



# Foreign Policy after Vietnam: From Realism to Idealism and Back Again

[T]he United States will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but . . . America cannot—and will not—conceive *all* plans, design *all* programs, execute *all* the decisions and undertake *all* the defense of the free nations of the world.[Emphases in the original]

PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON

FEBRUARY 18, 1970

[W]e are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear. . . . It is a new world that calls for a new American foreign policy—a policy based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision.

PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER

MAY 22, 1977

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

JUNE 12, 1987

Following the breakdown of the Cold War consensus, seemingly finalized by America's agonizing defeat in Vietnam, succeeding administrations attempted to offer new ideas on foreign policy to replace this shattered worldview. In this chapter, we discuss the different values and beliefs that the Nixon, Carter, and Reagan administrations brought to foreign policy making.

The Nixon administration employed a "power politics" or "realist" approach; the Carter administration employed a "global politics" or "idealist" approach; and the Reagan administration combined realism and idealism by resurrecting the values of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> Although none of these administrations succeeded in creating a new foreign policy consensus (indeed, all met with substantial criticism and resistance), each brought with it a distinct and identifiable worldview to fill the vacuum created after the height of the Cold War had passed.

### REALISM AND IDEALISM AS FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPTS

The concepts of *realism* and *idealism*, both of which have been widely used to describe the behavior of individuals and states in the study of foreign policy, require some discussion before we proceed.<sup>2</sup> Each is an *ideal type*, which means that individuals and states are closer to one than the other but do not match either perfectly. Early postwar presidents (e.g., Truman and Eisenhower) may have combined elements of realism and idealism, but they did not match these types as well as Nixon, Carter, and Reagan did in their foreign policy making. Realism and idealism, then, serve as important ways to think about the foreign policy of these presidents even if neither concept fully describes them.

The realist approach is based on several key assumptions: (1) The nation-state is the primary actor in world politics; (2) interest, defined as power, is the primary motivating force for the actions of states; (3) the distribution or balance of power (predominantly military power) at any given time is the key concern of states; and (4) state-to-state relations (not domestic politics) shape how one nation responds to another. For the realist, since human nature is ultimately flawed, efforts at universal perfection in global politics are shortsighted and ultimately dangerous. Instead, morality in foreign policy is largely defined by what is good for the state and for its place in international politics.

In this view, foreign policy is fraught with conflict, with each state seeking to further its interests and warily monitoring the activities of others. Balance-of-power politics predominates because all states are concerned with the relative distribution of power at any one time, and all are trying to maximize their own power and standing.

The idealist approach starts with a different set of assumptions: (1) The nation-state is only one among many participants in foreign policy; (2) values, rather than interests, are predominant in shaping foreign policy; (3) the distribution of power is only one of many important values, with social, economic, and military issues equally important; and (4) overall global conditions, not relationships between

states, should dominate foreign policy thinking. For the idealist, human nature can be changed, improving humankind is a laudable goal, and universal values should be the basis of action.

In the idealist view, foreign policy should be a cooperative process between states and groups, with joint efforts undertaken to address the problems facing humankind, whether political, military, economic, or social. International institutions (e.g., international and regional organizations) and rule-based international law are crucial to shaping global politics, and politics based on balance of power are largely to be eschewed.

## **REALISM AND THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION**

The Nixon administration's foreign policy was closer to the realist tradition than that of earlier postwar presidents. It was based on the principles of the "balance of power" and was anchored in a global equilibrium among the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China (and later Japan and Europe). The realist perspective would enable the United States to play a more limited global role and exploit substantial amounts of regional power (and power centers) to foster American interests. At the same time, it would allow the United States to remain an important, even dominant, participant in global affairs. It should be kept in mind that this new realism in foreign policy was precipitated by the events surrounding the Vietnam War (see Chapter 3). Indeed, the Nixon administration was as much consumed by Vietnam as it was by the reordering of superpower relations. Both factors pointed the United States toward a different foreign policy emphasis for the Nixon administration.

### **The Nixon Approach to Foreign Policy**

Several dimensions of Nixon's policy design were foreshadowed in a *Foreign Affairs* article he wrote almost two years before he took office.<sup>3</sup> Nixon emphasized two points: (1) the importance of bringing the People's Republic of China back into the world community; and (2) a more limited future role for the United States in regional disputes. The United States, Nixon wrote, "cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation." At the same time, he argued for a "policy of firm restraint" to persuade Beijing to accept the "basic rules of international civility."

Nixon also foreshadowed a change in American policy toward regional conflict: "Other nations must recognize that the role of the United States as world policeman is likely to be limited in the future." If U.S. assistance is requested, it must come only after a regional collective effort has failed and only when a collective request for help is made. Unlike the Vietnam experience, direct U.S. intervention must be reduced or limited.

Other essential elements of Nixon's approach to the world were described more fully in his *State of the World Report to the Congress* in early 1970,<sup>4</sup> in which he outlined his plan for a new world "structure of peace." Three principles defined the "Nixon Doctrine" and were driven in no small measure by his desire to shape a post-Vietnam role for the United States:

- Peace would require a partnership with the rest of the world
- Peace would require strength to protect U.S. national interests
- Peace would require a willingness to negotiate with all states to resolve differences

These principles meant that America's role was to be diminished and its power was to be shared with others in the preservation of world order. Such a design also meant that the United States would act to protect its interests and would do so primarily through its military might. Furthermore, it would welcome the opportunity to negotiate with other states to resolve outstanding differences. This design was some distance away from the postwar consensus that had put so much stock in the ability of the United States to carry the burden of responsibility for the "Free World."

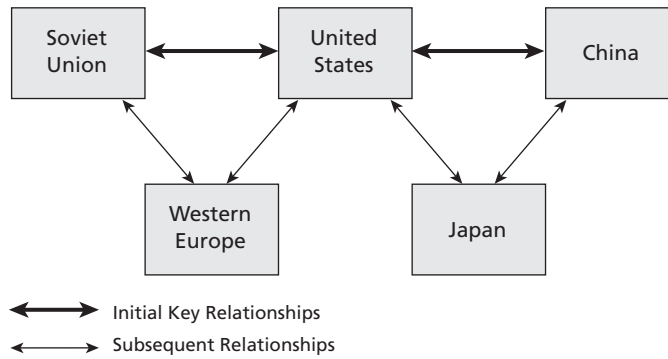
President Nixon made two other important observations in this speech. First, he recognized that the world was multipolar: ". . . the nature of that world has changed—the power of individual Communist nations has grown, but international Communist unity has been shattered." Second, he acknowledged the power of nationalism in the developing world, and he implied that this nationalism should not be equated with Communist penetration: "Once, many feared that they [the new nations] would become simply a battleground of cold-war rivalry and fertile ground for Communist penetration. But this fear misjudged their pride in their national identities and their determination to preserve their newly won sovereignty."

In all, then, Nixon's foreign policy design pointed to a new foreign policy approach for the United States and represented a sharp break with the postwar consensus.<sup>5</sup>

### Henry Kissinger and World Order

Whereas President Nixon's statements outlined the key components of a new policy approach, his national security advisor, and later secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, provided a more complete exposition of what that approach would look like in practice. To appreciate Kissinger's policy making, we must begin with his basic philosophy of international politics, which grew out of a number of years of academic writing and his practical foreign policy experience in previous administrations.

For Henry Kissinger, the essential problem in the postwar world was structural: the lack of a *legitimate international order*.<sup>6</sup> Both the United States and the Soviet Union had seen the world in terms of absolutes and had tried to impose their own views of world order. Neither had succeeded. As a result, there



**FIGURE 4.1** Principal Participants in the Balance-of-Power System Conceptualized by Nixon and Kissinger

was now a “revolutionary” and multipolar international system characterized by (1) the emergence of many states and new centers of power, (2) the growth of vast new technologies that created great disparities in power, and (3) the appearance of a diversity of political purposes by the new states and power centers.

These factors made it difficult to establish or maintain any legitimate order. Thus, according to Kissinger, the most important challenge confronting the United States was “to develop some concept of order in a world which is bipolar militarily but multipolar politically.” To create such order, he argued, the United States must think more along the lines of **balance of power politics**. Although America’s idealism of the past should not be abandoned, the requirements of global equilibrium should give such idealism some “perspective.” The United States should not be afraid to pursue its interests; it should not be afraid to pursue equilibrium; and it should not be afraid to think in terms of power.<sup>7</sup>

What Kissinger proposed was an international order in which **stability** was a fundamental goal—in contrast to absolute peace, a goal so essential in America’s past. Only by achieving a stable international system would international peace become possible.<sup>8</sup> Once stability was achieved, competing powers would recognize each other’s rights. This situation would hold the best prospect for achieving international peace because no state would attempt to impose its views on the international system.

To achieve stability and equilibrium, the legitimacy of both states and the international system had to be recognized. A prerequisite for such legitimacy was for states to accept each other’s rights and interests and to contain their revolutionary fervor. Henry Kissinger (and President Nixon) therefore proposed a “structure of peace” based on a “**pentagonal**” **balance of power** among the United States, the Soviet Union, The People’s Republic of China, Western Europe, and Japan.<sup>9</sup> (See Figure 4.1.) The emphasis would be on gaining some accommodation among the first three, later adding Western Europe and Japan to this global design.

An important requirement of Kissinger's design was that those states that failed to respect the rights and interests of others would not go unpunished. That is, if a state took action outside its "traditional area of interest," other states should take action to demonstrate that this violation of the required "norms of international conduct" would not be tolerated. For instance, if the Soviet Union provided economic or military support to revolutionary forces in Angola—an area where it had no historical tie—as it did in 1975, a response must be made. That response might be a change in the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union (e.g., reducing trade or the prospects of future arms negotiations) or in the multilateral relationship in the disputed area itself (e.g., direct assistance to the factions opposing the Soviet-backed group in Angola). Whichever the action, its intent would be to remind the offending state of the limits of acceptable international behavior and to demonstrate that attempts at expansion (which would upset international stability) would not be overlooked. In this way, conflict itself would contribute to stabilizing international order.

This method of dealing with violations came to be known as *linkage* in the Nixon–Kissinger system. Put differently, behavior in one foreign policy arena (e.g., bilateral trade agreements) was inevitably linked to behavior in another (e.g., aid to insurgents in a Third World nation).

It is significant that Nixon and Kissinger did not link foreign and domestic arenas. For them, linkage did not mean, for example, predicating arms agreements on changes in domestic conditions within the Soviet Union. Regardless, the importance of linkage to Nixon and Kissinger should not be minimized; it was indeed at the heart of their foreign policy strategy.

By having all states accept the legitimacy of the rights and interests of all other states, and by employing linkage, Kissinger believed that the United States could achieve global stability. In the short run, the success of this strategy meant the abandonment by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China of their universal goals of shaping international politics to their own ends. Furthermore, it meant that a policy of cooperation would be mixed with a policy of competition among these states. This approach, which came to be labeled *détente*, or relaxation of tensions between the superpowers, was an attempt to build some predictability into international politics. In the long run, if this approach could be institutionalized, a global order based on balance of power principles would become a reality.

### Domestic Values and Foreign Policies

Along with bringing a policy of accommodation with adversaries to American foreign policy, Henry Kissinger challenged four precepts of past American approaches to the world.

First, he believed that diplomacy (or the "statesman" as he labeled it in his essay on the subject<sup>10</sup>) was the key to the resolution of disputes and to the conduct of international politics. As he said, "negotiation is the mechanism of stability because it presupposes that maintenance of the existing order is more important than any dispute within it." Moreover, he was willing to negotiate outstanding differences between states as the principal means of achieving stability.

Second, Kissinger adopted a different attitude toward the use of force and the combining of force with diplomacy, perhaps best summarized as **“Negotiate when possible, use force when necessary.”** Furthermore, he believed in the use of relative levels of force in efforts to achieve foreign policy goals. Such an attitude toward force, and the degree of force to be used, was wholly at odds with America’s past.

Third, Kissinger’s view was that domestic values should not dominate American foreign policy and that policy should not be excessively moralistic; otherwise, he argued, it becomes dangerous, especially in a pluralistic world.<sup>11</sup> The United States should be guided by its historical values, but should evoke them in the world rather than impose them on it. Finally, Kissinger wanted a clear demarcation between domestic politics and foreign policy. In particular, he did not want Congress to impose conditions on the “statesman’s” operations in the international system. Thus, he vigorously opposed restraints on trade with the Soviet Union because of its treatment of Jews who sought to emigrate. Human rights standards were perfectly acceptable in domestic politics, but they were, he believed, unacceptable in foreign policy. Put differently, a state’s domestic policies mattered less to Kissinger than the way that state treated the United States. The principal guide to American foreign policy should be the **relations between nations, not the domestic conditions within them.**<sup>12</sup>

## THE NIXON–KISSINGER WORLDVIEW IN OPERATION

Many of Nixon and Kissinger’s views on world order, the use of force and diplomacy, and the role of domestic values were manifest in American foreign policy actions from 1969 through 1976.<sup>13</sup> As such they stimulated some important criticisms.

### Developing Sino–Soviet–American Détente

Almost immediately after assuming office, Nixon and Kissinger set out to establish their model of world order. By November 1969, the first discussions with the Soviet Union over nuclear accommodation were under way—the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)** held in Geneva, which proceeded through several sessions before agreement was reached in 1972. At the **Moscow Summit** in May 1972, President Nixon and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev signed the **SALT I accords**, which consisted of two agreements. One, the **Interim Agreement on Offensive Strategic Arms**, limited Soviet and U.S. offensive nuclear weapons; the other, the **Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty**, limited the development of defensive nuclear weapons. These pacts were the first to stabilize a structure of world order between the two superpowers and institute a “balance of terror” between them. They became synonymous with the notion of détente.

The Moscow Summit meetings produced more than military accommodation between the United States and the USSR; they also produced a series of political,

economic, and social/cultural arrangements. In one political agreement (“**Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**”), the principle of linkage was presumably institutionalized, with each country pledging not to take advantage of the other, either “directly” or “indirectly.” An economic commitment was made to improve trade relations, and a joint commission was established for that purpose. Four social/cultural agreements were also signed in Moscow calling for U.S.–Soviet cooperation in protecting the environment, enhancing medical science and public health, joint space exploration (including the 1975 Apollo–Soyuz flight), and furthering science and technology.<sup>14</sup>

The essence of détente with the Soviet Union was in place with these 1972 agreements because broad avenues of cooperation had been opened in a relationship that was still competitive. An important part of the three-pronged global order seemed to be operating.

Similar efforts at achieving global stability were initiated with the other major player in the Nixon–Kissinger design: the People’s Republic of China. In late 1970, Premier Zhou Enlai gave the first hints of an interest in establishing contact with the United States.<sup>15</sup> The United States responded quickly and positively. By mid-1971, Kissinger made a secret trip to China in order to pave the way for a Nixon visit to that long-isolated country. On July 15, 1971, Nixon appeared on American radio and television with the shock announcement that he had been invited to China, had accepted the invitation, and would go there as soon as arrangements could be worked out. Nixon’s visit took place in February 1972 and, by any analysis, was a huge success.

The **Shanghai Communiqué** resulted from this meeting. Issued from that Chinese city on February 28, 1972,<sup>16</sup> it reflected the differing worldviews of the two nations but also provided areas of global and bilateral commonalities.

For instance, the communiqué reflected some movement on the question of Taiwan through confirmation by both sides that there was only “one China”; it opposed “hegemony” in the world (a not-so-subtle strategy by the United States to use the “China card” to influence Soviet behavior); and it called for efforts at normalization of relations (although full diplomatic relations would not be achieved until the Carter administration). It also opened up trade and other contacts between the American and Chinese peoples. Overall, the communiqué did not produce the cooperation that the Moscow summit did, but it did sow the seeds. Indeed, it was remarkable in a more profound sense: After more than thirty years, formal contact between harsh adversaries was begun. The Asian component of the Kissinger–Nixon global design seemed to be falling into place.

The last component of this détente strategy was the **Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe** signed in Helsinki, Finland, on August 1, 1975.<sup>17</sup> The signing came after President Nixon had left office but while Henry Kissinger still dominated policy. It signaled efforts to expand détente to all European states.

The conference itself was composed of thirty-five countries from Eastern and Western Europe and the United States and Canada. The Final Act (or the **Helsinki Accords** as it is sometimes called) was a “political statement” rather than a legally binding treaty of international law. It was composed of three “baskets”



of issues, with each containing provisions for enhancing cooperation among the signatories.

The first basket dealt with principles of conduct and ways to reduce military tension; the second dealt with efforts to enlarge economic, technological, and environmental cooperation; and the third dealt with ways to foster closer social/cultural interactions.

The Final Act was not viewed as an end in itself; instead, it was seen as the beginning point of an evolving cooperative process in Central Europe, much like the Moscow and Shanghai agreements of 1972. In this sense, with the Helsinki Accords, the “relaxation of tensions” and the stability of the international order that Nixon and Kissinger had envisioned expanded to all of Central Europe.

Indeed, the policy of détente had a particular appeal for the European states. It conveyed an easing of political tensions in a region that had been the focal point of the Cold War. It had the potential of enhancing economic cooperation across the “Iron Curtain.” And it looked forward to uniting cultures and families divided by the Cold War. West Germany, with its policy of *Ostpolitik* (Eastern policy) toward East Germany would seemingly benefit immediately, but other countries of Central Europe would as well.

### Force and Diplomacy in the Third World

Two events illustrate the importance of the combination of force and diplomacy in the policy making of Nixon and Kissinger. The first involved negotiations over ending the war in Vietnam; the second was the use of “**shuttle diplomacy**” in the Middle East. From the outset of his tenure as national security advisor, Kissinger saw negotiations as the key to ending the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup> To this end a two-track system of secret and open negotiations was put into effect immediately after Nixon’s election. This did not produce quick results, however. In an attempt to get the peace talks moving, force—in this case the escalation of force—was added. For Nixon and Kissinger, force could be used to demonstrate U.S. resolve in holding to its bargaining position and to prod an adversary into serious negotiations.

In April 1970, Kissinger and Nixon agreed to an American “incursion” into Cambodia—a neutral country—essentially escalating the war (although secret bombing attacks had previously occurred). About two years later (May 1972), when negotiations were again stalled, the United States began the bombing and blockading of Hanoi and Haiphong.<sup>19</sup>

Yet again, after Kissinger had so solemnly announced that “peace is at hand” in late October 1972, and stated that only a few details were left to iron out, the final negotiations abruptly hit another snag. President Nixon responded by intensifying the bombing of North Vietnam in December.<sup>20</sup> By late January 1973, a Vietnam disengagement was signed in Paris.

The other major illustration of combining force and diplomacy occurred in the Middle East, in response to Arab initiation of force in the **Yom Kippur War** of October 1973 and to the oil embargo by the Arab oil states. At first, the United States used military assistance to reinforce Israel, but then Kissinger used his considerable diplomatic skills to negotiate a series of disengagement pacts among Israel, Egypt, and Syria. These agreements began to untangle the Middle East con-

flict, but they had, perhaps, more importance in turning the oil spigot back on for the United States. Intermittently, over a period of months from 1973 through 1975, Kissinger shuttled between Cairo, Tel Aviv, and Damascus to hammer out two disengagement agreements over the Sinai Peninsula, between Egypt and Israel, and one over the Golan Heights, between Israel and Syria. Such diplomatic actions brought into sharp relief the central role of the “statesman” in negotiations. Although Kissinger’s further efforts were ultimately stalled by intransigence on both sides, his results to that point illustrated how powerful diplomacy could be in moving toward international order.

### Human Rights and Foreign Policy

As the final part of their policy making Kissinger and Nixon separated American domestic values and American foreign policy actions. This separation was perhaps best illustrated in their policy toward **authoritarian and totalitarian regimes**. For instance, Nixon and Kissinger were reluctant to publicly confront the Chilean and Greek juntas about violations of human rights because of their overriding importance to global order. Similarly, they maintained their tacit support of South Africa despite its apartheid policy of legally separating races in social and political life. Once again, strategic considerations became an important motivating force for the Nixon administration.

Toward totalitarian regimes, Nixon and Kissinger seemed to operate on a similar dichotomy. For instance, Kissinger opposed official Washington recognition for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when he was expelled from the Soviet Union. He also opposed the Jackson–Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1974, which essentially made free emigration a requirement for any U.S. trading partner seeking most-favored-nation status. (Because of its restrictions on emigration, most-favored-nation trading status had been denied the Soviet Union). For Kissinger, domestic politics in any state were to be subordinated to international politics. To the extent that domestic situations were to be addressed, “quiet diplomacy”—secret representations to the offending regime—was the correct approach

### Criticisms of the Nixon–Kissinger Foreign Policy Approach

Despite their foreign policy successes in the 1970s, Nixon and Kissinger’s approach was subject to criticism both for its content and for its style. These criticisms came from analysts across the political spectrum.

From the left, the most telling critique was offered by political scientist Richard Falk in an essay aptly entitled “What’s Wrong with Henry Kissinger’s Foreign Policy?”<sup>21</sup> Falk focused on the **lack of moral content** and the irrelevance of Kissinger’s global design to the last quarter of the twentieth century. Kissinger’s concern with order and stability ignored the more important questions of peace and justice in global affairs. In Falk’s view, the most pressing issues of international politics were not power and domination, as Kissinger emphasized, but hunger,

poverty, and global inequity, which Kissinger's approach had no direct way of dealing with; rather, it was predicated upon preserving the nation-state system and attempting to manage it by moderating conflict among a few, strong Northern Hemisphere states. Such a view represented its "underlying conceptual flaw"<sup>22</sup> Kissinger's "**cooperative directorate among great powers**," according to Falk, was shortsighted in more fundamental ways as well: It accepted as inevitable the persistence of large-scale misery and repression, and it enabled the disfavored many to be kept under control by the favored few.<sup>23</sup>

From the right, the Kissinger approach was criticized in terms of **moral relativity**. In particular, political conservatives viewed détente as morally bankrupt because it gave international status and recognition to regimes that the United States had largely rejected previously as totalitarian and illegitimate. The opening to the People's Republic of China was particularly troubling because the United States had never recognized or interacted much with the regime of Mao Tse-tung. Suddenly, this situation changed. Although the change was not as abrupt with the Soviet Union, the effect was largely the same.

William F. Buckley, a leading conservative spokesperson, put this criticism in a slightly different way, arguing that détente was based on an "**ideological egalitarianism**" in which there were no fundamental differences between American, Soviet, and Chinese societies. As he noted in a televised interview with Henry Kissinger, the Chinese had been most often described as "warlike," "ignorant," "sly," and "treacherous" in a 1966 American poll in the United States. One month after President Nixon's return from China in 1972, however, the description had changed dramatically. Now, the Chinese were most often described as "progressive," "hard-working," "intelligent," "artistic," and "practical."<sup>24</sup> The regime in Beijing (at that time) had hardly changed its policy at all; only American policy had changed. Thus, according to Buckley's critique, détente had the effect of reducing the ideological distinction between the United States and the Communist states almost overnight.

Yet a third criticism from the right, and hardly divorced from the other two, was that détente connoted a "**no win**" strategy against communism. By accepting the legitimacy of the key communist states and by working with them, the United States was perpetuating, not undermining them, which presumably had been the U.S. aim for three decades.

Détente was criticized from yet another quarter. A former Kennedy and Johnson administration official did not see the policy as particularly new or as necessarily advantageous to the United States in terms of policy abroad or decision making at home.<sup>25</sup> On a policy level, détente did not represent a new attitude toward the Soviet Union, nor had it produced many benefits for the West. Neither had Soviet political cooperation significantly improved. On a decision-making level, the Nixon-Kissinger style was inappropriate for a great power and a democratic society. Kissinger's "lonely cowboy" policy making limited the foreign policy agenda, with the result of "a policy that ignore[d] relations with nations that happen . . . to be outside the spotlight, and . . . encourage[d] a practice of haphazard improvisation."<sup>26</sup> Further, this "policy of maneuver," by the "Master Player," was built on secrecy and personalism, which were hardly consistent with a

democratic society. By tradition, policies must be fully explained to the American public—something that Nixon and Kissinger did not want to do.

### A Break with Tradition

In short, opponents (and even admirers) appeared on both the political right and the political left to charge that Nixon–Kissinger “power politics” was fundamentally amoral and inconsistent with America’s past, and that its decision-making style challenged democratic traditions. America’s approach to the world had come a considerable distance from its traditional past. It had moved away from an emphasis on both moral principle and isolationism; instead, it moved toward embracing the basic elements of realism. No longer a postwar moral crusade, driven largely by fervent anticommunism, policy making was now driven by the principles of pragmatism and “power politics.” Support for this approach was to wane rather quickly, and the 1976 presidential election, fought, at least in part, over the question of the morality of American foreign policy, produced a new president—one committed to a foreign policy based on moral standards.

## IDEALISM AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION

Jimmy Carter’s run for the presidency in 1976 was based on making American foreign policy compatible with the basic goodness of the American people. He came to office pledged to restore integrity and morality to American diplomacy. In keeping with his fundamental beliefs and values, his policy making had more **idealist** elements than could be seen in the approaches of earlier postwar presidents. Carter sought to reorient America’s foreign policy away from a singular emphasis on adversaries, especially the Soviet Union (as had characterized the policies of Nixon–Ford–Kissinger) and toward a truly global emphasis. Four major policy areas would be highlighted:

- An emphasis on domestic values in foreign policy
- The improvement of relations with allies and resolution of regional conflicts
- A de-emphasis on the Soviet Union as the focus of U.S. policy
- The promotion of global human rights<sup>27</sup>

By the last year of his term, despite his initial idealism, Carter had reverted to a policy much more consistent with the realist policies of his predecessors.

### The Carter Approach to Foreign Policy

From the outset, President Carter highlighted the **importance of domestic values** as a guide to American foreign policy. In this sense, his approach was consistent with the reliance on moral principle so evident in America’s historical past,

and in sharp contrast with that of the previous two administrations. For Carter, domestic values were to be preeminent in the shaping of policy; the United States must “stand for something” in the world. Even more, it should serve as a model for other nations.

In his inaugural address, President Carter stated these beliefs forcefully: “Our Nation can be strong abroad only if it is strong at home. And we know that the best way to enhance freedom in other lands is to demonstrate here that our democratic system is worthy of emulation.”<sup>28</sup> He went on to say that the United States would not act abroad in ways that would violate domestic standards. In a similar vein, in a 1977 commencement address at Notre Dame, Carter emphasized the moral basis of American policy: “I believe we can have a foreign policy that is democratic, that is based on fundamental values, and that uses [the] power and influence which we have for humane purposes.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to a moral basis of policy, President Carter called for a different style of policy making—one that would be “open and candid” and not one that would operate “by manipulation” or through “secret deals.” Such references apparently were to what he saw as the style adopted by Henry Kissinger.

Finally, although he recognized that moral principle must be the guide, he acknowledged that foreign policy cannot be “by moral maxims.” The United States would try to produce change rather than impose it. In this sense, Carter believed that there were limits to what the United States could do in the world. These limits would need to be recognized, but America could not stand idly by. Rather, it should play a constructive and positive role in shaping a new world order, “based on constant decency in its values and on optimism in our historical vision.”<sup>30</sup>

### Carter and Global Order: New States and Old Friends

The focus of the Carter administration also reflected its view of the world. Policy would not focus simply on the anticommunism inherited from the past. (Carter said, “We are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.”) Instead, his administration would carry out **a policy of global cooperation**, especially with the newly influential countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia but also with the industrial democracies of the world. The aim of such an effort would be “to create a wider framework of international cooperation suited to the new and rapidly changing historical circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it would move beyond seeking global stability among the strong to recognizing the reality of the new states and their place in the world order.

Within this global context, **crucial regional trouble spots of the world** were to be important areas of concentration. Efforts at resolving the seemingly **intractable problems of the Middle East** were to have a high priority in the Carter administration. Moreover, the **festering problems of southern Africa**—Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa, for example—would need solutions if a more just and peaceful global order were to evolve. Similarly, the **problems with Panama and the Canal**, and their potential for generating hostility toward the United States in the Western Hemisphere, were part of the Carter

strategy of addressing regional conflicts as a stepping-stone to a more stable international order.

A second major point in Carter's global approach was the **improvement of relations with Western Europe and Japan**. This emphasis on better trilateral relations was in part another response to the previous administration's emphasis on improving relations with adversaries. For instance, Kissinger's much heralded "Year of Europe" for 1973 was essentially stillborn as pressing Middle East problems arose. The result was the appearance of fissures in America's ties with its traditional friends.

### Carter and the Soviet Union

With such a global emphasis, the **centrality of the Soviet-American relationship was downgraded**. Détente with the Soviet Union was not abandoned, but it was placed in a larger context of global issues. In particular, President Carter was committed to joint efforts at strategic arms control and made them the continuing and central aspect of U.S.–Soviet relations. The broad comprehensive détente of previous administrations was not the aim of the Carter administration. Economic, sociocultural, and political cooperation could continue, but only on the basis of mutual advantage. Crucial here was that such cooperation would not be linked to the overall quality of the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this sense, the "linkage" notion of the past was jettisoned.<sup>32</sup>

In essence, Carter's approach assumed that the world order of the late 1970s and early 1980s would not be achieved merely by harnessing the Soviet-American relationship. Détente had neither produced stability nor addressed critical global and regional issues. Instead, it had encouraged a variety of critics at home and abroad and had diverted attention from important global concerns. In short, the heart of international politics in this period had moved beyond this bilateral relationship, and any vision of an improved world along the Kissinger design was now politically infeasible.

Carter's initial approach toward the Soviets deeply offended and confused them. It was offensive because the Soviet Union had commanded the bulk of America's attention since 1945 and because it had gained superpower status only five years before via the Moscow agreements of May 1972. Now this status was apparently being denied. Carter's approach also confused the Soviets because they saw themselves as critical in dealing with conflict in the world, especially in the nuclear age. Despite their centrality to questions of war and peace, however, the Carter administration seemed to be shoving the Soviets aside. They did not know how to react to America's emphasis on moral principle and globalism as espoused by Carter or to the emphasis on human rights.

### Carter and Human Rights

Indeed, the pivotal new focus of the Carter administration was its **emphasis on human rights**,<sup>33</sup> which can be gleaned from his inaugural address:

Our commitment to human rights must be absolute. . . . Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom everywhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies that share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights. We do not seek to intimidate, but it is clear that a world which others can dominate with impunity would be inhospitable to decency and a threat to the well-being of all people.<sup>34</sup>

This philosophy was to be the guiding moral principle for American foreign policy. The United States would not conduct “business as usual” with nations that grossly and consistently violated the basic rights of its citizens. Instead, it would require that states change their domestic human rights behavior if they wished amicable relations with the United States. Although President Carter made it clear that the human rights criterion would not be the only consideration, he maintained “that a significant element in our relationships with other governments would be their performance in providing basic freedoms to their people.”<sup>35</sup>

The human rights issue appealed to Jimmy Carter because of his strong personal and religious beliefs about individual dignity and because of its strong domestic appeal, especially after Vietnam, Watergate, and revelations of CIA abuses. The “something” that the United States would stand for in the world would now be what it had historically embraced: the freedom of the individual. At the same time, the issue of human rights appealed across the political spectrum and thus would be domestically attractive. Conservatives would approve because it would presumably condemn Communist nations for their totalitarian practices; liberals would approve because the United States would now reexamine its policy toward authoritarian states.

## **THE CARTER WORLDVIEW IN OPERATION**

In the main, Carter’s initial foreign policy strategy was well received by the American public because it represented a reemergence of American idealism with a clear emphasis on traditional American values and beliefs. Coupled with the idealism of the Carter approach, however, was the realization of the limits of American power. Although the United States could assist in the shaping of global order, it did not have the power to direct the international system of the 1970s—a system so diverse and complex that no nation or group of nations could impose its views of international order. In this sense, the Carter strategy was partly compatible with Kissinger’s: The United States must evoke a global order through its actions. However, the focal point of this new order was considerably different from that of the past.

In spite of initial support for his policies, Carter met with criticism and challenge in two areas (improving human rights and dealing with the Soviet Union) but with some success in a third (resolving Third World conflicts).



## Improving Human Rights

**Definition and Policy** Almost immediately, the Carter administration faced **the problem of clearly defining human rights** and establishing a consistent application of its policy on a global basis. Although President Carter had originally sought to focus his policy on the humane treatment of all individuals—and their freedom from torture and arbitrary punishment for expressing political beliefs—his administration initially defined it to include the promotion of political, economic, and social rights of all individuals.<sup>36</sup> Such a broad definition left the United States open to criticism in this area, especially in its promotion of economic rights of all. As a result, the United States was seen as espousing a policy that it did not adhere to itself.

Furthermore, the administration was not always clear as to how human rights were to fit into policy regarding other states. That is, should the human rights condition be the defining criterion for dealing with another nation, or should it be only one of several? After some review and discussion, the administration seemed to settle on the latter. For example, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance cautioned against a “mechanistic formula” for the human rights campaign in his speech to the University of Georgia Law School, and President Carter recognized the limitation of “rigid moral maxims” in his Notre Dame speech.<sup>37</sup> As a result, though, the administration seemed to lose some of its enthusiasm for human rights, and a detectable pullback in this policy occurred over its first year in office.

**Implementation** A second problem also arose. **How was the human rights campaign going to be put into effect?** How far was the United States willing to go to bring about change? Was it willing to stop all contact with nations alleged to be violating human rights? Was it going to cut all diplomatic, economic, and military ties to offending states? Or was the United States going to continue these ties or modify them in line with more responsive behavior? After all, was not this a better way to exercise influence over another nation than stopping all contact and thus all means of influence? In short, what were the best tactics for encouraging human rights improvements in target nations?

In fact, aid—particularly military aid—was cut off to principal offender nations such as Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Cambodia, Uganda, and Mozambique,<sup>38</sup> and economic aid was used to encourage human rights improvements in other states. The primary instrument used with states with poor human rights records was diplomatic “jawboning”—publicly and privately conveying to offending foreign governments American dissatisfaction. Clearly, there were limits to how far the United States could or wanted to go in the human rights area.

**Applicability** A third major problem was this: **To whom should the human rights policy apply?** The paradox of the Carter approach was evident when nations saw, on the one hand, the United States calling for the free exercise of human rights, particularly in the Soviet Union and in Latin America, but, on the other hand, providing economic and military assistance to nations often cited as



having serious human rights violations—such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Iran. Juxtaposing human rights policy against the demands of *realpolitik* became a central dilemma for the Carter administration and a constant target of attack by its critics.

The apparent problem of selective application received criticism from two directions. Neoconservatives argued that human rights standards as practiced by the United States vis-à-vis “moderately repressive” but friendly regimes was, in effect, undermining these states and American global influence. The unintended result of this action might well be the overthrow of these imperfect regimes by ones opposed to U.S. interests—as happened, for example, in Iran and Nicaragua. Whatever the merits of human rights, these critics said, the requirements of global balance-of-power politics could not be wholly ignored.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, quiet, as well as intergovernmental, semi-governmental, and nongovernmental, efforts were necessary to pursue human rights in the international system.<sup>40</sup>

From an international perspective, critics argued that the administration’s policy was yet another way to impose American values on the other nations. Moreover, they claimed, because it reflected both the lack of political realism and the importance of American moral principle in shaping foreign policy, it was another American attempt to shape global politics. As well-intentioned as the human rights goal was, it would prove inappropriate for the diverse international system and would ultimately be dysfunctional for global order. Such a refrain was heard from Third World leaders and even from some American allies, notably France and Germany.

**Positive Effects** Carter’s human rights campaign did have some positive effects. The number of countries that could show an **improved human rights record** increased slightly, although much greater gains would be necessary if global conditions were to be substantially changed. Still, the Carter administration registered tangible instances of improvement. The Dominican Republic made a turn toward democracy; elections were announced for 1978 in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia; Colombia, Malaysia, Honduras, Morocco, and Portugal, among others improved conditions; Sudan, Nepal, Indonesia, Haiti, and Paraguay released political prisoners in the first year of the policy; and torture apparently declined.<sup>41</sup>

More significant, perhaps, American prestige was enhanced in various areas of the world. The United States began to stand for particular political values and, as a result, a more receptive attitude toward its initiatives was forthcoming, especially within the developing world. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of this impact was in Africa, where the black nations of southern Africa, in particular, began to have confidence in the Carter administration and American policy. Through the vigorous efforts of Andrew Young, President Carter’s ambassador to the United Nations, the frontline states around white-ruled Rhodesia (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia) began to believe that the Carter administration was willing to seek a just solution to Rhodesia’s problems (Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe), as well as those of Namibia and South Africa itself. Moreover, the pivotal African state of Nigeria expressed its confidence by receiving President Carter for an official visit.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, President Carter seemed to see the greatest benefit of his human rights policy as **the intangible change in atmosphere and in attitude toward individual liberties** on a worldwide scale during his years in office. As he notes, “The lifting of the human spirit, the revival of hope, the absence of fear, the release from prison, the end of torture, the reunion of a family, the newfound sense of dignity” were the ultimate measure of the worth of the human rights policy.”<sup>43</sup>

**Negative Effects** On the negative side, the human rights campaign caused friction with friendly but human rights-deficient nations—straining relations with Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil, Iran, and South Korea among others, and contributing to problems with the Soviet Union. It was particularly challenging to détente because it implied an “intervention” in the internal affairs of other states. Nonintervention in internal affairs, by contrast, had been the benchmark of détente that evolved under the Nixon–Ford–Kissinger administrations.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond its apparent violation of national sovereignty, the campaign for human rights threatened the Soviet Union in a more fundamental way: By fostering individual freedom of expression and tolerating diversity, it directly affronted totalitarian control at home and foreshadowed a weakening of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. As a result, the Soviet Union attacked Carter’s policy, contending that the United States itself was guilty of human rights violations because of its failure to ensure economic rights for its citizens given insufficient employment, inadequate health care, and unsatisfactory social welfare benefits. Furthermore, the atmosphere surrounding relations between the United States and the Soviet Union was affected, as Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko implied, after initial arms control discussions had broken down in April 1977.<sup>45</sup>

### Dealing with the Soviet Union

The essential aim of the Carter administration was to downgrade the dominance of Soviet–American relations in foreign policy and to concentrate efforts primarily in other areas of the world. As one analyst has aptly put it, the goal was to contain the Soviet Union, not by directly confronting it as in the past, but “by drying out the pond of possible Soviet mischief” through resolving global issues.<sup>46</sup> If global problems were addressed, intrusions by the Soviets would be much less likely and thus they would be contained.

Despite his initial intention, it never became possible to downgrade America’s relationship with the Soviets. **Carter’s failure to establish a clear and consistent policy toward the Soviet Union** was probably the greatest shortcoming of his initial foreign policy plan. At least three different reasons may be cited for this.

**Soviet Centrality** First, the Soviets would not allow the United States to downgrade their centrality to global politics. Their prestige was damaged by the Carter policy because they had put great effort into achieving superpower military and political parity. After finally achieving it with the 1972 agreements, they were unwilling to play “second fiddle” on global issues. Thus, the Soviets challenged

Carter on human rights, but they also attacked him on arms control, despite their desire for it. More important, they challenged Carter's attempt to focus on issues in the Third World. The Soviets sought inroads to the Western Hemisphere, especially in Central America through Cuba (or so the United States believed). They also did not restrain the Vietnamese in Asia and continued their military deployments there. Finally, they continued to pressure Western Europe through an increase in their military capabilities.<sup>47</sup>

**Competing Perspectives in the Administration** Second, officials within the Carter administration were divided over how best to deal with the Soviet Union. Carter's two top advisors, **Secretary of State Cyrus Vance** and **National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski**, took differing views on this issue. Vance appeared to be committed to Carter's globalist perspective and wanted to deal with the Soviets on a piecemeal basis without linkage. Brzezinski appeared to be of two minds,<sup>48</sup> formally rejecting the notion of linkage as the guide to American policy in dealing with the Soviets yet adopting a policy stance that seemed markedly close to it. In fact, the first time that the Soviets took significant actions in a "third area"—by supporting the sending of Cuban troops to Ethiopia—he resurrected aspects of the original Kissinger formula for dealing with Soviet-American relations. He wanted to confront the Soviets directly and to downgrade any remaining elements of détente. To Brzezinski, Soviet activities in the Horn of Africa should affect the SALT negotiations, and he said so directly.<sup>49</sup>

Others within the Carter administration—Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and the president himself—were not willing to go as far as Brzezinski on this issue, and he eventually lost out in this debate. It was disputes like this—over how to deal with the Soviets, and especially how multilateral events were to affect bilateral relations between the two superpowers—that dominated the Carter administration's agenda during its first three years.

**American Domestic Attitudes** A third factor that made it difficult for the United States to move away from a perception of the Soviets as dominant in foreign policy matters was American domestic beliefs. **A true dualism existed in the minds of Americans.** Most supported détente by a wide margin, but they were also increasingly wary of growing Soviet power vis-à-vis the United States. Additionally, they continued to see the Soviet Union as central to U.S. foreign policy.<sup>50</sup>

Accompanying this dual attitude was a shift away from support for cuts in defense spending, which had been so strong in the immediate post-Vietnam years. By 1977, and especially by 1978, support for more defense spending was increasing and public willingness to use military force against Soviet incursions was becoming more evident.<sup>51</sup> Thus, from the viewpoint of domestic politics, the Soviet-American relationship still seemed crucial, and the Carter administration was no doubt aware of these changing beliefs and the need to accommodate them in its foreign policy.

For various reasons, then, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States could not be downgraded in American foreign policy despite the

Carter administration's initial hopes. Moreover, the inability to fully integrate the primacy of this relationship into its foreign policy design and its "strategic incoherence" plagued the administration throughout its four years.<sup>52</sup>

### Resolving Third World Conflicts

The greatest success for the Carter administration in implementing its global design was its treatment of Third World conflicts. During his administration, President Carter was able to alleviate, if not resolve, conflict in Central America over the Panama Canal, in the Middle East between Egypt and Israel, and in southern Africa over Rhodesia and Namibia. Finally, although his establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States can hardly be characterized as a Third World event, it was important for lessening regional conflict in Asia.

**The Panama Canal** Perhaps Carter's greatest success was the resolution of the Panama Canal dispute. For more than two decades, the United States had been negotiating the transfer of the Canal and the Canal Zone to Panamanian sovereignty. The failure to resolve this dispute had undermined American influence in Central and South America and thus was one of the issues that President Carter was determined to address.

Indicative of the importance of Panama was the fact that the first **Presidential Review Memorandum** of the Carter administration dealt with the Panama Canal.<sup>53</sup> With such a central priority, American and Panamanian negotiators set out to reach an agreement, and in a few short months, they succeeded. By September 1977, moreover, the two treaties that constituted the agreement were ready for an elaborate signing ceremony in Washington. All Latin American countries were invited to witness the signing, which was a triumphant occasion for the Carter administration.

One of the pacts, the **Panama Canal Treaty**, called for the total transfer of Canal control to Panama by the year 2000, with intermediate stages of transfer during the 22 years of the pact. The second agreement, the **Neutrality Treaty**, to become effective in the year 2000 and to be of unlimited duration, stated that the Canal would be permanently neutral, secure, and open to the vessels of all nations in time of peace and war, with both the United States and Panama agreeing to maintain and defend this neutrality. President Carter viewed these pacts as clearly compatible with his goals of reducing regional conflict and fostering global justice. Both would minimize anti-American feelings and enhance American prestige and influence abroad.<sup>54</sup>

**The Middle East** In the Middle East, a constant regional trouble spot, the initial strategy of the Carter administration was to seek a comprehensive settlement through a Geneva conference cosponsored with the Soviet Union. However, the Israelis were reluctant to participate and the Arabs demanded maximum Palestinian participation.<sup>55</sup> Israel's fear was that it would be outvoted in such a conference

by the larger number of Arab states and the Soviet Union, leading to an outcome that would be far from their liking.

In November 1977, however, **President Anwar Sadat of Egypt** took a dramatic step to move the process along, announcing that he was willing to go to Jerusalem to seek peace. **Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel** quickly issued an invitation for Sadat to speak to the Israeli Parliament, and on November 19, 1977, Sadat landed in Jerusalem for three days of discussions.<sup>56</sup>

The importance of this visit cannot be overstated. It broke the impasse that had blocked the Middle East peace process since the shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger; it established the precedent of face-to-face negotiations between Arabs and Israelis; and it raised hopes for real progress.

Such hopes were soon dashed. Both sides still held strong positions on the fundamental questions of Arab lands and Israeli security. (See Map 4.1 for the territories in dispute between Israel and its neighbors at that time.) By the summer of 1978, another impasse had set in despite mediation efforts by President Carter. At this juncture, Carter took a bold gamble by inviting President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin to Camp David, the presidential retreat, for in-depth discussions. After thirteen days of intense negotiations, **“A Framework for Peace in the Middle East”** was agreed to by the parties and witnessed by Carter.<sup>57</sup>

The signing of the **Camp David Accords**, on September 17, 1978, was another highlight of the Carter foreign policy. (See Document Summary 4.1.) Real progress had been made in addressing the Middle East conflict. Furthermore, in March 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty based on the Camp David framework. A comprehensive peace settlement ultimately eluded the Carter administration, however, as all the Arab states except Egypt refused to accept and participate in the Camp David framework.

**Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa** The Carter administration achieved some success in southern Africa (see Map 4.2) over the question of Rhodesia and Namibia. America’s role was not as direct as in the Panama Canal and the Middle East, but it was nonetheless important. Specifically, the administration adopted a strong stand for black majority rule in these areas and assisted the British in achieving a successful outcome for Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. The United States, with the assistance of other Western states, maneuvered the South African government to accept a UN resolution on the transfer of power in Namibia.<sup>58</sup> Map 4.2 shows these territories in southern Africa.

In the case of Rhodesia, the Carter administration ceased trade with the white-dominated government and imposed economic sanctions in the first year of its term, bringing U.S. policy in line with long-standing UN actions. And even when the white-minority government and black leaders reached an **“internal settlement”** in 1978, the administration refused to lift these sanctions because dissident factions in exile had not participated in the settlement talks. By adopting such a stance, despite considerable opposition within Congress, the United States gave impetus to British efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement involving all parties. This settlement was ultimately worked out in the Lancaster House negotiations in London during the fall of 1979, and the agreement was put into



**MAP 4.1** Israel and Its Neighbors, 1977

Source: Boundaries taken from <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gov46/israel-egypt-1975.gif>.

---

### Document Summary 4.1 The Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, September 1978

---

#### THE FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Framework for Peace in the Middle East called for a “just, comprehensive, and durable settlement of the Middle East conflict through the conclusion of peace treaties based on **Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.**” (Those resolutions called for an exchange of land by Israel—the territories seized in the June 1967 war—for peace with its Arab neighbors and an end to the state of war.) It consisted of two parts.

The first part dealt with resolving the conflict over the West Bank of the Jordan and the Gaza Strip, which Israel had seized, calling for the establishment of a self-governing authority within these territories “for a period not exceeding five years.” By at least the third year of that self-governing authority, “negotiations will take place to determine

the final status of the West Bank and Gaza and its relationship to its neighbors and to conclude a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. . . .” These negotiations will involve representatives from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and “representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. . . .”

The second part called for Egypt and Israel “to negotiate in good faith with a goal of concluding within three months from the signing of this Framework a peace treaty between them.” Under this treaty, ultimately signed in March 1979 in Washington, DC., Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and Israel and Egypt ended their state of war, recognized one another, and established diplomatic relations.

*Source:* This description is drawn from the framework, which was printed in *The Camp David Summit*, Department of State Publication 8954 (Washington, DC: Office of Public Communications, Bureau of Public Affairs, September 1978).

---

effect in 1980.<sup>59</sup> Majority rule was obtained in the former Rhodesia, and the Carter administration rightly claimed credit for its role.

The same posture that was successful in Rhodesia was adopted toward South Africa: a firm stance against apartheid and a call for the transfer of control of Namibia to majority rule. Under U.S. and international policy pressure, South Africa agreed to **UN Resolution 435** on this issue. The transfer met numerous snags, however, and was not implemented during the Carter years. (In fact, it was not fully implemented until 1990.) Nonetheless, the promotion of American domestic values of respecting human rights and fostering majority rule won praise for the United States throughout Africa.

**People’s Republic of China** Carter’s final major foreign policy success was his decision to establish **formal diplomatic relations** with the People’s Republic of China, on January 1, 1979. Although this caused initial difficulties with Taiwan (because formal diplomatic relations and a security treaty had been broken with the Taiwanese government), it was generally hailed as a milestone in American foreign policy. Opening relations with Beijing reduced hostilities between the United States and China and had the potential of easing conflicts in East Asia. At the same time, though, it created another uncertainty in America’s approach to its traditional adversary, the Soviet Union, and reinforced the Soviets’ view that the Carter administration was more interested in dealing with other states than with them.



MAP 4.2 Southern Africa

### REALISM IN THE LAST YEAR: A RESPONSE TO CRITICS

By 1979, Carter's foreign policy had become the subject of considerable criticism on the grounds that it was inconsistent, incoherent, a failure, and, according to one critic, responsible for a decline in America's standing abroad.<sup>60</sup> In fact, although some successes in Carter's global approach might be identified, too many problems were evident, without a clear strategy for dealing with them.

- A revolution in Iran that replaced the Shah (whom the Carter administration had supported) with a markedly anti-American regime
- A revolution in Nicaragua, with the United States adopting a policy that pleased neither the Somozistas nor the Sandinistas
- The stalled Middle East peace effort, with Arab rejection of the Camp David framework
- The continuing growth of Soviet power without an American response



On all of these fronts, a certain malaise seemed to have set into Carter's foreign policy, marked by indecision and the inability to act. For this reason, a change in policy direction might well have been anticipated. In fact, two international events ultimately proved the catalyst to Carter's change of direction.

The **seizure of American hostages in Iran** in November 1979 and the **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan** a month later were watershed events in the global approach of the Carter administration.<sup>61</sup> Despite the effort to move its focus away from the Soviet Union, they brought that nation back into focus for America—the former indirectly, because it raised the prospect of Soviet inroads into the Middle East and Southwest Asia; the latter directly, because it projected the Soviet Union once again into the center of global affairs.

### American Hostages in Iran

The November 1979 seizure and holding of sixty-three Americans in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, produced what was perhaps the Carter administration's greatest foreign policy challenge. It raised real concerns among the American public over the U.S. role and its effectiveness in global politics. Fanning this concern was an ABC nightly news program called *America Held Hostage: Day*—(the day was changed nightly to emphasize how long the Americans were held) that catalogued the daily events surrounding the hostage taking. Significantly, this crisis generally and the program particularly soon conveyed how seemingly powerless the United States was and how much its global image had been damaged. Yellow ribbons (after a popular song of the time) appeared throughout the country signaling Americans' wait to welcome back the hostages. The longer the crisis continued, the greater the administration's policy dilemma became.

The hostage crisis produced a clear change in policy orientation and direction by the Carter administration, with national self-interest now dominant. Rather than trying to accommodate Third World demands, as it had been attempting in previous years, it now took a variety of steps—breaking diplomatic relations, seizing Iranian assets, imposing sanctions, and ultimately attempting a military rescue of the hostages—as a means of demonstrating resolve. Such actions also connoted a return to a realist perspective in foreign policy and away from Carter's initial idealism. Unfortunately, this strategy failed to yield quick results, and the American hostages were held for **444 days**. They were freed immediately after Carter left office on January 20, 1981.

### The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan also had a pronounced effect both on President Carter's view of the Soviet Union and on his foreign policy toward it. This was poignantly summarized by the president himself in an ABC television interview at the time: "My opinion of the Russians has changed most drastically in the last week [more] than even in the previous 2½ years before that."<sup>62</sup> The invasion also had the immediate impact of moving him away from his global approach, with the Soviet Union only one among many countries, toward **the bilateral**

**approach of the past**, with the Soviet–American relationship at the center of policy making. New policy actions quickly followed from this new orientation. Not all of the earlier initiatives were jettisoned, but the issue areas that he had earlier emphasized were given a secondary role.

The Carter administration adopted a series of responses to the Soviet Union over the invasion of Afghanistan:

- The ratification of the **SALT II treaty was shelved** in the U.S. Senate
- High-technology sales to the Soviet Union were halted
- Soviet fishing privileges in American waters were restricted
- A **grain embargo** was imposed on the Soviet Union<sup>63</sup>
- An **American boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow** was announced

### Global Events and Soviet–American Relations

Global events were now increasingly interpreted through lenses that focused on their effect on Soviet–American relations, with the principal U.S. efforts during 1980 centered on rallying friends to contain the Soviet Union. Moreover, it was during this time that such global goals as arms transfer control were downplayed as a signal to the Soviets of American determination. For instance, discussions were held with Beijing about arms sales to China. Furthermore, the United States began an effort to shore up its ties in the Persian Gulf and in Southwest Asia. Military aid was quickly offered to Pakistan, and National Security Chief Zbigniew Brzezinski made a highly publicized trip to the Khyber Pass as a show of determination regarding Afghanistan. Contacts were also made with friendly regimes in the Middle East to gain base and access rights for the United States in case of an emergency. Finally, the development of the **U.S. Rapid Deployment Force**—elite troops that could respond quickly to an emergency anywhere in the world—was given a top priority.

As a further signal to the Soviet Union, President Carter in his 1980 State of the Union Address warned that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. It will be repelled by use of any means necessary, including military force.”<sup>64</sup> Quickly labeled the **Carter Doctrine**, this statement was highly reminiscent of an earlier era with its Cold War rhetoric and its reliance on the essential elements of containment. Nonetheless, it accurately set the tone for the final year of the Carter administration and the policy shift that had occurred.

### Foreign Policy and the 1980 Campaign

Despite President Carter’s attempt to change his foreign policy direction, the perception of ineffectiveness continued to haunt him. As a consequence, foreign policy, with particular emphasis on the Iranian and Afghan experiences, became an important campaign issue in the 1980 presidential election.<sup>65</sup> Now, however,

instead of focusing on what was “good and decent,” as in 1976, the Republican challenger to President Carter, Ronald Reagan, called for a policy to “make America great again.” This was surely a call to move away from the idealism of the early Carter years. Yet it was also a call to pursue the kind of foreign policy that President Carter himself had tried to initiate in his last year in office.

## REALISM AND THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

Just as Jimmy Carter shifted away from the foreign policies of the Nixon–Ford–Kissinger years, Ronald Reagan sought to chart a different course from the one Carter had pursued. Reagan campaigned for the presidency on **the principle of restoring American power at home and abroad**, and his foreign policy was aimed at reflecting such power. Whereas Carter had attempted to move away from the power politics of the Kissinger era and away from a foreign policy that focused directly on adversaries—particularly the Soviet Union—Reagan embraced the need for power—especially military power—and the need to focus on the Soviet Union and its expansionism. During its second term, however, the Reagan administration sought and successfully obtained some accommodation with the Soviet Union, although without altering its anti-Soviet approach in the Third World.

### The Values and Beliefs of the Reagan Administration

President Reagan did not bring with him a fully developed foreign policy design, but he did bring a strongly held worldview. For him, the prime obstacle to peace and stability in the world was the Soviet Union and particularly Soviet expansionism. The principal foreign policy goal of the United States, therefore, was to be the **revival of the national will** to contain the Soviet Union and the restoration of confidence among friends that America was determined to stop communism. Furthermore, the United States had to make other nations aware of the danger that Soviet expansionism represented.

The ideological suspicion with which President Reagan viewed the Soviet Union was highlighted dramatically at his first news conference in January 1981, in which he stated that the Soviet leadership was committed to “world revolution” and that “they reserved unto themselves the right to commit any crime; to lie; to cheat,” as a means of obtaining what they wanted.<sup>66</sup> In 1983, echoing that first news conference, he assailed the morality of the Soviet Union once again and denounced it as an “evil empire” with which the United States, in his judgment, remained in a moral struggle.<sup>67</sup>

Such a consistently hostile view brought to mind comparisons with the U.S. foreign policy orientation of the 1950s, when the Cold War consensus was dominant. It surely stood in contrast to Carter’s view only four years earlier that “we are now free of that inordinate fear of communism.”<sup>68</sup> On the contrary, Reagan’s

view implied the centrality of the Soviet Union and its foreign policy objectives to American actions abroad. Indeed, to many observers, such a posture suggested the emergence of a new Cold War.<sup>69</sup>

### The Reagan Administration's Policy Approach

Despite the ideological cohesion that seemed to permeate the Reagan administration, its translation into a working foreign policy was not readily apparent to observers. In fact, charges were immediately made by policy analysts that the Reagan administration had no foreign policy because it appeared to have no coherent strategy for reaching its goals. Critics complained that rhetoric served as policy—a failing that was particularly accented by the Reagan administration's having come into office determined to bring coherence and consistency to foreign affairs, which they charged the Carter administration had been unable to do.<sup>70</sup>

This criticism is a bit overstated. In 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig provided a statement of principles and the underlying rationale for dealing with the world early in his tenure. Describing his approach as a “strategic one,” Haig said that American foreign policy behavior was based upon **four important pillars**:

- The restoration of economic and military strength
- The reinvigoration of alliances and friendships
- The promotion of progress in the developing countries through peaceable changes
- A relationship with the Soviet Union characterized by restraint and reciprocity<sup>71</sup>

He pointed out that none of these pillars would be pursued independently and that policy initiatives based on any one must support the others. The glue that would hold the pillars together was the Soviet–American relationship because, as Haig indicated, it “must be at the center of our efforts to promote a more peaceful world.”<sup>72</sup>

### Rebuilding American Strength

The Reagan administration quickly called for an increase in military spending, proposing a \$1.6 trillion defense buildup over a six-year period (1981–1986). Although the buildup was across the entire military—from a larger navy to a modernized army and air force and from the development of a new rapid deployment force to better pay for military personnel—it was the **strategic modernization plan** that attracted much of the attention in the early part of the Reagan presidency.<sup>73</sup>

Under this plan, each component of America's nuclear triad—land-based missiles, sea-based nuclear missiles, and intercontinental nuclear-armed bombers—would be modernized, and the strategic command and control structures—the technical communication facilities that provide direction for U.S. nuclear

forces<sup>74</sup>—would be upgraded to guard against any possible Soviet first strike. The Reagan administration also pursued two actions to improve America’s nuclear capability—one regional, the other global. On a regional level, it proposed to carry out the NATO alliance’s **Dual-Track decision of 1979**. In accord with that decision, new intermediate-range or theater nuclear weapons would be deployed in Western Europe if negotiations on theater nuclear arms control failed. On a global level, President Reagan called for the United States to “embark on a program to counter the awesome Soviet missile threat with measures that are defensive.” Such a defensive system “could pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate . . . [nuclear] weapons themselves.”<sup>75</sup> Formally called the **Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)** but more commonly known as “Star Wars”—after the popular motion picture—this proposal was viewed by critics as a further escalation of the arms race.

### Reinvigorating America’s Allies

The reinvigoration of the allies basically meant upgrading the military strength of the West and allied support of the political leadership of the United States globally. In the military area, as noted, the United States succeeded in persuading Western Europeans to go forward with the rearmament component of the Dual Track decision: Deployment of the 572 Pershing II and cruise missiles began by late 1983, after arms negotiations stalled.<sup>76</sup>

The administration also hoped to persuade the Europeans to accept a greater defense burden as a means of counteracting growing Soviet power in their region, and the Japanese to assume greater military responsibility in East Asia. Appeals were made to the Europeans to follow America’s lead in enacting sanctions against the Soviet Union and Poland after the imposition of martial law in Poland in late 1981, although their success was limited. The United States also tried to stop the Europeans from completing their natural gas pipeline arrangement with the Soviets at about the same time. Later, the Reagan administration sought (without success) to impose sanctions on the Europeans themselves over their failure to follow American wishes.<sup>77</sup>

### Bolstering Friends in the Developing World

The meaning of the third pillar—a commitment to progress in the Third World—reflected a sharp shift in U.S. strategy toward friendly developing countries. As compared to the Carter administration, the Reagan administration changed policy in three distinct ways. First, unlike President Carter, who sympathized with Third World aspirations, Reagan challenged those nations to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and seek improvement through private enterprise. The administration soon developed the **Caribbean Basin Initiative** as a model for utilizing the private sector to stimulate development. This plan provided for an increase in economic assistance to the Caribbean region by \$350 million, but it was preferential trade access to the American market for the Caribbean states and increased American investments in the region that were its key development components.<sup>78</sup>

Second, the administration increased U.S. reliance on military assistance as an “essential” element of American policy. Thus, it scrapped the arms transfer policy of the Carter administration and, following a plan more attuned to its philosophical orientation, announced that it would provide military assistance to “its major alliance partners and to those nations with whom it has friendly and cooperative security relationships.”<sup>79</sup>

Third, American policy would now focus on how regional conflicts would be analyzed and acted upon by the United States. No longer would they be assessed on the basis of regional concerns alone. Conflicts in the developing world would now be recast as part of the underlying conflict that the Reagan administration saw in the world. In turn, U.S. actions in regional disputes would have to recognize that global reality. Therefore, the emphasis was on how these conflicts affected U.S.–Soviet relations. The aim was to build a “**strategic consensus**” against the Soviet Union and its proxies.<sup>80</sup> Only after the Soviet danger in these conflicts was addressed could regional concerns be brought into their resolution.

### **Restraint and Reciprocity with the Soviet Union**

The fourth pillar of the Reagan administration’s approach to foreign policy focused directly on the Soviet Union. Only if the Soviets demonstrated restraint in their global actions would the United States carry on normal and reciprocal relations with them. In this sense, the familiar linkage notion of the Kissinger years was to be at the heart of any relationship with the Soviet Union. Specifically, Secretary Haig stated that the United States would “want greater Soviet restraint on the use of force. We want greater Soviet respect for the independence of others. And we want the Soviets to abide by their reciprocal obligations, such as those undertaken in the Helsinki Accords.” Moreover, no area of international relations could be left out of this restraint requirement. “We have learned that Soviet–American agreements, even in strategic arms control, will not survive Soviet threats to the overall military balance or Soviet encroachments . . . in critical regions of the world. *Linkage is not a theory; it is a fact of life that we overlook at our peril.*”<sup>81</sup>

## **THE REAGAN WORLDVIEW IN OPERATION**

With the four pillars as a primary guide, the Reagan administration’s actions toward the Soviet Union, Central America, southern Africa, and the Middle East reshaped the direction of American foreign policy.

### **Policy Actions toward the Soviet Union**

Because the Soviet Union had exercised neither policy restraint nor reciprocity in the past, the Reagan administration did not seek to improve relations immediately. Instead, it sought to rally other states against the Soviets and

adopted several initial measures to prod the Soviets into exercising international restraint.

First, administration officials publicly criticized the Soviet Union. President Reagan and Secretary Haig attacked the Soviet system as bankrupt and on the verge of collapse, charging the Soviets with fomenting international disorder.<sup>82</sup>

Second, the administration took direct steps to demonstrate American resolve. In addition to its strategic modernization plan, the administration called for producing and stockpiling the neutron bomb, a new kind of weapon (originally proposed during the Carter years) that killed humans but did not destroy property. Most significant, perhaps, the United States promptly imposed sanctions on both the Soviet Union and Poland in 1981 to show its dissatisfaction with the imposition of martial law by Poland's Communist government and Soviet support for it.<sup>83</sup>

Third, some actions were *not* taken to demonstrate that normal relations could not be reinstated until the Soviet Union showed that it could restrain itself. In this connection, the two most important omissions were the administration's refusal to move rapidly on arms control and its refusal to engage in summit meetings. In fact, arms control discussions were initially put on the back burner until the United States completed its arms buildup. Additionally, a summit meeting between the Soviet and American presidents was put off with the comment that conditions were not appropriate and that little valuable discussion would result.

Despite a relationship marked primarily by harsh rhetoric and strong action, some initial cooperation was evident. In the economic area, the Reagan administration lifted the grain embargo—which President Carter had put into effect after the Afghanistan invasion—in April 1981, despite its commitment to isolating and punishing the Soviet Union. Within a year, the administration sought to expand grain sales to the Soviets and eventually agreed to a new five-year grain deal.<sup>84</sup> In the military area, the administration stated that it would continue to adhere to the SALT I and SALT II limitations if the Soviets would.<sup>85</sup>

In the diplomatic area, Secretary of State Haig met with the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, during Gromyko's visit to the UN General Assembly in the fall of 1981, despite the political chill. Finally, the **Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) talks**—on nuclear missiles with ranges only within Europe—were reluctantly begun during November 1981—much earlier than expected given the overall political climate. Seven months later, President Reagan also initiated the **Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)** on intercontinental nuclear weapons.<sup>86</sup> By November 1983, however, neither of these talks had reached any agreement, and the United States went ahead with its deployment of intermediate missiles in Europe.<sup>87</sup> The Soviet Union walked out of the INF negotiations and, within one month, declared that it would not proceed with the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks, either. Further, the Soviets resumed and expanded the deployment of their intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Central Europe, announced the deployment of more nuclear submarines off the American coasts in retaliation for the new American weapons in Western Europe, and withdrew from the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, claiming that Soviet athletes would not be safe there.<sup>88</sup>



The consequence of this barrage of charges and actions by the superpowers was that by mid-1984 relations between them were “at the lowest level for the entire postwar period.”<sup>89</sup> The “restraint and reciprocity” that the Reagan administration had initially set out to achieve had not been accomplished, but the plan of restoring the Soviet Union to the center of American foreign policy and building up U.S. defenses was well under way.

### Policy Actions toward the Third World

**Central America** In Central America, the response of the Reagan administration to the unrest in El Salvador reflected its basic foreign policy approach. (See Map 4.3.) It quickly moved to interpret the ongoing civil war as Soviet and Cuban directed. Calling **El Salvador** a “textbook case” of Communist aggression, the administration issued a white paper outlining the danger it posed.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, testifying at a House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in March 1981, Secretary of State Haig charged that the Communist attack on El Salvador was part of a “four-phased operation” aimed at ultimate Communist control of Central America.<sup>91</sup>

Military assistance and the threat of military action were the principal instruments used by the Reagan administration to respond to the situation. Military aid totaling \$25 million was immediately proposed for the Salvadoran government in its struggle with rebel forces, with more to come, and the number of military advisors was increased from 20 to 55 by the spring of 1981.<sup>92</sup> Over the next several years, El Salvador and its neighbor, Honduras, became leading recipients of U.S. foreign assistance.

A similar policy approach, and some of the administration’s harshest rhetoric, was directed toward El Salvador’s neighbor, Nicaragua. President Reagan described the **Sandinista-led government of Nicaragua** as “a Communist reign of terror” and the Nicaraguans themselves as “Cuba’s Cubans” for their assumed aid of the Salvadoran guerrillas.<sup>93</sup> He also quoted directly from the Truman Doctrine of four decades earlier to justify the need for American action in the region (“I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples . . .”).<sup>94</sup> Charging that the Nicaraguan government was arming the Salvadoran guerrillas, the Reagan administration, on taking office in 1981, cut off \$15 million of economic aid.<sup>95</sup> By early 1982, in fact, the administration was conducting a clandestine operation in Honduras in support of Nicaraguan rebels, or Contras, against the Sandinista government.<sup>96</sup>

The hardline policy of communist containment in Latin America was perhaps manifested most dramatically with the American invasion of the Caribbean island of **Grenada** in October 1983. After Marxist Prime Minister Maurice Bishop was killed on October 19, 1983, and after a more radical group seized control, the United States agreed to join forces with the five members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States in an operation “to restore order and democracy.” This action was officially taken to ensure the safety of between 800 and 1,000 Americans—mostly medical students—and to “forestall further chaos.”<sup>97</sup> Within a few days, American control of the island was achieved, the Marxist regime had





MAP 4.3 Central America

been replaced, and the return to a Western-style democracy was under way. This intervention demonstrated that the Reagan administration would confront Marxist regimes, with military force if necessary.

**Southern Africa** The Reagan administration's actions followed a similar pattern against potential Communist gains in southern Africa. It adopted a policy of "**constructive engagement**" toward South Africa and linked any settlement in Namibia (or Southwest Africa) to the removal of Soviet-backed Cuban forces from Angola. These policies were predicated upon several key beliefs. First, South Africa was staunchly anticommunist, and, as a result, the United States should not seek a confrontational approach toward it. Second, the conflict in the region had East–West overtones that could not be overlooked. After all, South Africa was confronted by a Marxist regime in Angola backed by Cuban soldiers and Soviet arms.<sup>98</sup> Third, only when the South Africans felt more confident of American support could the United States try to influence them to change their apartheid policy and to seek a solution to the question of Namibia. In this region, the strategic concern of controlling communism produced a markedly different approach from the one the Carter administration had adopted.

**The Middle East** The administration's primary strategy in the Middle East was also aimed at stopping any potential Communist gains. No new initiatives were proposed, nor was there much effort to proceed with the Camp David framework inherited from the previous administration. Instead, as elsewhere, the Reagan administration attempted to rally the Arab states against the Soviet Union and to engage the Israelis in a strategic understanding. A new Persian Gulf command, with the Rapid Deployment Force as part of that structure, was announced. Negotiations were held with several Middle East states regarding American base and access rights, with Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, and Oman, for example, agreeing to joint military exercises with the United States<sup>99</sup> and the United States obtaining military cooperation from the Israelis.<sup>100</sup>

The most dramatic examples of military assistance employed to bolster American influence against the Soviet Union also occurred when the United States agreed to sell technologically advanced aircraft equipment and the **Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)** aircraft to Saudi Arabia in October 1981, and agreed to supply forty **F-16 fighter aircraft** to Pakistan (an arms deal worth more than \$3 billion) as part of its southwest Asia strategy.<sup>101</sup>

The Reagan administration's emphasis on global over local concerns ultimately proved short-lived in the Middle East. By the summer of 1982—and wholly as a result of Israel's invasion of Lebanon and its advance to Beirut—it had become fully immersed in local issues in the region. The administration sought a cease-fire between the Israelis and the surrounded Palestinian forces in West Beirut and a withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli forces from Lebanon itself. Moreover, even President Reagan played the role of mediator with a new policy initiative (labeled the **Reagan Initiative**) to serve as a follow-up to Camp David. The initiative called for a Palestinian homeland federated with Jordan, an end to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and security for Israel.<sup>102</sup>

The depth of American involvement in the area reached the point of deploying American military personnel on two occasions. The administration sent a contingent of U.S. Marines into Lebanon in August 1982 as part of an effort to evacuate Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) members from Beirut, where the Israelis had surrounded them. This mission was successfully completed without major incident. In September 1982, however, the Marines were again dispatched to Lebanon as part of a **Multinational Force (MNF)** composed of military personnel from several Western nations. Although the MNF was to serve as “peace-keepers” between the various Lebanese factions and as facilitators of a negotiated settlement among them, the task proved elusive and ultimately disastrous.<sup>103</sup> As factional feuding continued, the role of the MNF became increasingly unclear. In time, the Marines, encamped at the Beirut airport, became identified with the central government and became the target of Lebanese snipers. On October 23, 1983, a terrorist bomb attack on the barracks killed some 241 Americans.

Once again, although the Reagan administration originally intended to deal with regional issues in a global context, it became deeply involved in “local issues” in the Middle East without a well-conceived policy.

## CHALLENGES TO THE REAGAN FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH

Despite the efforts of the Reagan administration to refocus American policy on the Soviet danger, the rest of the world would not easily follow its lead. Concern over—and at times rejection of—that policy’s ideological tone and substance came from both international and domestic sources. These challenges made it difficult for the administration to maintain the ideological consistency that it originally intended, and they contributed to its modification over time.

### International Differences

The Western European states, for example, were reluctant to follow the Reagan administration in dealing with the Soviet Union. Whether it was over martial law in Poland or the building of a natural gas pipeline from the Soviet Union to Western Europe, they were concerned with preserving contacts with Eastern Europe, not disrupting them.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, even though the Europeans were committed to the Dual-Track decision of 1979, they were unsure (and uneasy) about President Reagan’s commitment to pursuing negotiations. With his harsh rhetoric, his strategic modernization plan, and his reluctance to proceed quickly with arms control talks, he did not seem to be following a policy of restraint. Further, the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in London, Rome, Berlin, and Bonn protesting the Reagan arms policy created further political difficulties for European leaders.<sup>105</sup> Finally, some European and Latin American states refused to support either the American approach to the situation in El Salvador or its policy toward Nicaragua.<sup>106</sup>

### Domestic Differences

The American public was increasingly skeptical of continued defense spending and expressed support for the **nuclear freeze movement**. Although Americans had been willing to go along with some increase in defense spending when the Reagan administration took office, that willingness had decreased considerably by 1983. By then, 45 percent of the American public believed that the United States was spending too much on the military, and only 14 percent believed that the United States was spending too little.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, public opinion polls consistently showed that more than 60 percent of Americans supported a “mutual and verifiable freeze” of nuclear weapons between the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>108</sup> This nuclear freeze movement was able to turn out more than 700,000 people in New York City in June 1982, for one of the largest demonstrations in American political history. The demonstrators—individuals from a wide variety of political and social backgrounds—reflected the diversity of support for this movement.<sup>109</sup>

Other domestic challenges arose over Central American policy. In particular, the public expressed concern with potential American involvement in the region, especially as more American advisors were being sent there. Would American combat forces be sent? Was this involvement the beginning of another Vietnam-like quagmire in which American involvement would slowly escalate? These fears caused Secretary of State Haig to rule out the use of American troops in Central America.<sup>110</sup> Another argument against involvement was that local conditions in Central America, such as poverty and inequality, ought to be given greater credibility as causes of the political unrest than the Reagan administration had allowed.

## POLICY CHANGE: ACCOMMODATION WITH THE SOVIET UNION

After President Reagan’s resounding election to a second term in November 1984, he immediately announced that his administration would continue to do “what we’ve been doing.”<sup>111</sup> In reality, however, the administration made some significant changes in its foreign policy. Reagan did not abandon his hardline position on Soviet expansionism in Third World areas, but he did make a significant change in the bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union by adopting a much more accommodationist approach and setting the stage for ending the Cold War.

### Sources of Change

At least three factors contributed to the movement away from the hard-line approach of the Reagan administration toward the Soviet Union:

- A change in the policy stance of the American leadership
- The emergence of new leadership and “new thinking” in the Soviet Union
- The domestic realities of the arms race between the superpowers

It is difficult to specify which of these (and presumably others as well) weighed most heavily in this policy change—or to show fully how they interacted. Nevertheless, a brief discussion of each is in order.

**Policy Shifts** Secretary of State George Shultz initially signaled a change in emphasis as early as October 1984, at that time declaring that linkage between Soviet behavior around the world and the quality of relations between the two superpowers was

... not merely a “fact of life” but a complex question of policy. There will be times when we must make progress in one dimension of the relationship contingent on progress in others. . . . At the same time, linkage as an instrument of policy has limitations; if applied rigidly, it could yield the initiative to the Soviets, letting them set the pace and the character of the relationship. . . . In the final analysis, linkage is a tactical question; the strategic reality of leverage comes from creating facts in support of our overall design.<sup>112</sup>

In other words, policy must be more flexible than it had been.

In his second inaugural address, President Reagan, too, suggested a new flexibility by committing his administration to better relations with the Soviet Union, especially in nuclear arms control. Specifically, the United States would seek to reduce the cost of national security “in negotiations with the Soviet Union.” Such negotiations, however, would not only focus on limiting an increase in nuclear weapons; rather, they would attempt to “reduce their numbers.”<sup>113</sup> To appreciate how significant a change this was, recall the Reagan administration’s initial rejection of arms control negotiations.

**“New Thinking”** The second factor that contributed to the possibility of accommodation between the two superpowers was the 1985 selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and eventually as Soviet president. Gorbachev’s rise to power was critical, as he brought several important conceptual changes to Soviet foreign policy thinking and a commitment to improving relations with the United States. In fact, he added two major concepts to the political lexicon of the 1980s and 1990s, *perestroika* and *glasnost*. *Perestroika* referred to the “restructuring” of Soviet society in an effort to improve the economy; *glasnost* referred to a new “openness” and a movement toward greater democratization of the Soviet system.

Such “new thinking” by the Soviet leadership, as Gorbachev himself called it, came to have important implications for Soviet–American relations. In contrast to earlier desires for “nuclear superiority,” Soviet leaders began to embrace the concepts of “reasonable sufficiency” as strategy for dealing with the West and to recognize the need for greater “strategic stability” in the nuclear balance. In such an environment, nuclear arms accommodation between the two superpowers became a viable option. Furthermore, the Soviet leadership indicated that the struggle between capitalism and socialism had changed, and so political, rather than military, solutions, ought to be pursued.<sup>114</sup>

**The Sustained Arms Race** Yet a third factor may well have been the most pivotal: the increasing domestic burden of sustained military spending. The economies of both nations were being undermined and distorted by continuing confrontation. Indeed, in the Soviet Union, people's basic needs could not be met as more and more resources were diverted to the military. Gorbachev's hope of restructuring the Soviet system could not be realistically undertaken as long as military spending consumed so much of the nation's wealth. In the United States, with military budgets approaching \$300 billion per year and federal budget deficits increasing, the country's economic health remained in question. Consequently, the Reagan administration could no longer count on public support for increasing military expenditures.<sup>115</sup>

### The Return of Soviet–American Summity

The first significant manifestation of a changed policy was the reemergence of summity between American and Soviet leaders. Surprisingly, considering his initial reluctance, President Reagan ultimately held more summits with Soviet leaders than any other American president. In the space of about three and a half years, he held five summits with President Gorbachev,<sup>116</sup> each of which proved to be an important building block in improved Soviet–American ties.

The first summit between Reagan and Gorbachev, held in Geneva, Switzerland, on November 19–21, 1985, was called the “**Fireside Summit**” for the backdrop against which it took place. No important agreements emerged; rather, it was an opportunity for the leaders to get to know each other better and to exchange views on numerous issues, including arms control, human rights, and regional conflicts. In effect, this summit was a prelude to the next one.<sup>117</sup>

The second and third summits were arguably the most important ones of the Reagan presidency. The **October 1986 summit**, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, focused largely on seeking progress in the ongoing nuclear arms talks between the Soviet Union and the United States. Its most significant products were agreements in principle to reduce all strategic nuclear weapons 50 percent over a five-year period and to limit intermediate-range nuclear forces to 100 warheads for each side.<sup>118</sup> These commitments were significant for advancing work on strategic arms reduction (START) and intermediate nuclear forces (INF) agreements. Discord remained, however, in negotiations on space-based missiles (the “Star Wars” defense systems), which threatened to undermine progress in START and INF. The INF discussions were eventually separated from the other talks, which quickly led to the completion of the **Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty** (discussed in the next subsection), signed at the third summit in Washington in December 1987.

The fourth summit, held in Moscow in late May and early June 1988, was primarily to exchange the instrument of ratification of the new INF Treaty, seek further progress in strategic arms negotiations, and discuss other key global issues.<sup>119</sup> The fifth and final Soviet–American summit of the Reagan administration was a brief one-day meeting in New York City in December 1988 during Gorbachev's visit to speak before the United Nations.<sup>120</sup> This was an opportunity

for a final exchange of views before Reagan left office and for President-Elect George H.W. Bush to meet the Soviet leader.

### The INF Treaty

The completion of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty was the most important manifestation of progress in Soviet–American relations in Reagan’s second term. It was the culmination of a long series of negotiations begun in November 1981, broken off in November 1983, and resumed after a joint Soviet–American agreement to link all nuclear arms negotiations—one track on intermediate nuclear forces, a second on strategic nuclear forces, and a third on defense and space arms—in a set of **“New Negotiations”** in January 1985.<sup>121</sup> After the 1986 Reykjavik summit, however, the INF talks were selected for acceleration and were eventually completed and signed in December 1987.

INF called for the elimination of all intermediate-range nuclear weapons within three years and all medium-range nuclear weapons within eighteen months.<sup>122</sup> It also prohibited the United States and the Soviet Union from ever again possessing such weapons. In addition, it provided a series of onsite inspections for each party and set out exacting procedures on how these nuclear weapons should be destroyed. Finally, it established a **Special Verification Commission** that would be continuously in session to deal with any issues that might arise.

The military significance of the INF Treaty has sometimes been questioned. It required relatively few nuclear missiles to be destroyed, and each superpower retained a formidable arsenal with which to destroy the another and the rest of the world. Its political significance, is less debatable, however. INF represented the first nuclear arms reduction pact in history, and it gave significant momentum to arms control and arms reduction for the future. With its incorporation of onsite inspection, it represented a new direction in the verification of arms control agreements between the superpowers.

## **POLICY CONTINUITY: THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND THE THIRD WORLD**

If actions toward the Soviet Union represented change, policy toward the Third World—and the perceived role of the Soviet Union in causing unrest there—represented continuity for the Reagan administration during its second term. This continuity was reflected in the formal emergence of the **“Reagan Doctrine,”** which supported anticommunist movements in various locations around the world. The Doctrine was demonstrated most dramatically by support of the Nicaraguan Contras, even though Congress cut off military support for that operation from 1984 to 1986. This episode, known as the **“Iran–Contra affair”** (discussed in an upcoming section) reflected the administration’s determination to

“stand tall” against perceived Communist penetration in Central America. At the same time, it produced a major policy inconsistency: The Reagan administration secretly abandoned its official arms embargo of Iran in an attempt to free American hostages held by Iranians.

### The Reagan Doctrine

By 1985, the administration’s support for anti-Communist forces in the Third World had gained such prominence and permanency that it took on a name of its own: the “Reagan Doctrine.” Unlike U.S. policy that focused on containing the expansion of communism, the Reagan Doctrine espoused “providing assistance to groups fighting governments that have aligned themselves with the Soviet Union.”<sup>123</sup> Despite the thaw in Soviet–American relations during Reagan’s second term, this strategy was vigorously pursued and proved to be the main thread of continuity with the hardline policy of anticommunism that was so prominent in 1981.

What the Reagan Doctrine meant in reality was that several anti-Communist movements across three continents received both covert and overt American economic and military assistance and political encouragement in their fight against the Communist governments in power. In Asia, for example, the United States continued to support the Afghan rebels in their battle with Soviet troops and the Soviet-backed Kabul government. In Kampuchea (present-day Cambodia), it clandestinely funneled aid to groups opposing the government supported by occupying Vietnamese. As for Africa, the Reagan administration persuaded Congress to repeal its prohibition on aid to forces opposing the Angolan government, and it continued to support rebel leader Jonas Savimbi and his **National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)** in its fight against the Marxist-supported Angolan government. In Central America, of course, the Reagan administration continued to support the Nicaraguan Contras against the Sandinistas, even as Congress diligently attempted to end such aid.

A useful indicator of how institutionalized the Reagan Doctrine had become was the 1985 foreign aid authorization bill. Although this bill included non-military humanitarian aid for the Nicaraguan Contras, support for other anti-Communist rebel groups was publicly acknowledged with a \$5 million allocation to the Cambodian rebels and a \$15 million “humanitarian” allocation to the Afghan people.<sup>124</sup> As discussed earlier, the congressional prohibition of aid to rebel forces in Angola was formally rescinded in this legislation.

### The Iran–Contra Affair, 1984–1986

The episode that best illustrates the extent to which the administration embraced the Reagan Doctrine, the Iran–Contra affair from 1984 through 1986, brought together two vexing foreign policy problems for the Reagan administration.<sup>125</sup> The first was its dealings with the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, which it viewed as avowedly Marxist, with the intent of spreading revolution throughout Central America. The second problem was its dealings with the Iranian



government led by Ayatollah Khomeini, which, along with student supporters, had seized 63 Americans in November 1979, held most of them hostage for 444 days, and released the remaining 52 on the day of President Reagan's first-term inauguration.

To deal with these two linked policy questions, the Reagan administration supported the **Nicaraguan Contras** fighting against the Sandinistas in various ways, including clandestine assistance and continued to enforce President Carter's trade sanctions against Iran, particularly the prohibition of U.S. arms sales to that country.

Beginning in 1984, however, policies toward Nicaragua and Iran were faltering and eventually unraveled by mid-1985. Iran's actions in support of terrorism caused the first challenge to the Reagan administration's policy. As a result of U.S. participation in a multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon in 1982 and 1983, anti-American sentiment and terrorism against the United States had risen significantly. In October 1983, terrorists bombed a U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon. In early 1984, three Americans were seized in Beirut. In 1985, four more Americans were taken. Both the American public and President Reagan became increasingly impatient over the hostage situation. Indeed, by mid-1985, Reagan decided to reverse the long-standing policy of an arms embargo against Iran in an attempt to free U.S. hostages.

The administration's policy reversal toward Iran did not occur in isolation; rather, it quickly became tied to an attempt to save its policy of aiding the Nicaraguan Contras. In October 1984, Congress had cut off all military assistance to the Contras with the passage of the most restrictive version of the **Boland Amendments**. (Named after Congressman Edward Boland of Massachusetts, these were a series of measures attached to defense appropriations bills and a continuing resolution from 1982 to 1986 aimed at shaping policy toward Nicaragua [see Chapter 8].) In light of congressional action, high administration officials almost immediately undertook efforts to keep the Contras together in "body and soul together," as President Reagan had instructed. What ultimately emerged was a covert operation by private operatives to raise money and provide support for them.

The administration employed two means of raising money to support the Contras: contributions by private individuals and other governments and the clandestine sale of arms to the Iranian government. The latter effort, largely directed by **Lt. Col. Oliver North** of the National Security Council, provided for several shipments of arms to Iran and for profits from those sales to be transferred to the Contras in 1985 and 1986.

It is significant that throughout the entire episode and during the investigations afterward, President Reagan consistently denied both that he knew that arms sales profits were being transferred to the Contras and that the arms sales were tied solely to the freeing of American hostages held in Lebanon.

The Iran-Contra affair affected both procedural and content aspects of American foreign policy during the last years of the Reagan administration. It damaged both the clarity and the credibility of the administration's policy and challenged the way the Reagan Doctrine was being carried out. It also had a profound

effect on congressional–executive relations and on public support. Yet it also demonstrated the extent to which the administration was willing to enforce the Reagan Doctrine.

### **POLICY CHANGES TOWARD THE THIRD WORLD: THE PHILIPPINES, THE PLO, AND SOUTH AFRICA**

Although adherence to the Reagan Doctrine marked the administration’s approach to the Third World, three important policy changes did occur: in Southeast Asia, in the Middle East, and in Africa.

#### **The Aquino Victory**

The first change involved the Philippines and the movement toward democracy under **Corazon Aquino** in 1985 and 1986. The United States had long supported the government of **Ferdinand Marcos**, principally because of his anti-Communist credentials and because of its need to maintain its strategic military bases at Subic Bay and at Clark Field. Yet Marcos’s dismal human rights record and authoritarian rule had long been a source of embarrassment and concern to U.S. policy makers. With the assassination of **Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr.**, the leading opposition politician, and the growing strength of the New People’s Army—a Marxist opposition group—and other nationalist factions, the Reagan administration came under increasing pressure to reevaluate its policy. By 1984, that reevaluation had begun with a National Security Council directive that anticipated a post-Marcos period.<sup>126</sup>

When President Marcos suddenly announced a “snap election” to be held in early 1986 to demonstrate his popularity, Corazon Aquino, wife of the assassinated senator and a political novice, agreed to run against him. Although Marcos was declared the election winner, accusations of voter fraud were rampant, with opposition groups surrounding the presidential palace and calling for Marcos to step down. At that juncture, the administration threw its full support behind Corazon Aquino and informed Marcos that he should resign. Within a matter of days, Marcos had left the country and taken up exile in Hawaii.

The significance of this event for the Reagan administration was that it represented a clear departure from previous policy, away from stability through support for authoritarian rule and toward human rights and democracy. This departure seemed to be particularly at odds with an administration that had previously supported Third World stability as the less dangerous way to thwart Communist expansion.

#### **The U.S.–PLO Dialogue**

A second change concerned the **Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO)** involvement in Middle East peace negotiations. In 1975, as part of commitments associated with the second disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt,

the United States had pledged to Israel that it would have no contact with the PLO until at least two conditions were met: (1) The PLO recognized the right of Israel to exist, and (2) it accepted **UN resolutions 242 and 338** as the basis for negotiations.<sup>127</sup> Later, a third condition for any contact between the PLO and the United States was added: the PLO would have to renounce the use of terrorism.<sup>128</sup> In spite of a variety of efforts by Secretary of State George Shultz in the mid-1980s, no real accommodation occurred among the parties to this ongoing dispute.

In November 1988, however, the Palestine National Council, the political assembly of the PLO, took a dramatic step to change the situation. First, it declared an independent Palestinian state in the area occupied by Israel and sought recognition from abroad. Second, and most important for U.S. policy, it moved to accept the first American condition for discussion between the parties and accepted in part the second condition. Regarding the third condition, however, it “condemned” terrorism but did not renounce it. By mid-December 1988, Yasir Arafat, head of the PLO, sensing the political value of discussions with the United States, announced his full acceptance of the three explicit conditions for U.S.–PLO dialogue and his renunciation of terrorism. Within a matter of hours, President Reagan declared that Arafat’s statement met American conditions and announced a shift in American policy.<sup>129</sup>

### Opposition to Apartheid

The third arena of change was South Africa. Although all American administrations, including Reagan’s, had long opposed South Africa’s **policy of apartheid**—segregation of the races—the Reagan administration’s policy was one of “constructive engagement” in which “quiet diplomacy” was seen as the best way to elicit change in that strategically important country. By August 1985, however, Congress had become impatient with such a strategy and was on the verge of passing a compromise bill that would have imposed economic sanctions as a more tangible way to move the South Africans along. In a clear reversal and undoubtedly as an attempt to rescue the initiative from Congress, President Reagan issued an executive order imposing virtually the same set of sanctions that Congress had proposed.<sup>130</sup>

In 1986, however, the administration took no further action against South Africa. At the same time, Congress pressed ahead and passed a new, tough sanctions bill, the **Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986**, over President Reagan’s veto. The policy change that President Reagan had originally put into place after congressional prodding in 1985 was now made permanent. In this sense, though, that change was more Congress’s and less the administration’s own.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Nixon, Carter, and Reagan administrations took different approaches to American foreign policy as the Cold War was changing and winding down. Nixon and Carter sought, albeit in different ways, a change in emphasis away

from the globalism of the Cold War and its basic tenets; Reagan sought to restore that globalism. The greatest value change that Nixon brought to U.S. policy was a de-emphasis on moral principle and a greater acceptance of traditional realism as the basis for U.S. dealings with the rest of the world. At least until the last year of his term, Carter sought to continue this limited globalism (with more emphasis on trilateral and Third World relations than on superpower ties), but with less of the largely singular moral emphasis on anticommunism; his would be a more comprehensive, morally based approach, best exemplified by his human rights campaign. Reagan sought less to impose new values and more to restore earlier values epitomized by the Cold War consensus. That is, his administration continued the moral emphasis of the Carter administration (although with communism, not human rights violations, as its focus), but it tried to restore an American globalism reminiscent of an earlier era.

The Reagan administration largely succeeded in its effort by restoring the Soviet Union to its place at the center of American foreign policy, challenging the Soviets worldwide, and attempting to rally the nations of the noncommunist world against Soviet expansionism. During its second term, however, the administration moved from confrontation to accommodation, notably completing the first nuclear arms reduction treaty (INF) in history. Toward the rest of the world, however, it continued its staunch anti-Communist policy with a more mixed result. Nevertheless, global conditions were changing and within a year of the end of the Reagan administration, the Cold War had begun to unravel, posing new challenges to the values and direction of American foreign policy.

In the next chapter, we examine the efforts of the Bush and Clinton administrations to deal with a world without the Soviet Union at its center.

## NOTES

1. The approach of the Ford administration (1974–1976) is not treated separately here because Henry Kissinger continued to serve as national security advisor (through 1975) and as secretary of state (through 1976).

2. For a detailed listing of the assumptions of realism and idealism, see Charles W. Kegley, Jr., “The Neoliberal Challenge to Realist Theories of World Politics: An Introduction,” in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., *Controversies in International Relations Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 4–5. For another statement of the idealism/liberalism tradition in international politics, see Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman/Little Brown, 1989).

3. Richard M. Nixon, “Asia after Viet Nam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46 (October 1967): 111–125.

The quoted passages are at pp. 121, 123, and 114.

4. Richard M. Nixon, *U.S. Policy for the 1970s, A New Strategy for Peace. A Report to the Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, February 18, 1970). The quoted passages are at pp. 2 and 3. For the earlier statements on some of these principles, see Richard M. Nixon, “Informal Remarks in Guam with Newsmen, July 25, 1969,” and “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam, November 3, 1969,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon 1969* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 544–556 and pp. 901–909, respectively. Indeed, the “Nixon Doctrine” is sometimes referred to as the “Guam Doctrine.”