the decline of conservatism in the party after the 1964 Goldwater campaign. If conservatives chose to assert their principles even with a Republican president, they “can be effective in 1972, 1976 and thereafter if we can develop it now. If we don’t, we will have little or no political effect on the course of our party.” If they failed to assert their principles, “it will cease to be an effective deterrent to the economic and military decline which is rapidly looking in as a way of life.”⁵⁴ The Ashbrook campaign began an intense debate on détente that persisted the entire decade.

⁵³John Ashbrook to Mrs. Louis G. Baly, 16 May 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

⁵⁴John Ashbrook to Peter O’Donnell, 7 January 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

After Nixon won a landslide victory over George McGovern (1922-), the right stayed hopeful about the future. Although conservatives lacked leadership in Congress, they continued to make progress at the local level. Ashbrook continued to equate détente with appeasement, “We are in an era of appeasement . . . it is similar to Churchill’s struggles in the thirties.” On the positive side, Ashbrook wrote, “All the time this is happening, the country is becoming more conservative. What we lack is leadership and I agree that an effective grassroots organization could reverse the tide.”⁵⁵ Reagan had potential to gain a wider following in the future to challenge the moderates. A supporter of Ashbrook later wrote that he “preserved the conscience of the conservative movement.”⁵⁶

Nixon’s victory over George McGovern, by the largest margin in American history, masked the bitterness of many in the party towards the administration. They resented Nixon for not helping other Republican candidates, and focusing on his own reelection. In addition, Nixon accumulated over \$40 million for his reelection and refused to spread the wealth to other Republicans. Congressional Republicans also resented Nixon for his lack of interest in their campaigns. Nixon’s failure to gain a consensus within his party on many issues, including détente, would cost him when his administration came under attack.⁵⁷

For the 1976 election, Nixon planned to build a new majority of the center to isolate the radical wings in both parties. Many conservative Democrats disliked the social policies of the party that favored abortion and legalizing drugs. The working class, stalwart Democratic voters, also began to resent the party’s leftward direction. In 1972,

⁵⁵John Ashbrook to Robert E. Dresser, 17 July 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

⁵⁶Moser, Promise and Hope, 22-24.

⁵⁷Ibid, 241-243.

the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters endorsed Nixon, a sign of the changing political realignment. Nixon cultivated his Secretary of the Treasury, John Connally (1917-1993) as his probable successor and leader of the new centrist alliance. While the Watergate scandal ended this plan, it signifies that Nixon planned to change the Republican Party.⁵⁸

The postwar conservatives changed the direction of American politics, first evident with Goldwater's 1964 campaign, and then with Reagan's victory in 1980. The Nixon years proved difficult for the conservatives, largely due to détente. In the postwar era, they developed an intellectual approach to foreign policy quite different from those of Nixon. Although their minor revolt with John Ashbrook in 1972 failed, it set in place a critique against détente that gained influence later in the decade.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 245-246.

V – A GROWING ALLIANCE AGAINST DÉTENTE, 1973-1974

President Richard Nixon's second term (1973-1974) altered the course of American political and diplomatic history. The Watergate scandal, which unmasked the illegal activities of the administration, dominated the last two years of the Nixon administration, and forced Nixon to resign. The scandal also played a significant role in ending détente. Watergate left Nixon and Kissinger's grand design exposed to questions that eluded them in the first term. A coalition formed against détente that gained influence in the midst of the scandal. Neoconservatism, an intellectual movement that took root in the 1970s from the American political left, joined the conservative movement in their opposition to the Nixon-Kissinger stratagem. Henry 'Scoop' Jackson (1912-1983), a Democratic Senator from Washington, like John Ashbrook on the Republican right, took a stand against the administration. Like most conservatives, they questioned the policy from a moral and strategic perspective that emphasized human rights. Nixon's realist diplomacy angered the idealists, but Watergate allowed the quiet enemies of the administration to gain a wider hearing. A confluence of events and trends contributed to détente's decline: the anti-communist alliance between the conservatives and neoconservatives, the erosion of popularity due to Watergate, and Nixon's failure to engage the public.

Nixon set an ambitious agenda for the second term in domestic and foreign affairs. Nixon named his domestic agenda the "Second American Revolution." In short, Nixon intended to build a new Republican majority from the silent center. Unlike the conservatives, who wanted to dismantle the whole welfare state, Nixon wanted to streamline the system. Watergate prevented these plans from going beyond the planning

stage. In 1973, Democrats controlled both houses of congress, and many fundamental conservatives were displeased with Nixon's reformist brand of conservatism, particularly, détente.¹

Détente reached its high point in 1973-74, largely on momentum from the important breakthroughs of the first term. In August 1973, Nixon appointed as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who emerged as the most popular member in the Nixon administration, immune from the scandal. The 23 January 1973 cease-fire to the Vietnam War, reached after four years of endless negotiations, ended America's involvement in the war, allowing the administration to focus on other areas. Talks proceeded with the Soviet Union on a SALT II agreement to place further limitations on each side's nuclear arsenal. The two sides also agreed to lift travel restrictions and cultural exchanges. Development continued in the opening of relations with China with the eventual goal of normalization of relations. Dealings with Western European allies and the future of NATO required reevaluation. Did the Atlantic alliance have a place in the wake of European integration and American rapprochement with the Soviets? The Middle East, however, more than any other region, drove the anti-détente forces. Despite the corrosive effect of Watergate, at the time of Nixon's resignation his foreign policy had a fifty-four percent approval rating.²

Watergate dominated Nixon's second term and did much to wreck détente. While any detailed appraisal of Watergate is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is necessary to give background details. The "under siege" mentality of the Nixon administration, which

¹Stephen Ambrose, Nixon Volume. 3: The Ruin and Recovery of a Politician, 1973-1990 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 12-14.

²Raymond Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), 360-366.

saw enemies in every shadow, led them to commit illegal acts. This led to a mania in controlling information, especially in the realm of diplomacy. Nixon also abused the powers of the presidency in the reelection campaign, by using various surveillance techniques on his rivals. The 17 June 1972 break in at Democratic headquarters, after months of investigation, had links to the White House. While it remains unclear as to who ordered the break-in, the Nixon White House did everything possible to cover up the details. Nixon won reelection despite public knowledge of Watergate, but the scandal eventually ended Nixon's presidency.³

The administration's downfall began on 7 February 1973 when the Senate elected a committee to investigate the Watergate affair. The investigation revealed the abuse of power within the administration that reached the highest levels. By the end of April, Nixon's top aides, H.R. Haldeman (1926-1993) and John Ehrlichman (1925-1999), revealed the depth of the scandal. In June, the committee learned of the taping system used by Nixon, and from that point, Watergate became a struggle to secure the tapes. Nixon's refusal to run them over because of executive privilege led to calls for impeachment and resignation. After months of legal rambling, that took a serious toll on Nixon, the Supreme Court forced Nixon to release the tapes that proved his complicity in the cover up. On 9 August 1974, Nixon became the first president to resign the office.⁴

The impact of Watergate on the final two years of Nixon's presidency undermined détente. External events also contributed to the end of détente, such as the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and superpower confrontation that followed. Watergate also weakened Nixon's ability to answer the critics of détente, who gained influence because

³Ibid, 269-297.

⁴Ibid.

of the strength of their ethical arguments, especially when Watergate exposed the questionable morality of the Nixon White House. The combined effect of the anti-détente forces and the weakened state of the administration due to Watergate helped end the policy's popularity. The neoconservative arguments resonated more with the public than the conservative movement's emphasis on opaque arms control issues.⁵

As Watergate engulfed Nixon's second term, the conservatives continued to abandon the president. Watergate exacerbated their sense of betrayal. Some called for Nixon's resignation in 1974 to make way for Vice President Ford, a true conservative in their view. The end arrived in August 1974 when Barry Goldwater and a group of conservative congressmen personally informed Nixon they had to suspend their support after the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to release the tapes. In the first five years of his presidency, Nixon managed to blunt the criticism from the right. When Nixon needed their support the most, they chose to abandon him in favor of the Constitution.⁶

Watergate only confirmed the right's fears about Nixon. They hated to watch the administration self destruct, but simultaneously felt betrayed at the man they supported, despite their reservation. Ashbrook's correspondence revealed a concern about the scandal's affect on the Republican Party: "The Republican Party has never been the cause of Richard Nixon's problems but at this point he is very definitely a source of major problems to the Republican Party. Our first concern must be for the country and the party, not for any individual."⁷ While Ashbrook did not support the impeachment of

⁵Ibid, 455.

⁶Daniel Kelly, *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 338-34; Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 1072-1073. The account of this meeting Nixon's memoir is bitter, after Goldwater and the Republican leadership informed they planned to vote for impeachment, Nixon wrote his decision to resign was "irrevocable."

⁷John Ashbrook to A.A. McDevitt November 30, 1973, Ashbrook Collection.

Nixon, he went along with the party's decision not to call for resignation. Ashbrook linked Watergate to Nixon's inability to allow disunity, "Richard Nixon's greatest fault is considering personal loyalty the highest badge of government service. This is nonsense. When you feel this way you place the man above everything else and this is precisely what happened in Watergate."⁸ Despite Nixon's historical achievements in arms control and international relations, the undemocratic methods of the administration produced a political disaster with Watergate. The decline of détente coincided with Watergate, with conversion of conservatives with the neoconservative movement.

Neoconservatism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, partly in reaction to the counterculture. Neoconservatives resented the New Left, whom they believed had hijacked the Democratic Party with the McGovern campaign. Their disregard of American institutions and foreign policy, which blamed the United States for starting the cold war, drove many liberal anti-communists out of the Democratic Party. Like Kissinger, they feared the Vietnam War ended the American people's will to defeat communism. Vietnam, according to the New Left position, had destroyed the moral authority of the United States to lead the world.⁹

In the 1970s, the neoconservatives developed a different conception of conservatism. They were more open to the role of government in the modern era, and believed that it was not the cause of every problem. History provided the best guide to solving new political problems. The leaders they admired most from American history, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt were their historical models because they all preserved democracy through times of turmoil, and yet remained

⁸John Ashbrook to Mr. Mrs. Chester Jones, May 12, 1973, Ashbrook Collection.

⁹Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Neoconservatism as a Response to Counter-Culture," in The Neocon Reader, ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 235-240.

true to the ideas of the Constitution. In their view, democracy developed organically, with an ability to evolve with changing times. As long as government did not veer from the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, neoconservatives believed freedom remained secure.¹⁰

The cold war shaped the neoconservative foreign policy outlook, one based on morality and power. Like the conservatives in the 1970s, they saw the Soviet Union as a great threat, at a vulnerable point in history. They were nationalistic in their outlook and distrusted the agenda of the United Nations, which in their view often worked against the United States. Above all, they saw the need for American to stay aware of Soviet aggression, evident in the expansion in the Middle East and Africa. Détente, to the neoconservatives, entailed a policy of appeasement at a pivotal point in history, akin to the 1930s.¹¹

Norman Podhoretz (1930-), editor of Commentary, and leading intellectual in the neoconservative movement, developed an antagonistic position on détente. Podhoretz described the Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy was one of “withdrawal, “retrenchment”, and “disengagement”, at a time when the United States seemed unsure of its role in the world and how to use its power. The Nixon Doctrine and the recognition of nuclear parity with the Soviets, legitimized in the SALT I treaty, solidified the loss of confidence in policymakers. Like the orthodox conservatives, they opposed Nixon’s realist approach to international relations.¹²

¹⁰Irving Kristol, “The Neoconservative Persuasion: What it was, and What it is,” in The Neo Con Reader ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 33-35.

¹¹Ibid, 35-37.

¹²Norman Podhoretz, “Neoconservatism and Détente,” in Keeping the Tablets: Modern American Conservative Thought, ed. William F. Buckley and Charles R. Kessler (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 387-390.

The neoconservatives blamed Kissinger for engineering America's geopolitical decline. American opposition to the Vietnam War had convinced Kissinger that the country "had suffered a failure of nerve and no longer had the will or the stomach to pursue a serious strategy of containment," according to Podhoeretz.¹³ In his historical writings, Kissinger wrote at length about the Nineteenth Century Austrian Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859). Kissinger admired Metternich for restoring order to European diplomacy in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Podhoeretz ascertained that Kissinger saw 1970s America in an analogous situation. Like the conservative intellectuals, Podhoeretz and the neoconservatives favored a diplomacy that challenged the Soviets on every front. They wanted democracy to spread in all regions, and not accept a status quo global balance of power, with nation's hostile to American ideals. Overall, they reasoned that détente amounted to disaster, in agreement with the conservative movement.

The October 1973 Yom Kippur War became a defining moment for the neoconservatives, who concluded the administration had abandoned Israel. The response of the administration created a rift between Nixon and the neoconservatives. Neoconservatives concluded the administration provided inadequate support for Israel. On October 6, the Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel triggered a superpower confrontation that put détente to the test. Nixon decided to give logistical support to Israel to prevent their defeat. After the Soviets threatened to intervene for Egypt, Kissinger placed U.S. forces on nuclear alert, as a warning to the Soviets. The October 25 cease-fire allowed Kissinger to act as the honest broker between Israel and Egypt. The shuttle diplomacy of Kissinger improved U.S.-Egyptian relations and bolstered

¹³Ibid, 390.

American influence in the region. Neoconservatives, however, saw the cease-fire agreement as convincing proof that Nixon placed détente above the security of Israel, a close ally. Detractors of détente agreed that the world's democracies had to show a united front, which took precedence over negotiating deals with enemies.¹⁴

In addition to Middle East politics, human rights issues also emerged as a major issue for the neoconservatives. Neoconservatives believed that détente did very little to advance American interests, except to recognize the USSR as part of a balance of power when their Marxist ideology made that impossible. The Nixon-Kissinger policy also ignored the rampant human rights violations in the Soviet empire.¹⁵ In December 1973, the House of Representative denied Most Favored Nations (MFN) status to the Soviets. The administration's reluctance to make human rights a foreign policy issue seemed immoral, and congress turned against détente. Linking trade deals with emigration policy is the first occurrence of cooperation between the anti-détente forces.¹⁶

John Ashbrook addressed Soviet human rights abuses in 1971 before it entered the public debate two years later. On 29 June 1971, Ashbrook delivered a speech to the House of Representatives on religious persecution in the USSR. The speech alluded to the anti-Zionist literature published by Soviet intellectuals. Ashbrook called on all Christians to lobby the administration on the issue. This was not a partisan issue

¹⁴Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 455.

¹⁵John Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1992, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 22.

¹⁶Nixon, RN, 875. Nixon made note of this in memoirs: "a fusion of forces from opposite ends of the political spectrum had resulted in a curious coalition. Kissinger later described it as a rare convergence, like an eclipse of the sun. On the one side the liberals and the American Zionists had decided that now was the time to challenge the Soviet Union's highly restrictive emigration policies, particularly with respect to Soviet Jews. On the other side were the conservatives, who had traditionally opposed détente because it challenged their ideological opposition to contacts with communist countries. My request in April 1973 for congressional authority to grant most-favored-nation trade status to the Soviet Union became the rallying point for both groups."

according to Ashbrook, “The plight of the Jew is, or ought to be, the active concern of conservative and liberal Christians alike for the very basic reason that religious persecution is above philosophical politics.” The speech pressed the administration to cut off all trade with the Soviet Union as the only way to combat the problem and more importantly, illustrated the conservative’s concern with human rights issues.¹⁷

Senator Henry Jackson became the most persistent critic of détente, on strategic and moralistic grounds, who influenced the public debate. Jackson reasoned that arms control treaties did not serve American interests when the Soviets undermined the influence of the United States at every opportunity. The SALT I agreements distressed Jackson, who believed they threatened the United States, in recognizing the quantitative superiority of the Russians. Jackson called on the administration to make the Soviets lift their emigration restrictions and allow free speech. It was also America’s responsibility to alert the world about the widespread repression in the Soviet Union. The Jackson critique stemmed from that basis. If serious detente were to proceed, the United States needed to include demands on human rights. The Soviets had to make serious concessions on human rights in return for trade agreements. In addition, Jackson believed that trade deals only propped up a failed economic system in the Soviet Union. In Jackson’s view, the realist approach of Nixon and Kissinger ignored traditional American ideas on democracy, since the United States had to combine realism and ideology in its diplomacy.¹⁸

Jackson’s insistence on attacking the moral basis of detente bewildered the administration. Those who claimed that détente was amoral left Nixon and Kissinger at a

¹⁷Congress, House of Representatives, Representative John Ashbrook, “Soviet Anti-Semitism” , 91nd Cong., 1st sess. Congressional Record 117, (29 June 1971): 22,362.

¹⁸Kaufman, Henry Jackson, 4, 248-252.

loss. They were not used to defending their policy under congressional scrutiny. Other critics of détente united behind Jackson, the most eloquent and persuasive critic. Anti-communists united behind the Jackson-Vanik amendment which attached Jewish emigration clauses to any arms control agreement. Kissinger's reluctance to engage the public to explain his policies added ammunition to his detractors. Jackson did share the concerns of many conservatives regarding détente, since his approach gave the anti-détente factions the moral high ground. The willingness of the conservatives to join forces with Jackson and the neoconservative viewpoint reveals their commitment to anti-communism.¹⁹

Kissinger argued that Jackson's determination to add emigration clauses to treaties did little to help the Soviet Jews and put détente at risk. The larger issue of arms control took precedence over all issues, and making demands on the internal affairs of other nations had no place in diplomacy. Kissinger maintained détente allowed the contradictions and internal flaws in the Soviet system to decline through time, which required patience. Demands on human rights made them less willing to negotiate. Before Jackson made emigration an issue, Kissinger had worked behind the scenes to lift quotas on Soviet emigration policy, without endangering negotiations. No issue better illustrates the conflict between ideas and realism that plagued the Nixon administration. Like the anti-Communists in the conservative movement, the neoconservatives despised the idea of coexistence with the communists.²⁰

The shared anti-communism of both conservative movements, however, masked

¹⁹Noam Kochavi, "Insights Abandoned, Flexibility Lost: Kissinger, Soviet Jewish Emigration, and the Demise of Détente," *Diplomatic History* 29 no. 3 (2005): 503-523.

²⁰Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 986-995.

many fundamental differences. A major difference was regional. The Eastern, urban neoconservatives rarely mixed with the traditional conservatives from the South and Midwest. Christianity influenced the conservative movement, while the neoconservative inclined toward secularism. Traditional conservatives resented the neoconservative faith in big government, which offended their ideology.²¹ They also approached anti-communism from different angles: the traditional right for communism's hostility to Christian traditions, the neoconservative for communism's opposition to personal freedom. Both believed in the dignity of the individual egalitarianism. Neoconservative intellectuals saw themselves as the standards bearers of "liberal-democratic modernity," the form of civilization envisioned by the Constitution. They accused the traditional conservative of having a hierarchal, medieval world view that valued order above all else. Both stem from the key beliefs of western civilization, directly opposed to Marxism.²² Major differences did exist between the two conservative movements.

Although an alliance between the conservative and neoconservatives did not materialize until the 1980s, many on both sides saw the advantages of an alliance. National Review looked with approval to the rightward shift of Commentary and believed they "could become important allies." The detrimental effect Watergate had on conservatism drew them together. With the growth of Soviet influence in Africa and Latin America and the paralysis of the American political system, they both believed that the country had to reassess its approach to world affairs. The times called for new leadership to reassert American values.²³

²¹Ehrman, Rise of Neoconservatism, 194.

²²Dan Himmelfarb, "Conservative Splits," in Conservatism in America: A Reader, ed. Gregory Schneider (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 383-392.

²³Ibid, 174.

The realist philosophy of Nixon and Kissinger inevitably disturbed the anti-communist strain in American politics, which stayed intact in the post-Vietnam years. Both the conservative challenge from John Ashbrook in the 1972 campaign and the birth of neoconservatism attest to the resilience of anti-communism in American politics. Nixon had a historic opportunity to build on the accomplishments of the first term, which changed the course of the cold war. The administration's distrust of the media and the bureaucracy compelled them to make policy from the White House, which saw its share of success, but worked against them in the end. Their clandestine methods in making decisions only gave ammunition to their critics, who were better equipped to sway public opinion. An example is Jackson's use of the Jewish emigration issue, as a moral argument against détente that swayed the public. Instead of engaging the public, the administration chose to isolate themselves, much to their detriment.²⁴

National Review expressed relief and remorse at Nixon's resignation. The journal called on Nixon to stand trial for his crimes to clear his name. Nixon's diplomacy, which they relentlessly criticized for almost the entire presidency, in their view left a mixed legacy. National Review surmised that Nixon had achieved neither peace nor honor in Vietnam, since he failed to defeat North Vietnam. The editors believed that SALT accomplished little except to recognize the Soviets as a strategic equal who had quantitative superiority in nuclear weapons. The reluctance of the Soviets to restrain their expansion into Africa and Asia revealed the failure of détente. In the end, the conservative journal concluded, "Nixon was not a great leader."²⁵

Détente struggled to survive after the resignation of Nixon. After Watergate, the

²⁴Michael H. Hunt, Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 188.

²⁵William F. Buckley, "Reflections on the Resignation", National Review, August 30 1974.

policy came under increasing attack. American foreign policy lacked focus for the rest of the decade. As William Hyland, a former NSC aide to Kissinger, wrote, “only a strong president and a strong policy could have sustained the ambitious policy of Nixon and Kissinger. A weakened presidency could not fend off the assaults on a policy that depended on the president’s ability to offer carrots and threaten sticks.”²⁶ Without Watergate, détente may well have continued. The scandal also caused world leaders to lose confidence in Nixon’s ability to carry through agreements. To protect himself from Democratic opposition to domestic programs, Nixon toned down the rhetoric of détente to win over the conservative base. In the end, one can conclude that Watergate benefited the anti-détente factions.

Nixon’s legacy in the conservative movement is dubious, largely due to his foreign policy. Nixon modeled his policies in the tradition of the progressive conservatism of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, whose portraits hung in the Oval Office. The middle of the road politics and détente of Nixon cost him support from the conservatives. Before Watergate entered the political lexicon, most conservatives already had qualms about the Nixon presidency. While they resented the left wing delight at Nixon’s downfall, the right also saw little to admire in the man. Conservatives decided not to stake their reputations on fighting for Nixon’s political survival, and chose to abandon him to his fate.²⁷

Kissinger wrote extensively on his years in office. In Diplomacy, a history of international relations, he put the Nixon’s foreign policy in historic perspective.

Kissinger argued triangular diplomacy led to major breakthroughs in the seventies: the

²⁶William G. Hyland, Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan (New York: Random House, 1987), 11.

²⁷David Greenberg, Nixon’s Shadow: A History of an Image (New York: Norton, 2003), 5-8

accord on Berlin, which settled that Cold War flashpoint, a cease-fire in Vietnam, the expulsion of the Soviets from the Middle East through shuttle diplomacy, the start of peace talks between Arabs and the Israelis, and European Security Conference in Helsinki. Shuttle diplomacy allowed the United States to broker the Middle East peace process without Soviet interference. The European Security Council settled many outstanding issues between Western and Eastern Europe. As a result, “linkage was operating with a vengeance.” Some of these breakthroughs involved help from European allies, but détente did create an atmosphere for the positive things to happen.²⁸

The Nixon-Kissinger record in areas outside of great power diplomacy leaves a varied legacy, beyond the scope of this work. Their mishandling of regional disputes also contributed to the decline of détente. Many reasons account for this, mostly due to the central role of the NSC, which lacked the personnel to give every region close attention. Relations with Western European allies suffered in the Nixon years. In 1973, Kissinger pledged to reinvigorate the Trans- Atlantic relationship received a cool response from the Europeans. As many historians have noted, Nixon and Kissinger saw regional disputes only through the prism of the cold war. They gave little regard to the local issues involved.²⁹

Why did Kissinger, Nixon, and other advocates of détente fail to anticipate the USSR’s collapse in the next decade? The anti-détente forces disliked the doubt about America’s future implicit in Nixon’s foreign policy. This glumness seemed to assume that America’s decline had forced it to back down to totalitarian governments. One

²⁸Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 733.

²⁹Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 127; James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1981), 98-99; Jussi Hanhamaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), xiii-xxii.

historian cited three reasons for Kissinger's pessimistic outlook on foreign affairs. The dreary experience of recent history, the carnage of the Second World War and the horrors of the atomic age convinced him that power always trumped ideas in diplomacy.

Kissinger was blind to the information revolution, which changed the global economy to the benefit of the west, and its resulting technological superiority over the east. Despite the stagflation that plagued the American economy in the 1960s and 1970s, the American economy weathered the crisis and avoided a major disaster. Conservatives, however, never lost faith in the survival of the United States, and refused to accept a retreat before the Soviets. Despite all their pessimism about the state of affairs, they all remained optimistic about the persistence of democracy.³⁰

The 1980 election of Ronald Reagan marked a watershed moment for the conservative movement. As leaders in the conservative movement began to write their memoirs, they gave much praise on the 1972 Ashbrook challenge. Ashbrook had the courage to hold the conservative line in the dismal age of Nixon. In 1976, Reagan almost won the Republican nomination from Gerald Ford, and like Ashbrook in 1972, campaigned against détente. Reagan won support from the conservative base, who in the post-Watergate era, were prepared to attack détente. Until that time, Nixon skillfully stifled conservative opposition to his foreign policy. One historian remarked that Ashbrook kept the "counterrevolution alive."³¹

Kissinger addressed the critics of détente in his writings after leaving office, and tried to show why they were wrong. In Kissinger's view, Nixon's pragmatic style of

³⁰John Lewis Gaddis, "Rescuing Choice from Circumstance: The Statecraft of Henry Kissinger," in The Diplomats, 1939-1979, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 587.

³¹Lee Edwards, The Conservative Revolution (New York: Free Press, 199), 172-174.

diplomacy offended the anti-communists, who saw the cold war as a spiritual crusade. Nixon saw the Soviet Union as a geopolitical instead of an ideological threat. Kissinger argued the conservatives had no sense of geopolitics to understand the grand strategy of détente, which was to build a new balance of power. Meanwhile, they gave no credit to Nixon for saving American credibility in Vietnam, a war for anticommunism. Détente allowed the Soviet system collapse without a war with the United States.³²

In his later writings, Kissinger went to great lengths to explain the true accomplishments of his years in power, in answer to his critics past, present, and future. Kissinger's analyses on the conservative detractors to his policies are perceptive, but patronizing. Like Nixon, Kissinger saw the necessity for America to adjust its foreign policy to the changing international situation, "America's nearly total dominance of the world stage was drawing to a close. America's nuclear superiority was eroding, and its economic supremacy was being challenged . . . by Europe and Japan."³³ Kissinger saw the role for America as one of transition from "dominance" to "leadership" in world affairs. If America decided to rearm itself to achieve military dominance over China and the Soviet Union, it would only make the international system more unstable.

Kissinger understood the conservative objections to détente. They saw the Cold War only through the lens of ideology. Kissinger wrote of the right wing: "Being moral absolutists, they distrusted any negotiation with the Soviet Union, viewing compromise with retreat, but conservatives treated a wide-ranging negotiation on political and military issues as abandonment of the moral issue."³⁴ This hit the mark; opponents to détente such as Ashbrook spoke in moral and ideological terms. Kissinger's background in the

³²Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 746.

³³*Ibid.*, 703-704.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 743.

European realpolitik and his refusal to make moral judgments on the internal affairs of other nations troubled conservatives. America's historic mission was to advance freedom and help all living in tyranny.

By the 1970s, anti-communists on the left and right sensed the Cold War had reached a turning point. Despite the American determination to contain the spread of communism, the USSR seemed stronger than ever. Their progress in arms production only scratched the surface. Several events in the early 1970s distressed the right: the trauma of the Vietnam War, Nixon's visit to China, and the rising power of the Soviet Union in the third world, juxtaposed with all the civil conflict in American society. At home, the growth of the federal government, and the immorality they saw in culture, all confirmed their fears of cultural decline. Nixon, in whom they had placed their hopes, proved a disappointment. Influencing Nixon was the pragmatic goal of the Ashbrook campaign, but it also revealed conservative anxiety about the country and their movement's future. Ashbrook expressed fear about the Republican Party: "To be candid, we are in danger of becoming just another democratic party."³⁵

When Nixon took office in 1969, the new administration faced many obstacles, and yet managed to transform the course of the cold war. Détente helped open the Soviet Union to western culture and established an era of unprecedented superpower cooperation. The process of arms control intensified with SALT I, to more substantive arms talks in later decades. The opening of China revolutionized world politics in a way that is clear in the Twenty First century, with the interdependence between both nations. Détente did help open the Iron Curtain to western culture, arms control at least showed both sides were talking, and the lifting of travel restrictions to the Soviet Union signaled

³⁵John Ashbrook to Wain Swanson, January 7, 1972, Ashbrook Collection.

progress. With détente, as crafted by Nixon and Kissinger, the USSR became a normal member of the international system, and no longer an enigmatic, revolutionary power. Their achievements in great power diplomacy, however, remained unfinished.³⁶

Nixon and Kissinger's pragmatic approach to foreign policy marked a shift away from many traditions in American diplomacy. For most of American history, the idea of American Exceptionalism, that America's vision of a free society made it better than other nations, guided diplomats. The lack of ideological zeal of Nixon and Kissinger contrasted with the New Frontier ethos of the Kennedy administration. Nixon moved foreign policy in a positive direction that accepted America's limitations, and to work within those confines, without losing its credibility.³⁷ Many American policymakers let their ideology determine their foreign policy. Nixon and Kissinger brought a new, almost revolutionary, mindset to the cold war that opened to criticism from many angles, made greater in the charged atmosphere of the period.

President Richard Nixon's second term ended before most of its foreign policy goals unfulfilled. It is impossible to ignore the impact of Watergate on ending it, but other factors were involved. Neoconservatives, who opposed the policy on moralistic and strategic grounds, brought human rights as an issue in foreign affairs. Like the conservative movement, they also viewed détente as a sign of decline. The new anti-communist coalition, the effect of Watergate, and the failure of the administration to win public support for détente, all contributed to its end.

³⁶Small, Presidency of Nixon, 117-118.

³⁷Hunt, Ideology and Foreign Policy, 182.

VI - CONCLUSION

Richard Nixon won the 1968 elections with the firm backing of the conservative movement, but gradually lost their support. Nixon's foreign policy accounted for this estrangement with the right. Détente, the policy adopted by Nixon and Kissinger, envisioned the end of the bipolar world and the start of a new global balance of power. The conservative movement's conception of foreign policy during the cold war was one that sought America's military superiority over the Soviet Union. John Ashbrook's 1972 primary campaign against Nixon was a harbinger of the anti-détente coalition. The Watergate scandal allowed them to gain more influence in the second term. The neoconservatives were liberal anti-communist broke ranks from the Democratic Party, and joined the right wing in opposing détente. The origins of the alliance in the Republican Party between the conservative and neoconservative movement were a direct result of Nixon and détente.

Richard Nixon presided over a time of transition in American society and politics. The polarizing effect of Vietnam ended the bipartisan consensus on the cold war. When Nixon entered office, the optimism of the Kennedy years had given way to a new age of cynicism. Meanwhile, the Soviets had achieved nuclear parity with the United States, which ended America's military superiority. The electorate, weary of the social changes of the sixties, elected Nixon by a narrow margin. The conservative movement, confined to a handful of intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, also expanded at the grassroots level. Although Nixon remained a moderate on most issues, the conservatives endorsed Nixon for his past anti-communist reputation.

The goal of Nixon's foreign policy was to build a new balance of power, with America as its fulcrum. Nixon and Kissinger planned to incorporate other regions of the world, mainly Europe and Asia, into a new equilibrium. They also faced the difficult task of ending America's involvement in Vietnam. America's withdrawal from Vietnam, while achieved at a high cost, nevertheless showed their determination not to accept a complete defeat. The most important breakthrough, however, was opening China, allowing the United States to use the Sino-Soviet conflict to their advantage. In a larger sense, it built a lasting trade relationship, and lessened the chance of war. The SALT I agreements with the Soviet Union began the process of ending the arms race and reduced tensions between the superpowers.

Nixon's election in 1968 seemed a great victory for the conservative movement. Nixon's diplomacy, however, affronted them because it recognized the legitimacy of communist nations. Conservatives developed their own conception of cold war diplomacy, which aimed for the destruction of communism, not its containment. Détente did not meet their expectations, and they withdrew their support of Nixon. In 1972, John Ashbrook, with the conservative backing, briefly campaigned against the Nixon presidency. While the popularity of Nixon in 1972 prevented any serious threat to his nomination, it did set the stage for the decline of détente in the second term.

The Watergate scandal crippled Nixon's presidency and contributed to the end of détente. Watergate also allowed a sizable coalition against détente to form between the conservative and neoconservative movements. Although Ashbrook had no association with the neoconservatives, they did share the same attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Senator Henry Jackson brought human rights into foreign policy debates, which clashed

with the administration's reluctance to interfere in other countries internal policies. As the public grew more skeptical of détente, Nixon and Kissinger failed to sway public opinion. Nixon's resignation created a fierce debate within the Republican Party on the cold war. Ronald Reagan, who campaigned against détente in 1976 and 1980, won support from both conservative movements.

Richard Nixon devoted the majority of his attention to world affairs, but little on the objections of the conservative critics of détente. Nixon saw the necessity for talking with communist nations in order to find common ground. Meanwhile, they acted with boldness on several occasions, and never put America's national security at risk. The conservative movement confused the policy as one of appeasement, while others questioned its morality. As the 1970s closed, the two groups adopted Ronald Reagan as their leader, who remained a fervent anti-communist that promised to confront the Soviets. Nixon's realist approach to world affairs met with much success, but it underestimated the influence of ideas in American politics on foreign policy.

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