

# ONE: Nixon suggests Détente

President Nixon's greatest achievements were in the field of foreign policy.

Some believe that Nixon's greatest accomplishment as president was in bringing about détente, a relaxation in the tensions between the superpowers. This role was ironic, for in the 1950's Richard Nixon had been one of the most bitter and active anti-communists in government. He had made his reputation as someone willing to demand extraordinary action in response to the communist threat. As President, however, Nixon dealt imaginatively with both China and the Soviet Union. Bypassing Congress, and often bypassing his own advisers, he relied heavily on the advice of Henry Kissinger, his secretary of state. Nixon and Kissinger reversed the direction of postwar American foreign policy.

Nixon drew on Kissinger's understanding that foreign affairs were more complex than a simple standoff between the United States and the threat of communism. Kissinger pointed out that there were deep rifts in the communist world itself, "The deepest international conflict in the world today is not between us and the Soviet Union but between the Soviet Union and Communist China."



Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, 1972.  
*Rauchwetter/dba/Landov.*

Nixon and Brezhnev



# TWO: Nixon visits China

The most surprising policy shift during the Nixon administration was toward China. When the communist revolution ended in 1949 the People's Republic of China was established. Americans saw all communists in Asia as part of a united plot to dominate the world. Ignoring reality, the United States did not extend formal diplomatic recognition to the new Chinese government-in effect, officially pretending instead that it did not exist. Even when a Chinese-Soviet alliance crumbled, the United States clung to its rigid position. It insisted that the government of Chiang Kai-shek, set up on the island of Taiwan when the Nationalists fled the Chinese mainland, was the rightful government of all China.

Quietly, Nixon began to prepare the way for change. In his inaugural address in 1969, he referred indirectly to China when he declared,

We seek an open world...a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation.”

The next year, the administration relaxed some regulations toward China. Then the Chinese invited an American table-tennis team to visit and the United States began to ease some trading restriction. In July 1971, after extensive secret diplomacy, Nixon made the dramatic announcement that he planned to visit China the following year. He would be the first United States President to travel to that country.

Nixon understood that the People's Republic, was an established government and would not simple disappear. Other nations had recognized the new government, and it was time for the United States to do the same. Similarly, other countries wanted to give China's seat in the United Nations to the People's Republic, and the United States could no longer muster international opinion against this change.

Nixon had other motives as well. He recognized that he could use Chinese friendships as a bargaining chip in his negotiations with the Soviet Union. Press coverage of the trip would give him a boost at home. Also, he believed that he could take the action without political damage, because of his past reputation as a strong anti-communist.

Nixon traveled to China in February 1972. He met with Mao Zedong, the Chinese leader who had spearheaded the revolution in 1949. He spoke with Premier Zhou Enlai about international problems and ways of dealing with them. He and his wife toured the Great wall and other Chinese sights, all in front of television cameras that sent historic pictures home. When he returned to the United States he waited in his plane until prime time so his return would be seen by as many television viewers as possible. Foreign relations were not yet restored, that would take a few more years, but the basis for diplomatic ties had been established.



President Nixon greets Chinese Party Chairman Mao Zedong (left) in a historic visit to the People's Republic of China, 1972.

# THREE: Nixon strengthens ties with the Soviet Union

While negotiating with China, Nixon and his aides turned their attention to the Soviet Union. He hoped to play off one communist state against the other. In 1971, he outlined his aim for East-West relations in Europe by saying

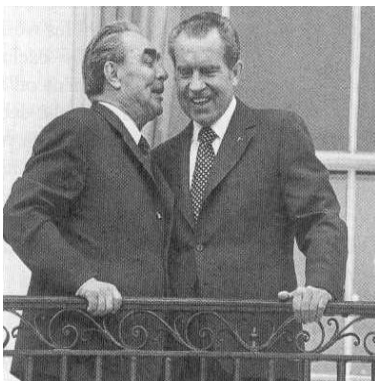
*East-West conflict in Europe springs from historical and objective causes, not transient (changing) moods or personal misunderstandings.*

*For twenty-five years Europe has been divided by opposing national interests and contrary philosophies, which clash over specific issues: ... the division of Germany, the situation in and around Berlin, the nature of relations between Western and Eastern countries and institutions, and the barriers to travel and cultural and intellectual (enjoyments)*

*These issues will not be quickly resolved. To relax tensions means a patient and persistent effort to deal with specific sources and not only with their manifestations (obvious appearances).*

*We in the West are convinced by the history of the postwar period that a detente that does not apply equally to Eastern and Western Europe will be inherently (basically) unstable.*

*In our view, detente means negotiating the concrete conditions of mutual security that will allow for expanded intra-European contact and cooperation without jeopardizing the security of any country...In view of this fundamental difference, a major question for the alliance to face is whether we can overcome the East-West stalemate while maintaining unity among ourselves and avoiding internal divisions in our countries.*



Several months after his visit to China, Nixon visited the Soviet Union. He was welcomed as warmly in Moscow as he had been in Beijing. In a series of cordial meetings with Premier Leonid Brezhnev, the two nations negotiated a weapons pact, agreed to work together to explore space and eased long – standing trade limits.



# FOUR: Nixon and USSR agree to limit weapons: SALT

Nixon saw arms control as part of the process in trying the various strands of his foreign policy program together. Like many Americans, he was worried about the widespread possibility of nuclear weapons. The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, a trilateral agreement among the US, USSR and UK, had ended atmospheric, underwater, and outer space testing of new bombs, but underground testing continued. Bigger and better bombs were being made all the time, and some people feared that the world might be destroyed unless these weapons were brought under control.

Nixon was determined to address the nuclear threat and to deal creatively with the Soviet Union at the same time. He had entered office intent of achieving superiority over the Soviet Union, but came to recognize that superiority made little sense in an era in which each nation had more than enough weapons to destroy their enemies many times over. This ability is known as overkill. Balance between the superpowers was what the nuclear age demanded. The United States and the Soviet Union therefore began Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, known as SALT.

Thirty months of talks ended in an important pact that held the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles at 1972 levels. The treaty also included an agreement restricting the development and deployment of defensive antiballistic missiles systems.

SALT I was a diplomatic triumph and an important step forward. But it did little to limit the number of warheads the two nations possessed or to stop them from improving nuclear weapons systems in other ways.



Dirck Halstead/Liaison/[Getty Images](#)  
President Richard Nixon and Russian leader Leonid Brezhnev sign the SALT treaty, freezing certain U.S. and Soviet weapons systems, on May 26, 1972 in the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia.



Nixon meets with Brezhnev during the Soviet Leader's trip to the U.S. in 1973



## FIVE: JIMMY CARTER: Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II

During Jimmy Carter's presidency, several issues complicated the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Détente-a relaxation of the tensions between the superpowers- was at a high point when Carter took office. In his first year, he declared optimistically that the United States would forge even closer ties with the Soviet Union. This did not work out.

First Carter's commitment to human rights made Soviet leaders angry. The Soviets were openly annoyed when the President verbally supported Soviets citizens who were publicly criticizing the government.

This situation slowed efforts to reach further agreement on arms control Negotiations were already underway for a second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II). Misjudging the Soviets, Carter offered new weapons reduction proposals that went further than earlier agreements. The Soviets, already suspicious of Carter did not agree to the proposal.

Finally Carter and Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev signed the new treaty in Vienna in June 1979. More complicated than SALT I, it limited the number of warheads and missiles each power retained. SALT II Still had to be ratified by the Senate, however. This ratification never happened because of the Soviet decision to invade neighboring Afghanistan.



President Jimmy Carter and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev sign the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) treaty, June 18, 1979, in Vienna

*Photo Credit: Bill Fitz-Patrick*

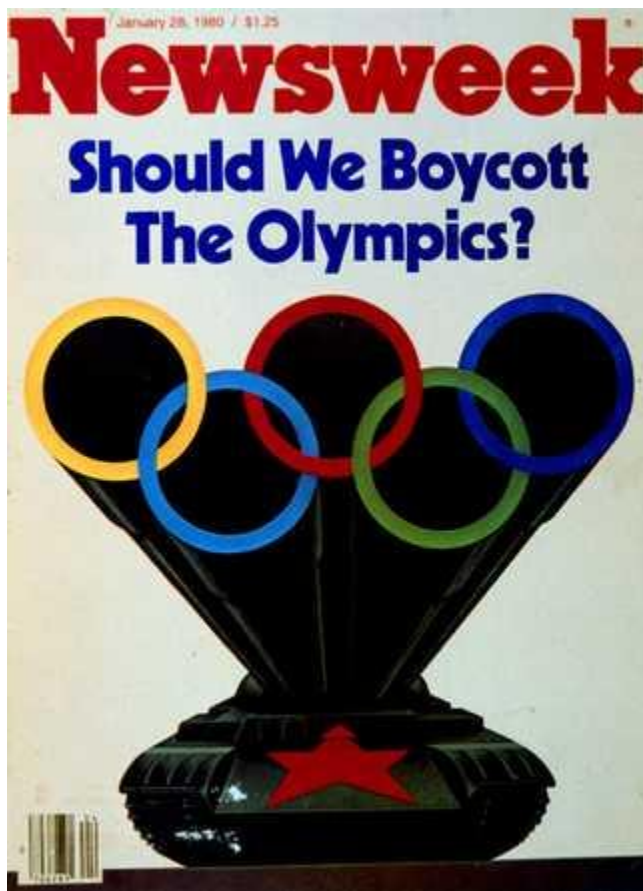
# SIX: Carter reacts to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

By June 1979, President Carter and Soviet leaders had agreed to new arms reduction agreements in SALT II. Under the terms of the US Constitution, Carter prepared to send the treaty to the US Senate for ratification or approval.

While awaiting approval, however, the Soviets Union invaded Afghanistan, a country on its southern border.

President Carter reacted by calling Brezhnev on the “hot line,” the open telephone line between Washington and Moscow, and telling him that the invasion was a clear threat to the peace.” He also added, “Unless you draw back from you present course of action, this will inevitably jeopardize the course of United States-Soviet relations throughout the world.”

Carter took other steps to emphasize United States disapproval of Soviet aggression. Realizing that SALT II surely would be turned down, he postponed sending it to the Senate. He also imposed a boycott on the summer Olympic Games to be held in Moscow in 1980. Eventually, some sixty other nations joined the boycott. Détente was effectively dead.



# SEVEN: Reagan begins Star Wars plan

Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 determined to defend United States interests in the cold war. He believed a tough approach toward the Soviet Union and wanted not only to strengthen conventional military forces but also to increase the supply of nuclear weapons. Cold War rhetoric increased dramatically, as the Soviet Union was referred to as an "evil empire" by Reagan.

The costs of such a buildup were enormous, contributing to the growing budget deficit. Over a five year period, the administration sought a military budget of \$1.5 trillion, an amount far higher than ever before.

In March 1983, Reagan proposed an altogether new program of missile defense. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly called "Star Wars", involved a satellite shield in outer space that would intercept incoming Soviet missiles. It would cost an estimated \$30 billion and, according to many scientists, might never work. Still Reagan remained committed to funding research on the initiative.

While proposing increased spending for defense, the Reagan administration continued arms control discussions. It abandoned SALT II, the arms reduction plan negotiated but never ratified under Jimmy Carter. As new negotiations bogged down, the arms race escalated and military budgets soared.



Diana Walker/Time Life Pictures/[Getty Images](#)

**President Ronald Reagan and SDI supporters discuss the "Star Wars" program supporters in the White House Cabinet Room.**

# EIGHT: THE COLD WAR COMES TO AN END

Surprising events in the Soviet Union changed the direction of American foreign policy. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the new Soviet leader in 1985, made daring reforms in his country. He proposed a program of perestroika-restructuring the economy and glasnost political openness. These new policies paved the way toward better relations with the United States. Summit meetings led to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987. Under the INF treaty 2,500 Soviet and American nuclear missiles in Europe would be destroyed.

Later, talks between the first President Bush and Gorbachev in 1989 and 1990 brought agreements limiting the buildup of both nuclear and chemical weapons. The two leaders signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 1991. START dramatically decreased the number of long range weapons that the superpowers had stockpiled.

The arms control agreement was one indication that the Cold was ending. Within a few short years, the Soviet Union fell apart as reformers pressed for more gains. The changes in the Soviet Union echoed through out Easter Europe. In 1989, East German leaders announced that people could travel freely to West Germany and the Berlin wall came to an end. Reform movements continued throughout Poland, Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Eastern part of the Iron Curtain.

Gorbachev and Reagan



Presidents Ford (38), Nixon (37), Bush (41) Reagan (40), Carter (39)



NAME OF EVENT	QUESTIONS	WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE EVENT ON DETANTE?
<b>NIXON SUGGESTS DÉTENTE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is détente?</li> <li>2. Who was Henry Kissinger?</li> <li>3. What was Kissinger's idea of the REAL threat in the world?</li> </ol>	
<b>NIXON VISITS CHINA</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. How did Americans view communist China after 1949?</li> <li>5. Why was Nixon's 1972 visit to China so historical?</li> <li>6. What were some of the things Nixon did in China?</li> </ol>	
<b>NIXON STRENGTHENS TIES WITH SOVIET UNION</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. What does Nixon say was the basis of the Cold War conflict?</li> <li>8. How does Nixon feel the Soviets should be treated during a détente process?</li> <li>9. What did Brezhnev and Nixon negotiate?</li> </ol>	
<b>NIXON AND USSR AGREE TO LIMIT WEAPONS (SALT)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Why did Nixon support the SALT Agreements?</li> <li>11. What were some of the details of the SALT agreement?</li> <li>12. Were the SALT agreements successful or unsuccessful?</li> </ol>	

<p><b>JIMMY CARTER AND SALT II TALKS</b></p>	<p>13. What were relations with the Soviet Union like at the beginning of the Carter Administration?</p> <p>14. Why did the Soviets become angry with Carter?</p> <p>15. What were the SALT II talks designed to do?</p>	
<p><b>CARTER REACTS TO SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN</b></p>	<p>16. What major agreement was awaiting Senate approval when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan?</p> <p>17. What were some actions taken by the US to protest this action?</p>	
<p><b>REAGAN BEGINS STAR WARS PLANS</b></p>	<p>18. What were Reagan's goals for the Cold War?</p> <p>19. What impact did Reagan have on military spending and the US budget?</p> <p>20. What did the Reagan administration do about arms reductions with the Soviets?</p>	
<p><b>COLD WAR COMES TO AN END</b></p>	<p>21. What changes did Gorbachev bring to the Soviet Union?</p> <p>22. What were the START agreements designed to do?</p> <p>23. What happened to change the Cold War in 1989?</p>	

