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Henry Kissinger and the USA-USSR Relations (1969-1977)

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Introduction

Henry Kissinger is one of the most influential and studied personalities of the 20th century. His wit, intelligence, and passions nourished his ambitions to a carrier in the American political scenario, but more specifically, he is remembered as the architect behind Nixon's foreign policy. Through the years, even if he retired from the public scene, he has always been willing to contribute with his advice and opinions, that throughout the century, always remained pertinent yet controversial at times. Henry Kissinger shaped international relations and this elaborate aims at analyzing the years between 1969 and 1977, when he was national security advisor and secretary of state.

Whenever historians discuss about American foreign policy at the end of the 1960s and 1970s, there is a crucial figure to take into consideration: Henry Kissinger. He is considered the architect in Nixon's foreign policy, and he is the only relevant person in the Nixon's administration to survive the scandal that in 1974 brought the President to resign. His theories in international relations and his views of bilateral relations profoundly shaped the US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union.

He also opened a dialogue on the limitation of nuclear weapons, and towards China, started a dialogue with the country after years of isolationism and lack of diplomatic relations. He still today continues to participate in the debates on the international scenario. However, Henry Kissinger reached the peak of his political and diplomatic career during the Nixon and Ford presidencies, and he is a crucial figure. His thoughts and theories in international relations were developed during his years as a student and scholar in Harvard, but the foundation of his positions can be found in the childhood years spent in Germany from a Jewish family, and in the years as a refugee in the United States, until he joined the army and became a naturalized citizen. These early years and experiences are fundamental to understand the core of his theories, which aim at achieving order and stability in a political scenario grounded in the Cold War. His opinions on bilateral relations and stability in the international scenario shaped his positions even when he was no longer part of the academic world, but slowly became part of the political field, first joining the Council of Foreign Relations, and then as a National Security Advisor and Secretary of State.

The aim of the following elaborate is to highlight the figure of Kissinger in American foreign policy, and in particular his role shaped the dialogue with Soviet Union in what is considered a relevant and debated passage in American history such as détente. The process is strongly tied to his architect and his views, which are the product of his life. Kissinger is a figure in American politics different from all others and his thoughts and controversialities will be at the core of these chapters.

The following pages are the result of a careful reading of Kissinger's memoirs and primary sources of the events covered in the elaborate. Among the latter, a particular role was played by FRUS documentation. On a second phase, the content of memoirs and FRUS was compared to secondary literature of the most relevant figures on the topics covered. A particular attention was paid to Mario Del Pero, Walter Isaacson and Jussi Hanhimäki's works.

The framework in which he developed his thoughts was characterized by the Cold War and a constant tension between the United States and Soviet Union. Kissinger believed that peace was a crucial goal, but could not be achieved. Instead, the goal to reach was stability and balance. The two countries were achieving nuclear parity and there was a need to regulate and limit the use of nuclear armaments. This view, however, did not exclude smaller, limited confrontations in third countries, or proxy wars. This was the only way to achieve a balance that could be durable in time. It was no longer possible to create an international system in which the Soviet Union was excluded, or the two countries would have been in constant tensions. The only way to achieve a balance was to create a dialogue, and a common ground with the Soviet Union. In this way, the opponent would be legitimized into the system, and it was possible to regulate the use of nuclear weapons, that was posing an increasingly dangerous threat.

However, this dialogue alone was not the entire strategy developed by Kissinger and Nixon. In fact, in this complex scenario there was another strategic country to be included: Mao's People's Republic of China. The opening of a dialogue with China was the result of many reasons. It was becoming certainly relevant in the Asian continent and it could have been a powerful tactical card to use as leverage for the Soviet-American relationship. In fact, the two communist countries were increasingly competing both because each of them believed that their way to communism was the right one, and because they were important actors in Asia. Due to the

clashes between the two in March 1969, the United States were able to convince the Chinese that a dialogue with the United States could counterbalance the Soviet security threat. Thanks to these events, a Sino-American rapprochement started. At the same time, Washington started a dialogue with Moscow that will end in the SALT (strategic arms limitation talks) agreement, signed in 1972.

However promising this dialogue might have seemed, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. This process, called *détente*, did not mean the end of ideological nor military confrontation between the two, which continued to clash militarily in several conflicts, and ideologically remained unchanged. In fact, the process does not mean the acceptance of the other's point of view nor giving up the fight for supremacy. *Détente* meant that the two countries were trying to agree on limiting the use of nuclear weapons, first of all to avoid a nuclear confrontation, which was mutually destructive, and secondly, to focus on domestic issues that were at the top of the two countries' priorities. On the American side, in fact, at the domestic level there were several mounting tensions due to the Vietnam war, and on the Soviet side, Brezhnev was implementing the Brezhnev doctrine and switching the focus to pursue a more global policy, less oriented on Europe, and more focused on the third world countries.

However, there are several aspects of contradiction and limitations to the process of *détente*. As previously mentioned, the two continued to clash, for example in the Vietnam war, which was one of the major contradictions of the dialogue between the two. The fact that *détente* lacked a code of conduct with a common interpretation, was at the same time a strength and a limit of this process. In fact, on the one hand it allowed the countries to engage in confrontation through third actors, but on the other, it resulted in the worsening of the relationship between the two, and eventually in the failure of *détente*. When considering the worsening of US-USSR relationship there are several factors to include.

One major impact is represented by the Watergate scandal and its consequences. In fact, after the outbreak of the scandal that involved the entire Nixon's administration excluding Kissinger, the Congress raised challenges and doubts on the process, which did not allow Kissinger to negotiate freely, nor to keep the promises made to the Soviet Union. This, together with the clashes in Third World countries that were increasing, and the threat of Soviet spread contributed to the end of *détente*. At the same time, a change in administration and the arrival of

President Carter, who was much focused on human rights rather than dialogue with the Soviets, stalled the process until it officially ended with the intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. These policies, carried out by Kissinger and Nixon, and later by Ford, are the pillar of a change in pace in foreign policy during the Cold War, and a new course of action taken by the Nixon's administration.

The first chapter will focus on Kissinger's life, background and on his views. In order to better understand the policies that Kissinger will develop in the Nixon's and Ford's administrations, it is important to first understand his thoughts and theories on international relations, history, leadership and bilateral relations. The focus on his experiences is crucial to understand the origins of his geopolitical vision. His early years in Germany, leaving the country and becoming a young Jewish refugee in the United States, and the experience in the army have shaped the first ideas, that he later developed and researched as a scholar in Harvard. The second part of the chapter will analyze his years in the academic field, and the topics and positions that were crucial to him. These concepts, as order and stability for example, will play a crucial role in his years in office as a National Security Advisor, and later Secretary of State.

The second chapter is dedicated to two of the most important policies of Nixon's first term. The main focus will be to understand the ideas and reasons behind the process of détente, and how this process took place. Nixon's administration at the same time, was working to open a dialogue with China, in light of the strategy of triangular diplomacy. Kissinger in these two major policies played a crucial role, not only as an architect but as a mediator and diplomat. These policies are crucial in the context of the Cold War and meant a change in direction for American foreign policy. One of the major achievements of the Nixon's administration was the SALT I (strategic arms limitation talks) agreement on the use of nuclear weapons, which will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

The third chapter, instead, is dedicated to the limits of these policies, and how they ended up failing. The first limitation discussed is the Vietnam War, a scenario of confrontation for the two superpowers, which continued even during the talks. The two countries, in fact, never stop their competition for influence, and to stop their interventions in third countries was never considered in their dialogue. The Vietnam War is not the only limit of détente. There are several aspects that contributed to the worsening of the relationship between the United States and the

Soviet Union, which are both at the international level and at the domestic one. At the domestic level, the Watergate scandal will have a crucial impact, that will spread its consequences in foreign policy too, affecting the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The last part of the third chapter is focused on the demise of détente and of Nixon's administration.

Henry Kissinger is relevant for at least two reasons. He is the key representative of the period of détente and the strategies behind it, which is crucial in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, he is an eccentric and multifaceted figure difficult to compare to others, and independently from the controversiality that he raises, he has shaped a decade in foreign policy.

Chapter I – Henry Kissinger

1.1 Henry's life and background

A careful overview of Kissinger's life is crucial to understand his positions in international relations. His life and thinking are the outcome of life experience, starting with his childhood in Germany, his desire of appreciation as a Jewish refugee in the United States and the experience in the army. These chapters of Kissinger's life resulted in the beliefs and theories that he then developed as a scholar, and applied as a national security advisor. To understand his view of the US-USSR bilateral relations it is important first to understand why the concepts of order, stability, linkage have been developed and researched in the first place. To do so, the first part of this chapter is dedicated to understand the foundation of Kissinger's thought, which is rooted in his life experiences. The following chapter in particular is focused on his world vision. The first section is an overview of his life and background and it tries to explain how his early years have impacted his mentality and views of history and international relations. The second and third sections will focus on his writings and theories: first as a Harvard scholar and researcher, then a statesman.

Why is Kissinger's childhood relevant for our research? His early life might seem unimportant, but it is made of the first experiences that will shape his view of international relations. His passage from Heinz to Henry is not just adapting his name to a new reality, but building a new life, in which his past as a Jewish refugee plays a crucial role, even though he never admitted it. In fact, he will experience since a very young age disorder and instability, the impact of Nazi policies and the consequences that those had in society. It is not a case that the main topics of research in his years as an academic will be the meaning of history, order, stability and the role of statesman in maintaining order, that same order that was destroyed in the Nazi period, and in Kissinger's childhood in Germany. In his research for the meaning of history, it is possible to see the research of a Jewish that had believed in God's will as the meaning of history, who has abandoned his religion and is looking for answers. His research, the issues that he will focus on, and the rationale behind his world views are the product of life experiences that started in Germany in a particular historical phase, and this is why it is crucial to give an overview of his early life to understand the core of his international relations perspectives.

He was born in a Jewish family on May 27, 1923, in Furth. He was the first child of Louis Kissinger and Paula Stern, both from Jewish families. By 1923, the Jewish population of Furth, in Bavaria, was no more than three thousand people. During the centuries, the Jewish community in the area suffered occasional episodes of antisemitism, but on the average, they were well integrated into society. Heinz's father, Louis, was from a middle-class well-educated German family. He followed his father's career and after studying at Heidelberg University he decided to become part of the teachers' academy in Furth, a town near Nuremberg. He was a proud German middle class teacher, who took a great pride in his honorable job. Heinz's mother, Paula, was also from a Jewish family, even more integrated in her town's life. She was a sharp and practical decision maker.

From a young age, it was clear that Heinz emerged in intelligence and leadership. Since he was a kid, he was shy and observant. He was a thinker.¹ Heinz was not much of an athlete, but was competitive and his personality emerged strongly, even in leadership. He was a brilliant student, and this was clear from a young age. These characteristics will be evident in his years at the White House. His childhood friends and family remember him always carrying a book. After years of Jewish school, his father wanted him to attend a state-run school, but the political situation was rapidly changing, and Heinz was rejected because of his religion. When Heinz graduated from school in Furth, he went to study at the Jewish seminary in Wurzburg, not because he wanted to follow his father's footsteps, but because in that moment, due to the political situation, there was not much better to do.

Germany was rapidly changing between 1933 and 1935, and it was clear that there was no future for teachers since limitations were introduced and intolerance was rising. When Heinz was born, Germany was suffering the consequences of WWI, nationalism rose, and Jews were increasingly treated like outsiders.² In 1923, the same year that Kissinger was born, Julius Streicher³ had founded a weekly antisemitic newspaper to spread his ideas and incite the extermination of Jews. It only paved the way to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935⁴ that alienated Jews

1 Walter Kissinger, Mar. 17, 1988 Taken from Isaacson, *Kissinger: a biography*. 2013

2 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 34

3 Julius Streicher was a German politician, who founded an antisemitic movement in 1918, and later became part of the Nazi party. He founded and directed the antisemitic journal *Der Stürmer*. He was responsible for racial persecutions and was sentenced to death in the Nuremberg trials.

4 See Michalczyk, J. J. (2017). *Nazi law: From nuremberg to nuremberg*. Bloomsbury Publishing

from every aspect of society. As a result, Heinz's family ended up unemployed and isolated.⁵ On August 20, 1938, the Kissinger family came to the difficult decision that the only solution was to leave the country. They first went to London, where they spent some time with their relatives, and then they left to sail to the United States, where Paula's cousins were living. Henry was fifteen, and his brother, Walter, fourteen.⁶

His family moved into a comfortable but modest three-bedroom apartment in a squat six-story brick building at Fort Washington Avenue and 187th Street. Across the hall lived Paula Kissinger's cousin. Other friends and neighbors from Furth and Nuremberg were among the hundreds of new Jewish immigrants who filled similar buildings up and down the avenue.⁷

New York, and in general the United States, have been the destination of Jewish migration waves that took place at the end of the 19th century and lasted until few years before WWI. New York's Jewish community was broad, there were schools, synagogues, newspapers, theaters, societies.⁸ The American society was different from European tradition. Immigrants, and Jews among them were free to assume whatever rank in society they could. More specifically, the absence of a medieval tradition meant that Jews were not weighed down by survivals of the medieval religious concept.⁹ America came to signify the certainty of freedom and tolerance that in Europe was no longer present and allowed Jewish communities to start a new life.

A month after the Kissinger family arrived in the US, Heinz enrolled in George Washington High School, quickly improving his use of English and his school records. He immediately noticed the difference, and went from fearing walking around, isolated from every aspect of society and persecuted, to a place where he could, for the first time, experience freedom. After his first year of high school, Kissinger started to go to school at night and work during the day at a shaving-brush manufacturer owned by his mother's cousins. When he graduated, he had no problems getting into City College of New York to become an accountant like his father's latest job in Germany, even though it was not his ambition. His desire of assimilation in this place

5 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 27

6 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 48

7 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 28

8 Handlin, Oscar, and Mary Flug Handlin. "A century of Jewish immigration to the United States". *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 50, 1948, pp. 1–84. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23603332>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2023

9 Handlin, Oscar, and Mary Flug Handlin. "A century of Jewish immigration to the United States". *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 50, 1948, pp. 1–84. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23603332>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2023

that welcomed him and his family, soon came to be reality, when the draft notice arrived at the beginning of 1943, and he left for the army. It was the first time that he was not part of a Jewish community.¹⁰

The years from 1943 to 1946 and his experience in the American army were crucial for Kissinger because it was his direct access to the American society. In fact, the immigrants that joined the army legally became naturalized American citizens and were no longer considered refugees or part of immigrant communities. For Kissinger this is the first step into American life, away from the German community he had been part until that moment. The army was an incredible opportunity to all the immigrants to become at all effects American citizens to complete their process of integration in society.

The army for him was a new and shiny opportunity. With the entrance in the army, Kissinger became a naturalized American citizen. After he went through his basic training, Kissinger scored well enough in an aptitude test and was assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program. Those that did well on the test, were picked out of combat for their intelligence, and they were sent to college at government expenses. Kissinger was assigned to study engineering at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, an idyllic campus less than a hundred miles from Washington Heights.¹¹ Even among those who scored well on the test, he had the impression that he was the smartest.

But in April 1944 the program was canceled because the army could no longer support the program after the invasion of Europe, and the same year Kissinger became part of the 84th infantry division, along with other 2800 intellectuals.¹²

In that context, he encountered the person that could be considered his army mentor and that had an important impact on his life: Fritz Kraemer, a 35-year-old Prussian US army private. Kraemer was a peculiar individual, his father was a Prussian prosecutor, but he had followed the University route. Kraemer attracted the attention of General Bolling, who was impressed and assigned him to his headquarters. He knew that that division was composed by many intellectuals and understood the importance of explaining them why the country was at war. So, he

10 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 66

11 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 34

12 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 75

gave a speech on the war and on the Nazi mentality. Kissinger was enthusiastic, and wrote him the following note: “Dear Pvt. Kraemer. I heard you speak yesterday. This is how it should be done. Can I help you in any way? Pvt. Kissinger.”¹³ This is how the two exiled Germans found themselves talking. Kraemer was surprised by Kissinger’s wit, and soon recognized his intelligence and capabilities of understanding history. For Kissinger, Kraemer was a new mentor figure within the army, who allowed him to pursue new opportunities. Kraemer’s influence was crucial. During the following few years, he would pluck Kissinger out of the infantry to secure him as a translator for General Bolling, get him to manage and administer the occupation of captured towns and help his way into the Counter-Intelligence. Finally, he convinced him that City College was not enough and to go to Harvard.¹⁴ They had very different personalities, as with time it was clear that Henry’s ambitions differed broadly from Kraemer’s disdain for money and power. But in the first years, they had long conversations about politics, history, philosophy. Kraemer introduced him to new thinkers and philosophy, and this made Henry aware of his capabilities and understanding of history.

When in September 1944 the 84th division was sent to Europe in the aftermath of D-day, Kissinger was among them. Henry would remain in Germany within the army for six years. Thanks to Kraemer he was picked to cover the task of German speaking translator for General Bolling. Later he would be assigned to Division Intelligence, and later to Counter-Intelligence Corps which handled military occupation and oversaw restoring order.¹⁵ Kissinger was sent to the latter when the Americans were pushed back into Germany.

The first town captured was Krefeld, which was left in a total disaster. However, no one of the Counter-Intelligence Corps spoke German, and when the task of handling civilian occupation was assigned to Kraemer, he declined, suggesting Kissinger to administer it instead. His job there was to bring the town back to function and find the Nazi left there. His task for the Counter-Intelligence was to find Nazi and Gestapo agents on the territory under American control.¹⁶ In June 1945 he became commander of the Counter-Intelligence detachment assigned to

13 This incident has been frequently recounted, often with minor variations. This version is from an interview with Fritz Kraemer, May 4, 1988, and with Henry Kissinger, Dec. 19, 1988. Taken from Isaacson, *Kissinger: a biography*, 2013

14 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 45

15 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 85

16 Blumenfeld, Ralph, and reporters of the New York Post. *Henry Kissinger*. Stati Uniti, New American Library, 1974. pag 45–68

provide order and weed out dangerous Nazis in the Bergstrasse district of Hesse.¹⁷ Again, after a year Kraemer stepped in and insisted that he became a teacher at the European Command Intelligence School. The school taught Allied military officers how to uncover Nazis and restore German civil authority.¹⁸

The experience in the army had a strong impact on Kissinger. First, as said earlier, it was the first time that he was outside of the Jewish community. He no longer practiced his religion, and no longer felt part of the refugee community. The army was a way for him to acquire confidence and quicken his integration in his new country.

“It was an Americanization process,” said Kissinger. “It was the first time I was not with German Jewish people. I gained confidence in the army.” Says his brother, Walter: “Both of us found our way, got ourselves going, became who we are, because of our time in the service.”¹⁹

During his life Kissinger rarely talked about his childhood or the Holocaust, claiming that the events did not leave a mark on him. It is highly unlikely however, that such events did not shape part of his beliefs. In fact, after witnessing the Nazi horror, he abandoned Judaism and consequently the view that meaning of history is connected to God’s will. Later in his life, especially in Harvard, he would embark in intellectual research on the meaning of history.²⁰ Kissinger’s childhood experiences, not surprisingly, also instilled in him a deep distrust of other people that remained an aspect of his personality for his entire life.²¹

Moreover, he had been an outcast during his childhood, excluded from school, events, and people around him and his family, he would, once in the United States, develop a desire of acceptance, as referred to by Arthur Schlesinger, historian, and longtime friend of Kissinger’s ‘refugee’s desire for approval’.²² This desire for approval generated a duality that will characterize Kissinger’s personality and way of operating. His attempts of deceitfulness, secrecy and back channels that characterized his time in office were often the result of his attempt to

17 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 95

18 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 43

19 Henry Kissinger, Dec. 19, 1988, interviewed by Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: a biography*. 2013

20 Dickson, Peter. *Kissinger and the Meaning of History*. Regno Unito, Cambridge, 1979 pag 43

21 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 52

22 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Feb. 16, 1989. Taken from Isaacson. *Kissinger: a biography 2013*

win approval of opposing groups. During Vietnam, for example, he would attempt to convince dovish Harvard intellectuals that he was still one of them while simultaneously trying to impress Nixon with hardline advice. He would try to gain the right's support over détente after receiving strong criticisms, at the same time criticizing Reagan to his intellectual friends.²³

The Nazi experience and his past could have directed Kissinger towards two different approaches in foreign policy: an idealistic approach, focused on the protection of human rights, or a realist approach that aimed at preserving the stability of the system and balance of power at all costs. Kissinger would follow the latter route. Given a choice of order or justice, he often said, paraphrasing Goethe, he would choose order. He had seen too clearly the consequences of disorder.²⁴

One of the main positive effects of his early life, however, is the love for his adopted country. When the young Heinz moved to New York and became Henry, the tolerance and order he found would give him a sense of personal freedom and chance to someone that as a Jewish boy was afraid to walk the streets.²⁵ “I therefore,” he would later say, “have always had a special feeling for what America means, which native-born citizens perhaps take for granted.”²⁶

Before returning to the United States from Germany in 1947, Kraemer's advice proved to be fundamental again for Kissinger's future. In this last advice he told him “You need an education, go to a fine college. A gentleman does not go to the College of the City of New York.” This advice, reflected Kraemer's elitist views, but matched well with Henry's ambitions.²⁷

Harvard university was one of the few to make a special effort to make sure that veterans had access to university. In this context, Henry met his academic mentor, William Elliot, a professor of the Government department. Again, he was a devoted and insatiable student. Elliot's mentoring provided Kissinger with a boost since he was an undergraduate student until later in his path to become professor. Under Elliot's guidance, Kissinger focused on both government and philosophy. Henry's thesis became quite famous at Harvard for its incredible length. The

23 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 53

24 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 54

25 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 55

26 Landow, David. *Kissinger: The Uses of Power*. Stati Uniti, Houghton Mifflin, 1972 pag 15

27 Fritz Kraemer, May 14, 1988; Henry Kissinger, Dec. 19, 1988”, taken from Isaacson, *Kissinger: a biography*.2013 pag 103

elaborate, titled *The meaning of history: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee, and Kant* was a combination of intellectual brilliance and unconventionality.

In his undergraduate thesis, he introduced themes about freedom, revolution, bureaucracy, and morality. *The Meaning of History* raised one of the most fundamental philosophical issues: the problem of determinism versus free will.²⁸ These themes will accompany Kissinger throughout his years both as a scholar and researcher and will be at the base of his theories in international relations. In the next section, they will be analyzed more in depth.

In 1951, Elliot gave Kissinger a project that lasted several years, and gave him the possibility to start building his network of important acquaintances: the Harvard International Seminar. Kissinger was the one to pick the people to participate in it. The program was dedicated to young promising leaders to spend the summer at Harvard. Kissinger in this way was connected not only to young future leaders, but also to the famous lecturers that he invited.

Kissinger's doctoral thesis surprised again. This time, however, because it seemed outdated. Instead of focusing on contemporary matters, his thesis was titled: *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22*. He believed that through the study and understanding of history, it was possible to solve modern issues too, and that contemporary issues were not that different and unrelated to the beginning of the 17th century's ones. On the first page of this elaborate he wrote something that will define his realism and outlook throughout his career.

“Whenever peace—conceived as the avoidance of war—has been the primary objective of a power or a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most ruthless member of the international community,” he wrote. A more proper goal, he argued, was for *“stability based on an equilibrium of forces.”*²⁹

At Harvard Kissinger had also another opportunity that will impact his career. He ran into Arthur Schlesinger Jr, a member of the Council of Foreign Relations, who asked him to look at

28 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 118

29 Kissinger, Henry. *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22*. Stati Uniti, Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

a paper he had written on nuclear weapons. Kissinger's comments were so that impressive, so he sent the article to Foreign Affairs, the quarterly of the Council of Foreign Relations.³⁰

Henry's involvement with the Council of Foreign Relations is a crucial passage in his career. It meant the transition between his role as an academic, and the opening act for his career in foreign policy. In fact, the Council of Foreign Relation was a crucial actor in shaping foreign policy. Henry became member of the Council in 1956 and has also served as a member of the Board of Directors from 1977 to 1981.³¹

To fully understand the importance of this step in Kissinger's career, it is important to describe the importance of a think tank like the Council of Foreign Relations. Think tanks offer a privileged look at the policy making process and the relationship between public institutions and private stakeholders. Think tanks are influential private organizations as they operate where parties, agencies, interest groups and academic institutions meet. Generally, think tanks try to influence political agenda through three main activities: entering into the public debate, advising policymakers, and fostering dialogue through public diplomacy activities. Under this light, foreign-policy think tanks are symbols soft power and informal advising³².

The Council on Foreign Relations has been generally described as the most authoritative foreign-policy think tanks in the American history. This private organization acted like a *Brain Trust*, status reached under Kennedy's administration, and thus provided general principles and policy papers to the heads of the State Department and the White House which would then use them as the basis of their foreign policies. The Council on Foreign Relations members continue to arouse the keen interest of historians and social scientists because of their social profile and political vision: they influenced world politics both as informal strategists and unconventional diplomats. In the case of CFR experts, their world view and cultural predisposition towards Anglo-American cooperation influenced a great deal their activities in political arena. Additionally, the CFR's *Foreign Affairs* magazine became one of the most authoritative scientific

30 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 149

31 Council of Foreign Relations <https://www.cfr.org/henry-kissinger-chair-us-foreign-policy>

32 See Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* Regno Unito, Frank Cass, 1996; Abelson Donald, *Capitol Ideal: Think Tanks and US Foreign Policy*, Canada, Mc Gill-Queen's University Press, 2006

journal of that time in international economics and politics.³³ They used to meet together and share information about international affairs. Moreover, the Council of Foreign Relations had a great impact in influencing public opinion on foreign policy. The domestic support was crucial in the success of any foreign policy decision, as we will see for the Vietnam war or several other occasions. Kissinger was aware of it and placed a great importance of the image perceived by the population of the Nixon's administration foreign policy.

Thus, Kissinger was entering the core of foreign policy analysis, and was at a turning point in his life.

Within the Council of Foreign Relations, Kissinger will be a very active member, and will publish several articles on diplomacy, defence, and the use of nuclear weapons for *Foreign Affairs*.

The article had two main consequences. First, it was the base for Kissinger's theory that peace was not possible, and the country should be ready to fight "limited wars", which was the precursor of Kennedy's administration's flexible response strategy³⁴ and NATO's deployment of intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe. The second consequence was that it helped Henry get a job at the Council of Foreign Relations, which would bring him from an academic context to the world of nuclear strategists.³⁵

Kissinger was offered a job as a study group director on the topic of nuclear weapons, and this, like the Harvard International Seminars, gave him the chance to build his own network and be around great minds and powerful personalities. He divided the group in smaller panels, basically serving the aim of producing a book on the matter of nuclear weapons and foreign affairs. From this study, Kissinger concluded that the United States had to develop the capacity to use nuclear weapons to fight limited wars.³⁶ This theory proved quite controversial, since limiting a war in which nuclear weapons are deployed was quite impossible. These ideas were not

33 Grose, Peter. *Continuing the Inquiry. The Council of Foreign Relations from 1921 to 1996*. Stati Uniti, Council of Foreign Relations, 1996 Pp 14-22.

34 See Combs, J. A. *John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and flexible response. The history of american foreign policy* pp. 182-203. Stati Uniti, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315497297-8>

35 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 150- 151

36 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 76-78

Kissinger's alone. In fact, that is the main results of the panels' discussions, mainly derived from the ideas of Paul Nitze and General Gavin.³⁷

In 1955 Kissinger met the person that can be compared to Kraemer for the army and Elliot for Harvard: Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, member of the Council of Foreign Relations and at the time he was an assistant to President Eisenhower for international affairs. They met when Rockefeller gathered a group of academics to discuss national security policy. They were extremely different in status and personality. In March 1956, with his Council book half-finished, Kissinger agreed to become director of the Rockefeller project.³⁸ Until he joined Nixon's staff at the end of 1968, Kissinger remained a part-time consultant to Rockefeller.

The following year, Kissinger was offered a job back at Harvard, as an associate and lecturer for the Center for International Affairs, which never became successful and remained marginal. Kissinger return to Harvard included a couple of years later, becoming full professor of Principles of International Relations. Again, Kissinger's actions were more directed towards his personal advantage and ambitions. In 1958 Kissinger managed to take over Harvard's Defense Studies Program. It was a graduate level course which included related study projects. It soon became a way for him to get in touch and invite potential patrons to be his guest lecturers, and to create his personal network of powerful and influential figures as previously happened with the International Seminar.³⁹

Kissinger's articles and views on diplomacy and arms control was at the basis of a book called *The necessity for Choice*. It was a sort of manifesto of Kissinger's positions and was published few weeks before Kennedy won the 1960 elections. Through the book Kissinger was able to restate and perfect some of his previous arguments into a coherent approach to foreign policy. It could be considered also a way to attract the attention in case the new President needed some new and fresh ideas on foreign policy.⁴⁰ The book contained a major shift in Kissinger's view of limited wars and the inclusion of nuclear weapons. The shift was due to the fact that regulating a war which included nuclear weapons was nearly impossible.

37 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 160

38 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 76

39 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 180

40 Schwartz, Thomas A. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Stati Uniti, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020. Pag 89

His network and writing brought Kennedy to offer him a job in the new administration as a part-time consultant. In those years he also kept his job as a professor at Harvard, but his ambitions were in Washington. However, he was different from people that surrounded Kennedy and never fit in the with Kennedy's staff. In 1962, he decided to go back to Harvard full time, writing articles and specializing in nuclear weapons, foreign policy and relations between the US and Europe.

In 1964 he became involved more closely in politics, with the presidential campaign carried out by Rockefeller, who challenged Barry Goldwater for the Republican nomination.

Shortly after the 1968 Republican convention, Richard Allen called Kissinger and invited him to serve on Nixon's foreign policy advisory board for the electoral campaign. Kissinger hesitated for a few days, then declined, preferring to participate privately, behind the scenes.⁴¹ And so he did, providing him information on the Paris peace talks regarding the Vietnam war. However, never talking to him directly during the electoral campaign. They only met once before, at a Christmas party. When Nixon appointed Kissinger as National Security Advisor, they did not know each other, but soon they found something in common: neither of them wanted the State Department to interfere with their ideas of foreign policy. This unlikely collaboration lasted many years, and often when referring to American foreign policy it is referred to Nixon-Kissinger's foreign policy.

They were very different, but their similarities brought them together and made their collaboration work. In the words of Walter Isaacson, "both were practitioners of realpolitik, that blend of cold realism and power-oriented statecraft that tended to be detached from morals".⁴² However, it was their ambitions and ideas for foreign policy that really brought them together, as it is possible to see in the next chapters.

41 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 235

42 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 255

1.2 Kissinger as a scholar and researcher

Kissinger differentiated himself from the rest even in his Harvard years. It is important to keep in mind that all the aspect that he studied as a scholar and researcher are strongly tied to international relations and had a crucial impact on the thinking behind his decision-making when he became part of the President's staff. This section will analyze Kissinger's thinking in the years before 1968, that characterized his writings, especially in the Harvard period and in the Council of Foreign Relations. Many topics are interconnected to his views of international relations and will reemerge in his years as a statesman.

During his studies at Harvard, Kissinger focused much on history and philosophy. His thesis was one of the longest in Harvard's tradition, and differently from other students, he analyzed the past instead of contemporary issues. The same thing happened in his doctoral thesis. As it is possible to see from *The meaning of history: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee, and Kant* and *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–22*, to him the past represented a crucial key to the understanding of the contemporary scenario. In these two elaborates he focused on the concept of stability and order and the crucial importance that the two had in politics. This mentality not only was present in his writings but will shape his views and actions in the political years.

In his doctoral thesis he deals with one of the pillars of his theories: stability and order. According to him, stability is not derived from peace, but it is the result of legitimacy. In his view legitimacy is not equivalent of justice, but it is the mutual agreement on arrangements. It is only achieved through the acceptance of the concept by all major powers of the international system, leaving no major state dissatisfied.⁴³

To this regard, it was fundamental to improve the relationship with the Soviet Union, even if this meant recognizing it as a major actor of the system, as it was. In order to find stability in the period of Cold War, it was necessary to start a dialogue with the Soviet Union, especially because of the risk of nuclear confrontation. Only by recognizing the opponent as a legitimacy actor in the international scenario, even though of different ideological roots, was crucial to start a process of agreement on regulation of the use of nuclear weapons. The final goal of the

43 Kissinger, Henry. *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22*. Stati Uniti, Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

United States was not to achieve peace, because peace was an impossible goal. Instead, the aim of foreign policy had to be to achieve stability and order, and this could only be done by finding an agreement on common ground with the major powers. Otherwise, the risk would be to fight for something unattainable on the long term, as peace, against an opponent that is fighting for its legitimacy in the international scenario. This reasoning could be applied also to China, which was a relevant actor in the international scenario but was isolated from interactions with the West.

To Kissinger, the man in power must have an innate capability of manipulation of reality like Metternich and tendency to risk like Bismarck. According to this view the statesman needs a liberty of action that goes beyond the morality. Hence the perseverance in the search for stability must outweigh the search for morality. Stability was not to be perceived through the research of peace, that in most cases would lead to the hegemonic predominance for one actor (a sort of winner), and consequently will create losers, that will not recognize the system as legitimate. Instead, to him, was a process to be reached through a dynamic equilibrium and diplomatic strategy. The consciousness of moral responsibility, as Kissinger points out, is inextricably bound up with the consciousness of freedom, since one knows that one can act because one is conscious that one ought and thus one knows in oneself the freedom which, without the moral law, had remained unknown.⁴⁴

Kissinger largely focuses on limits during his studies. Mainly he refers to the limitations that constrain statesman decision-making. In his view, in the international system the distribution of power determines structural limits, that characterize the system itself. Moreover, there are historical limits for processes that are not necessarily progressive. There are also cultural and political limits that come from the culture and spirit of a nation, and the limits posed by the ability to choose and follow a coherent and effective foreign policy. On this topic, Kissinger was very critical of the United States, adopting a sort of cultural relativism that resulted on the idea that some nations are better at power politics.⁴⁵

44Kissinger, Henry. *The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee, and Kant*. Stati Uniti, Bokforlaget Stolpe Ab, First Published in 2022., p.273

45 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 67

Statesmen, especially the ones that he celebrated as heroic, were constrained in every action by limits. Nevertheless, they had to operate to overcome those limits, and when not possible they had to operate within them. The goal of the statesman is to look past these limits in terms of goals and means. In this, statesman and historians are different, because the latter had to be aware of the possibility of tragedy, while the statesman must act as the country were immortal.

⁴⁶ This was an important element in his détente strategy. According to him, actions had to be taken quickly and in a determined way, due to the difficult times of the international context, eliminating the limits imposed by the bureaucratic procedures. That's why, once in power, he tried his best to centralize every process in the hands of the President, isolating crucial bureaucratic actors like the State Department from the decision-making process. Intellectual conviction, political convenience, and necessity converged, resulting, and justifying a concentration of power that had very few precedents in US history.

The centralization of the decision-making process is a relevant characteristic of Kissinger's way of doing politics and will be central in all the years he held office. It is possible to see this in the use of back channels to carry out diplomacy, as for example the back channel with Dobrynin that was a protagonist during the entire process of détente with the Soviet Union. It is also a crucial aspect in the decisions that Nixon took in the Vietnam War. Secrecy never abandoned Nixon-Kissinger's foreign policy, and in most of the cases, the Department of State, the Congress or the American public were kept out of the decisions taken by the President. Kissinger was aware that secrecy in diplomacy and in Nixon's foreign policy was the key to success, and so it became his main *modus operandi*. In fact, when Nixon's administration and decisions in foreign policy begun to be questioned and criticized, and Kissinger was no longer just national security advisor but also Secretary of State, the Congress started to pose many obstacles to the process of détente. Nixon was under the spotlight and secrecy was limited to a minimum, and the process of détente started to fail. Of course, this is not the main reason why détente was no longer successful throughout the 1970s, but the limits and conditions that the Congress posed in the relationship with the Soviet Union certainly contributed to the process.

In many occasions, elements and decisions in foreign policy were kept secret from the public to avoid protests and discontent, for example the decision to invade Cambodia, or the

46 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 67

negotiations with North Vietnam in Paris. On the one hand, this tendency to secrecy was able to keep American promises at the beginning, and Kissinger and Nixon were freedom of maneuver. Later, however, when this freedom was no longer present, the impact of this change was strong on the bilateral relations with China and the Soviet Union, as chapter three will analyze.

The focus on limits encounters two aspects that contradict it: the first one is the geopolitical globalism and the concept of interdependence. And the second is the importance of knowledge of history. Through the latter it was possible to understand the problems that afflicted the international and domestic scenario and therefore find a solution. This position goes against Kissinger's typical pessimism. Kissinger's globalism, with its emphasis on interdependence, ended up giving an element of possibility that clashed with the emphasis on limits of Kissinger's "crisis discourse."⁴⁷ The optimistic rhetoric of possibilities that marked Kissinger's scholarly production was also showed in his studies on the opportunities given by the nuclear weapons. It was also evident in his unilateralist faith in U.S. freedom of maneuver.

Kissinger the scholar had emphasized that domestic support was crucial base for a coherent and effective foreign policy. Internal consensus was the vital condition of foreign policy.⁴⁸

In the book published after the panels of the Council of Foreign Relations, *Nuclear weapons and foreign policy*, he states that in the nuclear age everything is different, and strategy has to adapt to the new framework. Given the new power of the weapons and the fact that the Soviet Union has reached good levels in nuclear weapons, the strategic doctrine to him needs to create an alternative to total nuclear destruction. He also talks about the possibility of agreement and of a system of general collective security, that would not be that effective to smaller threats. Since now the Soviet Union has raised its nuclear weapons, American strategy has to change and adapt.⁴⁹

Any examination of the strategic revolution brought about by nuclear technology must start from a discussion of the increased destructiveness of modern weapons. Nuclear technology has advanced to a point at which weapons of any desired explosive power can be produced.

47 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 69

48 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 86

49 Kissinger, Henry A. *Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Council on Foreign Relations, 1957. Pag 118-119

New and modern weapons are mutually destructive, and this causes the impossibility to fully win a war. When creating the best strategy for military intervention it is important to consider two aspects: the best strategy to resist an attack, and the best one to attack. The result must be a mix of the two. With the new technological development of nuclear arsenal, the discussion verted towards deterrence and actual war and how to regulate and use nuclear weapons.

The temptation of strategic doctrine is to seek to combine the advantages of every course of action: to achieve maximum deterrence but also to do so at minimum risk.⁵⁰ Limited war involves as many psychological complexities as a policy of deterrence. A strategy of limited war would seek to escape the inconsistency of relying on a policy of deterrence whose major sanction involves national catastrophe.⁵¹ One of the difficulties with discussing the problem of limited nuclear war is that its nature is rarely understood. Any attempt to define the role of limited nuclear war will therefore have to start with the realization that a revolution in technology carries with it a revolution in tactics. With each new technological discovery, the temptation is strong to integrate it into what is familiar.

The studies and articles on diplomacy and foreign policy and nuclear weapons are at the basis of the book *The necessity for choice*. This book was a comprehensive collection of Kissinger's ideas on foreign policy. One of the issues that the touched was the concept of limited wars. He decided to go back on this topic. He meant those regional conflicts that were not a full blown out war. He believed that the United States had to threaten a limited response when in front of a limited challenge.⁵² he added that a country that did not want to risk limited wars out of fear that the attacked country resisted aggression was the same as surrender.⁵³

“A country not willing to risk limited war because it fears that resistance to aggression on any scale may lead to all-out war,” he argued, “will have no choice in a showdown but to surrender.”

This is a relevant aspect in the process of détente, and it is at the same one of the reasons why détente initially was successful, and one of the reasons why it failed. It is crucial to consider

50 Kissinger, Henry A. *Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Council on Foreign Relations, 1957.

51 Kissinger, Henry A. *Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Council on Foreign Relations, 1957.

52 Kissinger, Henry. *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Harper, 1961.

53 Kissinger, Henry. *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Harper, 1961. ix–xi, 2–6”

that, while the two countries started a dialogue for mutual limitation on the use of nuclear weapons, confrontation never stopped in third countries. The two superpowers exploited proxy conflicts to continue their battle for supremacy, and never included a comprehensive peace as an element of détente. On the one hand, limited wars and the fact that détente did not avoid them nor consider them in the talks, was an incredible strength that allowed dialogue to continue. On the other hand, the continuous confrontation through third countries contributed to the failure of the process of détente because it inherently lacked a code of conduct for both countries, which will interpret the other's actions in third countries as a break of détente's agreement.

In his previous writings when talking about limited wars he claimed that they also included nuclear weapons. In this case, with *The necessity for choice* he goes back on what previously said, excluding nuclear weapons from limited wars. He admits that there had been some developments that made him change his mind about it.⁵⁴ He still believed in the general concept of nuclear war, but he had difficulties in establishing the limits of limited. So, for practicality he stated that the line between conventional and nuclear weapons was easier to maintain and regulate.⁵⁵ Still, the country had to keep developing nuclear weapons as a deterrent for the Soviet Union to use its weapons.

The book included two previously published articles by Kissinger: "Arms Control, Inspection and "Surprise Attack," and "Limited War: Conventional or Nuclear? A Reappraisal". The first one was published in *Foreign Affairs*. In it, Kissinger draws a comparison between the past, in which countries only had conventional weapons that served the purpose to eliminate the source of conflict in case of tensions, and the present, in which the system itself has changed due to technological developments, and it is no longer possible to eliminate the source of tension. In this context, the countries must be ready and develop the necessary technology to protect its security.⁵⁶

54 Kissinger, Henry. *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Harper, 1961.

55 Kissinger, Henry. *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Harper, 1961. 32–36, 57, 59, 81–83, 87, 89”

56 Kissinger, Henry A. "Arms Control, Inspection and Surprise Attack". *Foreign Affairs*, 1 luglio 1960, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1960-07-01/arms-control-inspection-and-surprise-attack>. Accessed 7 January 2023.

In the article he also deals with the possibility of agreement between two countries with nuclear weapons saying that ‘‘development of missiles, simple remedies can no longer work. The goal of responsible arms-control measures must be to determine, free of sentimentality, not how to eliminate retaliatory forces but how to maintain an equilibrium between them. It is more worthwhile, at least for the immediate future, to seek to reduce the incentive to attack than the capability for it.’’⁵⁷In a way he is anticipating what will be the American strategy of creating dialogue towards the Soviet Union.

In the second article *Limited War: Conventional or Nuclear? A Reappraisal*, he recognizes that the Soviet arsenal is growing, and no war could ever be again totally free of nuclear weapons but at the same time reinforces his theory of limited wars.⁵⁸

This article is crucial to understand his ideas in bilateral relationships between two nuclear superpowers, and to understand the rationale behind the dialogue with the Soviet Union. The strategies that countries need to adopt are inherently different from previous wars, because any conflict could transform into a nuclear confrontation. No war can be exempted from the risk of utilization of nuclear armaments. Hence, the possibility of nuclear power must always be taken into account, both in defense and offence strategies. And this must be kept well in mind by the diplomats that negotiate on wars. A second aspect, equally important is the fact that is not entirely up to the United States to avoid the use of nuclear weapons. Since the Soviet nuclear arsenal has increasingly grown in the past years, it is not possible to exclude the fact that nuclear weapons will not be used against the United States. If the country decided to attack, the United States can decide to only use conventional weapons but must be ready to fight limited nuclear wars. Only the consideration of this later aspect can allow the use of conventional weapons.⁵⁹ He then proceeds to analyze pros and cons of each strategy: nuclear or conventional. He argues that sometimes both sides can be misguided by moral issues, whether it is an insult to progress and technology not to use nuclear weapons, or the amorality of using them on the contrary. He believes that these rationales can limit and create a strong bias in evaluating the strategy more adept for a country.

57 Kissinger, Henry A. ‘‘*Arms Control, Inspection and Surprise Attack*’’. *Foreign Affairs*, 1 luglio 1960, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1960-07-01/arms-control-inspection-and-surprise-attack>. Accessed 7 January 2023.

58 Kissinger, Henry ‘‘*A. Limited war: Conventional or nuclear?*’’, 1961 *Survival*, 3:1, 2-11, DOI: [10.1080/00396336108440227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396336108440227)

59 Kissinger, Henry ‘‘*A. Limited war: Conventional or nuclear?*’’, 1961 *Survival*, 3:1, 2-11, DOI: [10.1080/00396336108440227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396336108440227)

According to the supporters of a nuclear strategy, it is the best way to counterbalance the manpower available to the communist countries, adapted to a new strategy, different from the previous ones. According to the supporters of a conventional strategy, the use of nuclear weapons is difficult to be limited or circumscribed, and the possibility of an escalation is extremely high. The issue is whether problem is analyzed from the point of view of deterrence or conduct of an actual war. In the case of deterrence, the advocates of a nuclear strategy argue that nuclear weapons must be the most effective sanctions against the outbreak of a war, while considering the actual conduct of a war, the opponents of a nuclear strategy are above all concerned with reducing the impact of military operations and increasing their predictability.⁶⁰

In the second part of the article, Kissinger spelled out his own ideas on the issue. In the past he had advocated a nuclear strategy, because it seemed the most effective deterrent against the Soviet Union. But while the need for the capability of fighting a limited war still exists, he changed his mind on the use of conventional versus nuclear forces. This switch is due to three main reasons: the first one is that there are several doubts on how to limit a nuclear confrontation, the second is that the Soviet growth in nuclear armaments, and the third is the general framework that changed with the beginning of arms-control negotiations.⁶¹

Another issue that Kissinger touched following *The necessity for choice* was the cohesion between the Atlantic alliance and the relationship between the US and the European allies. The Council of Foreign Relations was one the main places to discuss the relationship between the US and Europe. A series of seminars and discussions led to *The troubled partnership: A Re-Appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*. In the book, Kissinger discusses that the fault of the troubled relations laid in the negligence of the US with regards to the allies' requests and a decrease of credibility in American strategy vis-à-vis the European leaders. However, behind the denunciation of the American strategy there is a masked reaffirmation of it.⁶² Over nuclear issues he points to the unsuccess of NATO collective nuclear project due to unreliability of European partners together with the incoherence of American strategy. He suggested that consultations needed improvement and European requests had to be indulged. He also believed that a unified

60 Kissinger, Henry "A. Limited war: Conventional or nuclear?", 1961 *Survival*, 3:1, 2-11, DOI: [10.1080/00396336108440227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396336108440227)

61 Kissinger, Henry "A. Limited war: Conventional or nuclear?", 1961 *Survival*, 3:1, 2-11, DOI: [10.1080/00396336108440227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396336108440227)

62 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 62

and strong Europe could loosen its tie to the US and that scenario had to be avoided.⁶³ In *The trouble partnership* he also reaffirms his bipolar view of the international system that recurs often in his views.

Europe was not marginal in the United States' priorities. In fact, played a crucial role in American strategy against the Soviet Union. Containment itself aimed at avoiding Soviet expansion in Europe, especially in countries in which Moscow had quite some influence, as for example the French and Italian communist parties were quite close to Moscow. The American administrations with this foreign policy doctrine focused on keeping the Soviet influence limited, and the crucial area for both countries was Europe. At the same time, it was crucial not only to keep Moscow far from European countries, but to keep the Atlantic influence strong and united. The policies towards Europe since the end of the conflicts aimed at these two crucial aspects.

Within Kissinger's theories on the international scenario and foreign policy, Kissinger exposes his views on the strategy of containment. His main critique to the logic of containment is conceptual. Massive retaliation was based on the idea that the bipolar system was not the normal condition and had to be solved. However, to Kissinger's bipolarism is the intrinsic character of the international system, it was natural and physiological after 1945 and it was a way to keep the system stable. To Kissinger peace was not normal, but stability was.⁶⁴ For Kissinger the concept of stability was pivotal. Statesman must aim at preserving stability. The goal is to create a stable system, in which some actors, like the US and USSR, must accept the legitimacy of that system and respect the rules.⁶⁵ Kissinger's geopolitics is based equally on equilibrium and acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the system. It is through this dual characteristic of the international scenario that showed the conservatism of Kissinger's vision of world politics.⁶⁶

63 Kissinger Henry, *The Troubled Partnership: A Reappraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*. Stati Uniti, McGraw-Hill, 1965. Pp 226-227

64 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979. Pag 61-62.

65 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*; Stati Uniti, Simon and Schuster, 1994

66 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 74

1.3 Kissinger in office

His background as a scholar and a researcher allows him to have a complete and structured thought on which he based his strategies. This, places him in the spotlight for the complexity and controversiality of his theories. His foreign policy, and consequently Nixon's were based on a much more complex set of theories and strategies than many others. The multifaceted strategy that accompanied him was much more coherent and well-structured than many of our contemporaries, yet it was controversial and ambiguous at times. It is not a case that he emerged for his wit, intelligence, and sharp mind. His approach to international relations is the one of a scholar.

The years of Kissinger as a statesman are characterized by a continuous disregard and critique for bureaucracy. It is also a characteristic aspect of his writings, when in office, this aversion turned into a preference for centralization and back channels. This critique can be applied both at the domestic level and in foreign policy. This justified the centralization of the decision-making process to the President during the Nixon's administration and consequently, of Kissinger's influence.⁶⁷ This is quite ambivalent since Kissinger has been a bureaucrat himself for most of his life.

Kissinger had strong criticisms towards Cold War liberalism, and this tendency intensified after 1968 election. He has criticized in his writing, even pre-1968, some basic principles of the US liberalism starting from cultural and ethical universalism.⁶⁸ For him the concept of diversity of national cultures and the difficulty of transforming them was related to the concept of limits. This produces a sort of relativistic attitude that was far from the common belief. He also explicitly rejected moralism, progressivism, and legalism the directed US Cold War liberalism. The concept of morality in foreign policy initiatives for him was connected and established by national interest.⁶⁹

67 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 70

68 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 71

69 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 72

His vision of geopolitics was conservative. In 1973 he stated that “it is extremely in our interest to keep the present world going as long as possible”.⁷⁰ His bipolarism was analytical and prescriptive. It took into consideration the military power primarily and according to him during the 1960s there were two main actors: the United States and the Soviet Union.

His actions during the period he served as a national security advisor, were guided by the principles of his theories. One of their crucial aspects, that also reflected in the rationale behind the various actions taken by the Nixon’s administration, was the concept of interdependence, as the following chapter will analyze in relation to the opening to China and the dialogue with the Soviet Union. A system based on bipolarism, as the one on which he believed, had to count on structural interdependence. It was inevitable. This was made explicit with the concept of linkage. According to linkage, problems and possibilities were connected, and one action by an actor had consequences and repercussions on the action of another actor of the system.

The emphasis on credibility was related to the bipolar concept. It was like lenses through which Kissinger observed the consequences of the actions in the international scene.

Henry Kissinger has talked profusely about his years at the White House, both as a national security advisor and as a Secretary of State. In his memoirs, he describes and narrates in detail many aspects and actions taken by the Nixon and Ford administrations, putting forward the reasoning behind the process, especially dealing with foreign policy. In *White house years*, he starts from the beginning and his first days at the White House. He was certainly new to the corridors of power.

When he entered office, he had brought with him a philosophy based on twenty years of studies of history. He was sure that history could help understand the present, but he never conceived that designs and strategies of previous decades could be applied as they were to the present.⁷¹

History could shade light on comparable situations, and teach important lessons, but could not take away the burden of making difficult decisions. He added: ‘’ But I was also aware that we were entering a period for which there was no precedent: in the destructiveness of weapons, in the speed of the spread of ideas, in the global impact of foreign policies, in the technical

70 Kissinger, Henry. *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow*. Stati Uniti, New Press, 1999. Pag 4

71 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979pag 77

possibility to fulfill the age-old dreams of bettering the condition of mankind.”⁷² He also repeats what has been part of his philosophy since being a student at Harvard: the focus on equilibrium, and the role of morality for the leader. The political leader does not have this luxury to decide between right and wrong. His decision could have moral flaws, but his goal is to find solutions independently of the limits and obstacles that he encounters. These positions are recurrent from previous writing.

Even though he was only National Security Advisor in the beginning, and later became Secretary of State in 1973, which continued to be his role in the Ford administration, he is, at all effects, the architect of foreign policy followed by Nixon starting in 1969, and later by Ford until 1977. During the years, both Presidents left him an autonomy and centrality that was not previously granted to people in his position. He had a crucial role and his opinions not only guided the White House foreign policy, but often shaped it.

⁷² Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979pag 77

Chapter II – The role of Kissinger in the process of Détente

2.1 Kissinger's Détente toward the USSR

Henry Kissinger's ideas of bipolarism will structure American foreign policy and shape two of the main events of the decade: the détente process with the Soviet Union and the American opening to China. During the Nixon's administration he is considered the architect of several crucial decisions taken by the President can be considered a pillar of the American foreign policy between the end of the 1960s and the 1970s. His theories of international relations transformed into precise strategies in the years that he was in office. His ideas not only modeled part of the American diplomatic strategy but he was one the protagonist of the several events that shaped the decade, his vision modeled American diplomatic strategy for years and continue to stimulate thematic debate.

When Nixon became President, him and Kissinger entered the existing debate with their proposals. Henry Kissinger was a realist, and his ideas were inspired by the need to rebuild the domestic and international consensus needed for a successful foreign policy.⁷³ As seen in the previous chapter, Kissinger's background was mainly academic, and his previous experience as a scholar and researcher are strongly present in his diplomatic strategies and approach to international relations.

The following chapter aims at highlighting the role of one of the architects of American foreign policy between the years 1969-1977 in some of the main events that characterized Nixon's administration. The first part of the chapter will focus on Kissinger's theories of international relations and his ideas of bipolarism in the international scenario and how they developed into policies towards the Soviet Union. The second part focuses on one of the crucial events of Nixon's years, namely, the opening towards China, focusing on the beginning of this process and on the role and impact that Kissinger had in it. The last part of the chapter shows how his ideas and strategies were headed towards the aim of achieving a relaxation of tension with the Soviet Union in the détente process, and in particular the section will deal with the SALT I and II talks between the two great superpowers in the attempt of reaching a mutual understanding towards nuclear weapons.

⁷³ Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 42

Understanding Kissinger's Soviet policy as national security advisor requires a certain degree of awareness about the policies carried out by his own colleagues in the previous years.

In the years following the end of the Second World War, the international scenario underwent a series of structural changes. The first one to mention is caused by the beginning of the Cold War. After the end of the WWII⁷⁴, the alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States started to fade, and the tensions between the two countries brought them apart. While during the war the presence of a common enemy was able to put differences on a second level, in the post-war context they started to emerge, highlighting the conflictual sides of their alliance. This is due to many reasons, among which lack of trust, wanting to control the same areas, and strong ideological differences. The two countries were promoting two different ideologies of the world and of modernity. Both American and Soviet approaches were universalist, and in the tensions the ideological dimension was complemented by the geopolitical dimension.⁷⁵

Therefore, their main concern during the 1950s for both superpowers was to strengthen their control over the territories that belonged to their influence area. They carried out this goal by creating projects and alliances involving third countries. In this way the two superpowers created and solidified into two well-identified spheres of influence. This change at the international level influenced many aspects at the domestic level too, especially the two countries' approach to foreign policy.

Until the 1950s the main aim of the US government was to contain the Soviet expansionism and avoid that third countries developed strong ties with the Soviet Union. Moscow had to be not only excluded but constrained and limited in the spread of its ideal of universal socialism and in this perspective the United States kept a close look at the European area. In fact, in some countries, like Italy and France, the communist parties were quite strong, and their proximity to Moscow was a concern for the American counterpart. Foreign policy, from 1946 onwards,

74 On post-war and American intervention in Europe see Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. Stati Uniti: Penguin Publishing Group, 2006.; Ellwood, David W., *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and postwar reconstruction* Stati Uniti, Longman, 1992; Milward, Alan S., *The reconstruction of Western Europe, 1945-51* Regno Unito, Methuen, 1984, Holm, Michael. *The Marshall Plan: a New Deal for Europe*. First edition Stati Uniti, Routledge, 2017

75 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 13-14

was based on this concept of containment embraced by Truman. His interpretation of George Kennan's containment was characterized by firmness, rejection of dialogue, support, and economic intervention in countries where communism could spread and building strategic alliances to counter the Soviet expansionism. When Eisenhower became president in 1953 the policy adopted was a more active one, named roll-back⁷⁶, as sort of liberation from communism.⁷⁷ But it soon proved just words, when in 1956 the United States did not intervene to stop Soviet repression of the Hungarian protests.

Foreign policy played a crucial role in the Presidential election of Richard Nixon and remained a constant priority during his mandate. Nixon and Kissinger's goal was to reassure the centrality of the role played by the United States at the international level, but the challenge came from different directions. In fact, not only domestic discontent was becoming predominant, especially regarding the Vietnam war, but the international scenario was swiftly changing. The Soviet Union was quickly catching up in its race to nuclear armaments and even though was not at the American level, the confidence spread by the Brezhnev doctrine was convincing Washington that action was needed to change the situation.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Soviet strategy was keeping Eastern Europe under close control, which worried the United States, considering the Soviet closeness not only to its satellites but its intervention in third countries, especially with the military support in Arab states like Egypt and Syria.⁷⁹ In this challenging and changing environment Kissinger saw the necessity of developing a new diplomacy and find a new equilibrium, trying to keep the American role at the international level and at the same time withdraw from the disastrous situation of the Vietnam war.

In 1969, when Richard Nixon became President, the country started to experience quite the discontent domestically for the strategy of containment and for the American intervention in

76 See more Jim Marchio *Resistance potential and rollback: US intelligence and the Eisenhower administration's policies toward Eastern Europe, 1953–56*, *Intelligence and National Security*, 10:2, 219-241, DOI: [10.1080/02684529508432297](https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529508432297); László Borhi; *Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction? U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s*. *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1999; 1 (3): 67–110. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1162/152039799316976814>

77 László Borhi. "Rollback, Liberation, Containment, or Inaction? U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1999; 1 (3): 67–110. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1162/152039799316976814>

78 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 29

79 On Soviet policies see Zubok, V. M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Stati Uniti: University of North Carolina Press.; Zubok, V. M., and Pleshakov, Konstantin, *Inside the Kremlin's cold war: from Stalin to Khrushchev*, 1996; Keep, John L. H., *Last of the empires: a history of the Soviet Union, 1945-1991* Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 1995

Vietnam, which was perceived by the citizens as a mistake. A reassessment of American foreign policy was necessary since the conditions had changed. The two superpowers were reaching military and geopolitical parity. Moreover, American economic supremacy was being challenged by the growth of third countries, especially in the European area.⁸⁰

Moreover, in 1965 the US was hit by a mass anti-Vietnam war movement, as a response to US escalation in the war during the Johnson administration. In those year the movements increased, involving many parts of society, including students' manifestations. By 1967, 32% of Americans agreed that becoming involved in the war had been a mistake. By the end of the year the percentage rose to 50%.⁸¹ These anti-war protests played a huge impact on the 1968 elections, as it was a pressing issue for the electorate. Even though Nixon had no strategic plan, his ideas to withdraw from the war in six months appealed to the electorate.⁸²

From this historical context, a new approach towards the conflict developed: the Détente. What does this approach mean? Before describing the events and trends of the 1970s that led to the fall of détente, it is essential to bear in mind that this term is, first of all, an idea. So forms of détente occurred regularly in the past, prior to the Cold War, between numerous states throughout world politics, as phases of stability and limited coexistence.⁸³

It is possible to attest to a long-standing inability to agree on a standard definition of détente: it has been defined by some authors as a condition, by others as a process, a policy or a historical period. With such semantic confusion at the theoretical level, it is no surprise that there is so much more chaos than consensus in reconstructing its practical applications.⁸⁴ The term détente has been used and defined in ambiguous ways. It usually refers the process of easing tension between states whose interests are so radically divergent that reconciliation is limited.

In other words, détente presupposes a bilateral relationship between powers whose perceived interests are basically in conflict. The conflicting interests and perceptions continually inject

80 Kissinger, Henry. *Diplomacy*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster UK, 2012. pag 703-704

81 Melvin Small. "The Doves Ascendant: The American Antiwar Movement in 1968". *South Central Review*, Winter, 1999 - Spring, 2000, Vol. 16/17, Vol. 16, no. 4 - Vol. 17, no. 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3190075>

82 Melvin Small. "The Doves Ascendant: The American Antiwar Movement in 1968". *South Central Review*, Winter, 1999 - Spring, 2000, Vol. 16/17, Vol. 16, no. 4 - Vol. 17, no. 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3190075>

83 Stevenson, Richard W. *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1953–1984*. Stati Uniti, University of Illinois Press, 1985, introduction

84 Stevenson, Richard W. *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1953–1984*. Stati Uniti, University of Illinois Press, 1985, introduction

tension into the relationship, causing additional conflict. Détente, by this definition, does not apply to an easing of tension between states which are allies or which together form an entente.

In the words of the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger⁸⁵:

‘Détente is an amorphous, not to say cloudy subject and, like all clouds, susceptible to a variety of interpretations. Hearing experts argue about détente, one is reminded of the famous colloquy between Hamlet and Polonius. As you will remember, Hamlet seizing Polonius by the arms, says ‘Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?’ ‘By the mass, and ‘tis like a camel indeed’ agreed Polonius. ‘Me thinks’, says Hamlet, ‘it is like a weasel’. ‘It is backe like a weasel’, agrees Polonius, ‘or like a whale?’ ‘Very much like a whale’.’⁸⁶

The author pointed out how different people interpret détente differently even though they are embedded within the same space or time.

Détente can be understood as both an era and a strategy. In the early 1970s, the policy of reducing military tension through negotiations and agreements with countries based on dramatically different ideological foundations reached its peak. By contrast, the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, who openly called for a more belligerent American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, signaled the end of an era of negotiations that Nixon had started a decade earlier.⁸⁷

Détente also represented a historical phase that stretches from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. More precisely, détente has been described as a historical period ranging from 1963 to 1975, a complicated phase of relaxation of tension in Europe that bridges the Cuban missile crisis of the early 1960s and the proxy wars of the late 1970s.

During this decade, the policies to decrease bilateral tension were first carried out through formal audits and summits and through agreements, joint statements and treaties in the most successful attempt. Détente proved to be effective in Europe and, to a lesser degree, in Asia. It is

85 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. was an important historian and Harvard professor. His work focused mainly on American liberalism, US government and leadership. He also collaborated with the Kennedy Administration and in several electoral campaigns.

86 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ‘Détente: an American Perspective’, in *Détente in Historical Perspective*, edited by G. Schwab and H. Friedlander (NY: Corgi Press, 1975) p. 125. From Hamlet, Act III, Scene 2

87 Tucker, Robert W. ‘Reagan’s Foreign Policy.’ *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 1, 1988, pp. 1–27. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043881>. Accessed 9 Feb. 2023.

possible to recall that fostering dialogue between Washington and Moscow reductively opened rooms for the end of China's virtual isolation from international affairs and the launch of diplomatic rounds between Eastern and Western countries of Europe.⁸⁸

From the perspective of Washington, Détente was a conservative policy aimed at stabilizing a situation threatening the proper functioning of American foreign policy, especially considering the Vietnam War and the escalation in a nuclear arms race.

Aiming at isolating a significant symbolic feature of détente, one might take the SALT I and II agreements on nuclear weapons, which ruled out a shared threshold for managing nuclear rockets and collateral military technology.

Besides, the road to peace was social and economic cooperation. The policy of détente primarily meant détente in Europe. At the same time, the results of the easing of tension could have been more evident and influential in the other continents. While the status quo was acceptable to both power blocs, Asia, Africa and Latin America offered an opportunity for expansion that both superpowers did not refuse to save the spirit of distension.

All this, however, took place against the backdrop of violent conflicts in the third world that gave zest to the ongoing confrontation between the two blocs, capitalism and communism.

For Kissinger détente was a process and not a static condition, that could guarantee stability and serve the needs of the United States. The latter can be defined as the process of research of a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, through which the two superpowers discuss and together moderate the risk of a nuclear war. Through this process, the US aimed at not only moderating the risk of nuclear confrontation, but also to limit the enlargement of Soviet nuclear arsenal through cooperation and at the same time reduce proxy conflicts in peripheral countries.⁸⁹

The way that Kissinger used to portray the concept of American détente domestically based on three elements. The first one was focused on the goal of Nixon's electoral campaign on a new

88 Yahuda, Michael . “China’s New Outlook: The End of Isolationism?” *The World Today*, 1979 35(5), 180–188. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40395114>

89 Husain, S. Rifaat. “Soviet-American Detente: Theory And Reality.” *Strategic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1977, pp. 97–114. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45181235>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.

approach to reduce American international commitments. The second element is to give a new legitimacy to the bipolar international structure. The third is it justify and consolidate US primacy.⁹⁰

It is important to consider two main elements. The first one is that détente is not only due to the two countries alone. Other local or regional political actors but active in international politics, such as Cuba, Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and especially China, have primarily influenced the behavior of the two blocs, and their foreign policies have generated a series of often conflicting actions and reactions that have slowed the East-West détente process.

With varying degrees of success and autonomy, many states, or political movements, often considered minor political actors, have impacted the history of international relations.

The second crucial element to consider is that easing tension did not correspond to the end of the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism. Détente is not a black-and-white condition: cooperation in certain areas is combined and coherent with conflicts in others.

For instance, Moscow was prepared to accept the status quo in Europe, but normalization here went

on in southern Africa, the Horn of Africa, Indochina, and Afghanistan.

The United States had higher expectations for détente. These disappointments over the new conflicts fueled those who opposed cooperation with the Soviet Union – a sentiment that had always existed in parts of the population.

Moscow stressed that while the policy of détente was necessary, the ideological differences between communism and capitalism would remain. Both at home and abroad, the Kremlin emphasized that there could be no questions of ideological coexistence.

To understand the process of détente, it is important to start from Kissinger's view of international relations. His ideas of bipolarism in fact shaped the foreign policy adopted by the United States in taking the different steps towards the USSR and later China, developing the concept of triangular diplomacy.

90 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011.pag 80

The American government has tended to view détente not as a dynamic process but as one guaranteeing peace and security through maintaining stability. Nixon sold détente to the American people on the premise that it would not only limit the arms race but also control Soviet behavior and expansions. For this reason, most Americans initially tend to view détente optimistically – as a way by which the Soviet Union and the United States would become partners in maintaining world order. In this view, détente was a contract between rational players involved in a chess game, a bargaining struggle with fixed and clear-cut rules and goals.

In the international scenario, and especially for the European countries, the US was not perceived anymore as the American dream and a promoter of peace and stability, but as a country with a very aggressive foreign policy. The Vietnam war had required the Johnson administration to send more troops and the discontent was growing. This situation was also very costly economically and put the United States in a critical position. During the 1960s the US were undergoing a change in their image perception. In fact, the involvement of the country in the Vietnam war had caused some domestic discontent and protests, undermining American credibility. The latter, especially for Kissinger, was crucial in the American reputation. Thus, the process of détente was a much-needed step for the two countries, as they started to face domestic challenges towards which they needed to direct their attention and energies.

The situation that Nixon inherited in Vietnam was complex, where victory was not possible, and withdrawal was difficult. The latter aspect was part of the electoral campaign carried out by Nixon, so it was crucial for his electoral program. The United States had entered the conflict under Kennedy's administration because the latter saw North Vietnam's actions as a sign of Soviet-Chinese Communist expansionism.⁹¹ By the time Nixon became President, however, it was clear that there was a misconception of the regional conflict and independent nationalism of Vietnamese communists and of the relationship between China and the Soviet Union.⁹² In the US, the Vietnam War caused the rise of several protests for the crudity of the war and the death of more than 30000 American soldiers.⁹³ Moreover, the American involvement in the

91 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 291

92 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013.pag 291

93 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013.pag 291

conflict meant also an economic burden that the US could not sustain in the long term and even though the President was aware of the difficulty of withdrawing from a war in which the previous administration had sent several additional troops, his electoral promises were clear, and there was the necessity of a change in strategy in Vietnam.

At the same time, the Soviet Union too underwent a very important period of change. In fact, the previous leader Khrushchev, had been removed and replaced by Leonid Brezhnev. He was the type of leader against any kind of liberalization in the Eastern bloc, who wanted to keep close control of the economic activities in all the satellites. He strongly believed in what will become known as the Brezhnev doctrine: the indivisibility of the communist bloc, and the right of the USSR to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries to prevent any deviation. In fact, during the 1970s Moscow started to strengthen its power projection to pursue a more global policy, less oriented on Europe. Soviet priority veered towards to hard policy: national defense investment, military diplomacy, and arms exports to friendly governments or movements. So, while keeping the possibility of *détente* with the west, the country carried out a more ambitious policy in Third World countries to facilitate Soviet expansion on a global scale.

This doctrine was also adopted in 1968, when the Soviet Union intervened to stop the deviationist Slovak leader Dubcek, who believed in socialism with a human face, by granting freedom of speech and association. Brezhnev, who was afraid of any spillover effects that could lead to lack of solidity of the Eastern bloc, intervened militarily in Prague to end this process. The result of this intervention is the perception that the USSR was no longer a hegemonic power, but a country that to keep control of its sphere of influence had to use the army. Thus, at the time, the USSR image was affected for the repression in Prague, and the US for the participation in the Vietnam war. In part, the process of *détente* begun because of the reputation and image damage that the two countries were suffering. One of the goals of the process of *détente* was to restructure the perception of the two at the international level. Both actors intervened heavily in third countries, especially in situations that they perceived as threats to their hegemonic power. However, to the eyes of third countries, especially those considered allies, these interventions were aggressive and changed the image perception. This was a major concern for the United States, but also the Soviet Union was having reputation repercussions. Moreover, the latter not only resulted aggressive, but also weak, as military intervention was the only tool through which it could keep its control on the satellites. The consequences brought

by these decisions, especially the intervention in Czechoslovakia for the Soviet Union, and the involvement in Vietnam for the United States, played a role in the credibility of the two superpowers and was an additional reason to push for a reconciliation. In a way, détente was a useful propagandistic tool for both.

The process of dialogue between the two countries will be the topic of discussion of the next section, but for now it is important to understand who the actors are to fully comprehend what type of process détente is. On the American side the process was led by President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his national security advisor. On the Soviet side the talks were led by Brezhnev. Both were conservative leaders, and the process of détente must be seen through conservative lenses, not progressive ones. It was a convenient step for both countries, to find a common ground on the limitation of nuclear weapons and prevention of nuclear escalation, and it also allowed them to focus on the domestic matters. For the Soviet Union this dialogue was crucial because it meant that the US considered it a superpower at its level, so for Moscow this was also a sort of legitimation.

According to Mario Del Pero, the four administrations of the first twenty years of Cold War interpreted the concepts adopted in foreign policy in different ways, but never explicitly stuck to the goal of avoiding further expansion of the Soviet Union.⁹⁴

The strategy of containment started to fail in the early 1960s, as the premises on which it was based were no longer present. In fact, the optimism and support on which it was based started to crumble and the factors that allowed its survival were questioned like strategic superiority and the access to unlimited resources. Moreover, balances were changing at the international level, and as Kissinger stated few years later that in the military sector there were two superpowers, while in economic terms there were at least five.⁹⁵

According to Kissinger, Eisenhower strategy of massive retaliation had two crucial weaknesses. The first is the lack of flexibility, because there appeared to be no alternative to inaction or total retaliation. The second is that it was based on the superficial conviction that it was possible to

94 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 15

95 Henry Kissinger, "Address to the Pacem in Terris III Conference", Washington DC, 8 October 1973, in *Henry Kissinger, American Foreign Policy*, 3rd edition (New York, Norton, 1977), p 128

reach a solution to all the problems that the country had, including Soviet Union.⁹⁶ For Kissinger, the US had to accept that total victory was not possible. He claimed that the solution was the idea of limited nuclear war, which means a form of conflict that allows the US to achieve the greatest advantage from its industrial potential.⁹⁷

The period of Cold War was the framework at the base of Kissinger's theories in international relations. Kissinger, in fact, is not only a crucial figure for the Cold War period, especially at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, but his views of international relations was molded on the reality and constraints created by the Cold War itself. In fact, in his theories and positions, the bipolar nature of the international scenario, which characterized the Cold War era, was predominant. He was in favor of interventions in third countries, together with a firm belief in the interdependence of the international system and a strong focus on credibility.⁹⁸ A crucial aspect of Kissinger's thought is the concept of bipolarism in international relations, that could end up underestimating regional dynamics. Kissinger thought that the American power had to be directed towards diplomacy and military. The tactic of linkage will be recurrent in Nixon and Kissinger's decision. It consists in the view that the international system was strongly interdependent, and everything was interconnected. Therefore, it could be manipulated.⁹⁹ This approach was the strategy adopted vis a vis the Soviet Union.

Nixon and Kissinger strategies, even if they were not exactly new, involved the withdrawal from the Vietnam situation, the beginning of dialogue with the USSR, and opening to China. In fact, dialogue with Moscow on nuclear weapons had already started and in 1963 the ban on nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space and water had already been signed. Both countries started to perceive dialogue as a necessity. So, these policies that are usually attributed to Nixon and Kissinger, had already been adopted previously, even if the results achieved were obviously different. The actions, however, were portrayed as innovative and different from the previous approaches. In all the negotiations and actions that Kissinger carried out during the Nixon's administration, the rationale behind his thinking was that it was not possible to

96 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 52

97 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 52

98 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011 pag 59

99 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 69

negotiate anything by splitting up the Cold War situation into different items. Everything was interconnected, as the relations between US and China was connected to the US-Soviet relation, the Vietnam was connected to both of them, and to any agreements on arms control there was an agreement on political restraint attached.¹⁰⁰ It was not possible for him to proceed in sections, every aspect was connected on so many levels, and this concept of linkage is what differed in taking steps in the international scenario differently from what the previous administrations had done.

The process of détente, and in general Kissinger's approach was a conservative strategy. His vision of the international system a strictly bipolar one, in which, especially militarily, there were only two superpowers. This vision belonged to the early 1960s and conditioned him throughout his years as scholar. The system for Kissinger was bipolar, and the goal was for the US foreign policy and for Kissinger was to keep it that way.¹⁰¹

Both the United States and the Soviet Union were moderating their tensions to be able to negotiate. For both Nixon and Brezhnev was important to keep the status quo unchanged. Détente meant relaxation of tensions but did not mean that the system was less bipolar, if possible, this characteristic was even more enhanced. To make the bipolarism legitimate it needed to be accepted by the Soviets too, and therefore dialogue was needed. In a way, it was to better control and shape that dynamics of the international system itself.

As Kissinger mentions often, the first goal of détente is to avoid war, and a legitimate bipolar order could allow posing limits on rearmament.¹⁰² At the same time, this process was useful to both superpowers on other goals: to avoid that third countries, or those under the sphere of influence of one of the two, tried to escape their direct control. Détente was a deterrent to centrifugal tendencies and a way to keep control of the system. To summarize, détente was necessary to guarantee order and stability, which had always been at the center of Kissinger's focus both as a scholar and a political figure.

100 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019. Pag 96

101 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. pag 81

102 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 163-165

2.2 Opening to China 1971-1974

The process of rapprochement with China is considered one of the major successes of Nixon's foreign policy. The decision to improve the relationship with the People's Republic of China is unprecedented and meant the end to a more than twenty years of hostility and isolation between the two countries. The United States had strongly fought against the spread of the Communist ideology and opening to a declared Communist country was never considered before. However, in Nixon's foreign policy it played a major role in light of the Soviet- American relations and the concept of triangular diplomacy, which included Washington, Moscow and Beijing to improve the possibility of maneuver of the United States and increase their power in negotiations.¹⁰³

Triangular diplomacy is based on the concept that Kissinger was convinced that increasing American diplomatic options, especially towards the People's Republic of China would not harden Moscow's stance, but soften it, especially due to the recent Sino-Soviet split. In this way, Kissinger believed that "the triangle between Washington, Moscow and Beijing would improve the possibilities of accommodations with each as we increase our options towards both".¹⁰⁴ In this perspective, if both the Soviet Union and China were more concerned about each other than about the United States, for the latter it would have been an incredible diplomatic advantage.

In the United States until the end of the 1960s, China was perceived as a Communist enemy, and Beijing was not sympathetic on the United States either. In fact, the later considered the American the emblem of the capitalist world and had developed a strong anti-American propaganda during the Johnson administration. However, things were about to change.

It is important to underline that the two leaders perceived their common goals through very different lenses. If on the one hand Mao sought American dialogue as a strategic necessity to counterbalance the threat posed by the Soviet Union, Nixon perceived it as a pawn in a broader redefinition of American foreign policy and international leadership.¹⁰⁵

103 Goh, Evelyn. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974". *Diplomatic History*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2005, pp. 475-502. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915131>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2022.

104 Quoted in Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 165

105 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012. 438

The possibility of creating a dialogue with China was created by regional events, that allowed American diplomacy to step in. In fact, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union was tense, not only for ideological reasons and different perspective of Communism, but also for border clashes. These tensions that emerged, posed a security threat that was no longer manageable for China alone, and it brought the country to consider the attempts of dialogue of the United States.

In March 1969, the Ussuri river, the border between China and the Soviet Union became the theater of military clashes between the two countries.¹⁰⁶ The relationship between the two was not at its best and during the 1960s it had deteriorated even further. Neither of the two was taking responsibility for the clashes over the border and the tensions between the two was high. Diplomacy did not reach any result and while the Soviets were moving troops close to the borders, the Chinese embarked in a hard propaganda against the communist neighbor.¹⁰⁷ These clashes were not ignored by the Americans, who were able to play the events in their favor. Kissinger was about to begin his game of triangular diplomacy to pressure Moscow in the moment in which the Soviets were facing the Chinese challenge. The Sino-Soviet border conflict continued, and Mao feared that the Soviets could launch a nuclear attack, offering the United States a great opportunity to create bargaining power towards Moscow, exploiting the Chinese security threat.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the risk that the Soviet Union posed to China was greater than the hostility and ideological differences that for years had pushed the Chinese to implement anti-American propaganda.

In June 1969 Moscow proposed an economic and security system in the Asian region, leaving Beijing out of the games. In fact, during the June Communist Summit Conference, the Soviet Union initiated some measures that could undermine China. The aim was to create a sort of collective security system among non-aligned countries against the imperialists- seen as United States and China. The proposal practically increased the influence of the Soviet Union on

106 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004 pag 41

107 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004 pag 41

108 Goh, Evelyn. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974". *Diplomatic History*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2005, pp. 475–502. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915131>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2022.

countries nearby, excluding China, which was seen as a heretic communist and imperialist country.¹⁰⁹

The main reason for Beijing to open a dialogue with the US was to counterbalance the security threat posed by the Soviet Union. However, the decision was difficult and very controversial and, regardless of the United States' several attempts to connect, the Chinese were still in doubt. Since the beginning of the 1950s the Chinese had launched a strong campaign against capitalism and the United States and even though they were in a risky position with the USSR starting discussions with the American was against their ideology. Throughout the early 1969 for the Americans, it was very difficult to reach the Chinese, and the signals that the latter sent were mixed. The border clashes with the Soviet Union pushed China towards easing the relationship with the Americans because the US was no longer China's major threat. The major risk for China's security then was the armed conflict with the Soviet Union and getting closer to the US could represent a potential protection.¹¹⁰

At the same time, Nixon announced that the US goal was to withdraw from the Vietnam war, and started to consider a Vietnamization of the conflict, a crucial proposal in Nixon's foreign policy that meant to leave the conflict to its local actors, and helping South Vietnam through training.¹¹¹ It was not a case that while the Soviets were announcing a measure that could disadvantage China, the US was doing the exact opposite. This was convenient for Nixon at the domestic level to reduce the protests undergoing towards the war, it was also strategic to attract the interest of the Chinese and make a rapprochement easier.

For the Chinese it was a strategic necessity to improve the relationship with the US, as the conflict with the Soviets was potentially dangerous for the country, and nuclear weapons could be used.

When the two countries finally started to talk, which was in December 1969, it was through the American and Chinese ambassadors in Warsaw. These meetings were publicly announced, and

109 Lawrence L. Whetten. "Moscow's Anti-China Pact". *The World Today*, Sep., 1969, Vol. 25, No. 9 pp. 385-393 Royal Institute of International Affairs <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40394309>

110 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004 pag 57

111 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 57

Soviet started to be concerned on the Sino-American rapprochement. This was the element that Kissinger and Nixon hoped to use. It was the beginning of triangular diplomacy.

At the beginning, although rapprochement was a necessity for both countries, it was not easy, and the two countries started to take small steps towards each other. Nixon, as expressed in an article for *Foreign Affairs* in 1967¹¹², invoked the need to invite China to join the community of nations.

The first change in tone for Mao took place in 1965 through interviews with the American journalist Edgar Snow. However, after softening his tone, distance was kept between the two countries until 1969. On January 20, 1969, Nixon made during his inaugural speech a slight reference to an opening to China with the words ‘ ‘ We seek an open world- open to ideas, open to the exchange of goods and people- a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation’’¹¹³ and for the first time Chinese newspapers gave attention to Nixon’s speech by reprinting it.

Things started to develop after American Ambassador in Warsaw, Walter Stoessel, was ordered to make contact to the Chinese diplomats to express the American willingness to start dialogue. From that moment onwards there were several occasions between the end of 1969 and 1970 in which American diplomats and Chinese diplomats exchanged words.¹¹⁴ Dialogue was still not official and not at the government level, but the two countries were taking small steps towards each other. In this light, few messages were exchanged between Zhou Enlai and Kissinger through the Pakistani and Romanian embassies, which included an invitation for Nixon, that, as Kissinger mentions in his memoirs, was considered too risky for the moment being. This is the background to what became known as the Ping- Pong diplomacy.¹¹⁵

For the first time since the Cultural Revolution, a Chinese sports team participated in international tournaments outside China, in this case in Japan. Following Mao’s order, the Chinese team invited the Americans to visit China.¹¹⁶ Mao and Zhou were operating on different

112 Nixon, Richard M.. "Asia After Viet Nam." *Foreign Affairs*, 1 ottobre 1967, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1967-10-01/asia-after-viet-nam>. Accessed 9 February 2023.

113 Richard Nixon, "Inaugural Address: January 20, 1969," no. 1, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 3

114 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012. Pag 451-452

115 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012. Pag 472

116 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979. Pag 710

diplomatic levels. On the one hand the Ping-Pong diplomacy constituted a follow up to the messages previously exchanged between Kissinger and Zhou. It was a commitment on the Chinese counterpart to dialogue outside the secret diplomatic channels.¹¹⁷

As these exchanges continued between the White House and Beijing, President Nixon accepted the invitation to China but insisted that in such meeting both sides were free to raise any topic of discussion.¹¹⁸ This was crucial to expand the debate outside the issue of Taiwan, which was often mentioned as a condition for the Chinese side.

From this moment onwards, the relationship with China was strictly controlled and carefully organized by Kissinger. In July 1971 Kissinger made a first trip to China in absolute secrecy, followed by a second, public one, in October. The trip was important both at the symbolic level and at the political level. For a while no results were achieved in their meetings as there were issues on which the countries were strong about. In preparation for the summit, Kissinger and Zhou Enlai would participate in a preliminary secret meeting. This secret trip took place in July 1971. In that occasion two negotiating sessions took place with the goal to decide whether it was possible for the two countries to set aside ideological differences and tense previous foreign policy and focus on improving the relationship between Beijing and Washington.¹¹⁹

According to Kissinger there were two main challenges presented that could obstacle the process of turning the secret visit into a process of dialogue successfully: Taiwan and Vietnam War. The two countries had different conditions on the first issue as for Mao the recognition as one country was a precondition for dialogue, while for the Americans the condition was that China would wire towards a peaceful resolution of the matter before the discussions.¹²⁰ Until the beginning of the 1970s Taiwan was recognized as the legitimate government at the international level. The country was formally recognized as a US ally and generally recognized by liberal countries, as it also had a seat at the UN security council. They were able to achieve a withdrawal of American troops from Taiwan conditional on the resolution of the Indochina War.¹²¹

117 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012. PAG 474

118 Message from the Government of the United States to the Government of the People's Republic of China, Washington, May 10, 1971," FRUS 17, 318.

119 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012. Pag 489

120 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012 Pag 503-504

121 Memorandum of Conversation: Beijing, July 9, 1971, 4:35–11:20 p.m.," FRUS 17, 367–68.

The Chinese, as Kissinger mentioned in his memoirs, did not reject the concept of linkage, and agreed that the matters were sort of interconnected. On the second issue Zhou acted according to the same logic adopted to manage the first issue, and at the same time avoid commitments. The 48-hours visit resulted in the successful outcome of a joint communique that would make public Nixon's visit in China. On February 21, 1972, Nixon visited China. The first encounter with Mao was symbolic, as the more pressing issues were to be discussed later with Zhou. The main issues were divided into three categories: the first one was a closed meeting with limited staff on the aims of the two sides and their cooperation against the enemy for China, namely the Soviet Union. The second category is a dialogue on cooperation in the economic, scientific, and technical fields participated by the Foreign Ministers. And the last was a draft of the final communique headed by the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua and Kissinger.¹²² Nixon and Zhou did not talk about contemporary issues, instead, Nixon proposed to base the foreign policy on mutual interest, reconciliation, and cooperation, keeping in mind that the two countries maintained their ideological opposition, but worked together as a necessity.

The Shanghai Communique summed up Nixon and Kissinger's visit, and the American counterpart was represented by Kissinger himself. It did not go as Kissinger expected, and how they had planned in a second trip that took place before the presidential visit. The Communique as envisioned by Mao was basically a statement on the two countries positions and ideologies, which were quite contrasting, followed by a section on mutual positions. The surprising part on mutual position was the one according to which neither of the two would seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.¹²³

After Nixon visited China, a period of strategic cooperation between the two governments started. The meetings with Zhou and the conversations with Mao kept developing what Kissinger defined a quasi-alliance, which was not based on agreements but on their personal geopolitical needs and goals.¹²⁴ For China, an alliance with the United States meant adding a security measure to the Soviet threat, for the United States it was a diplomatic strategy towards the Soviet Union to push for a mutual understanding on nuclear weapons.

122 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012 pag 532

123 Joint Statement Following Discussions with Leaders of the People's Republic of China: Shanghai, February 27, 1972," FRUS 17, 812-16

124 Kissinger, Henry. *On China*. Regno Unito, Penguin, 2012 Pag 559

The concept of linkage entails that the successful resolution of one issue has positive consequences on other problems. The same logic works in negative. The opening to China, as previously mentioned, can be read through this filter. In fact, what was perceived as the most revolutionary decision taken by Nixon administration, must be seen in function of putting pressure on the Soviet Union. Basically, the rapprochement with China was used as leverage to pressure the Soviet Union to reach an agreement on arms control in the SALT talks. Through this opening, Kissinger hoped to achieve his goal. On the one hand he wanted to put pressure on the Soviet Union to get to some results on the nuclear weapons limitation negotiations, on the other, he wanted to strengthen and consolidate his concept of bipolarism in Europe and prevent excessive autonomy of the area.¹²⁵

The use of the Chinese card has always been perceived as a tool to put pressure on the Soviet-American talks to achieve goals better and quicker, but it was more than this to the US. In fact, the logic of triangular diplomacy was also to exploit the Soviet card, the threat that the Soviet Union posed to China, to play in the Sino-American relationship to discuss with Beijing.¹²⁶ This element was used especially in the beginning to convince the Chinese to develop closer ties with the United States.¹²⁷

This renewed relationship between the two countries resulted in a new inclusion of China within the international scenario. In fact, one of the effects of the opening towards China is its entrance in the United Nations, supported by the United States. Mao's China was formally admitted to the international community in a position of strength, gaining a permanent seat at the Security Council.¹²⁸

However, in their relationship there was one issue: the recognition of the Republic of China went at the disadvantage of Taiwan's independent movement. This issue had been part of the negotiations, and the Chinese were irremovable on it. The necessity for dialogue prevailed over

125 Del Pero, Mario. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Cornell University Press, 2011. Pag 93

126 Robert Ross. *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War*. Stati Uniti, New York, 1993.

127 Goh, Evelyn. "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974". *Diplomatic History*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2005, pp. 475–502. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915131>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2022.

128 Dallek, Robert. *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*. Stati Uniti, HarperCollins, 2009 Pag 333-334

the positions previously taken by the US on Taiwan's side, and Kissinger had reassured Mao that the country would not intervene in China's internal dynamics. The Taiwan quarrel will continue in the following administrations and will continue to play a controversial role in the relationship between the two countries, also affecting regional affairs.

However, Washington maintained strong geopolitical ties with Taiwan, even though it did not and did not legally recognize it as an independent country. This generates a paradox: since the 1970s, thanks to the Nixon-Mao diplomatic round, the Communist regime has been recognized by the world community as the representative political actor of the Chinese people, but the United States has continued to keep a strong presence in Taiwan, the former legally recognized Chinese power.¹²⁹

129 Accinelli, Robert. "In Pursuit of a Modus Vivendi. In *Normalization of U.S.-China Relations*". The Netherlands: Harvard University Asia Center. 2005 doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9781684174201_003

2.3 Salt I and II 1969-1972

A great domestic consensus after the opening towards China was achieved in 1972 with the SALT I agreement. With it, the two superpowers determined the numbers allowed and regulated to the arms race for the first time. The SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) I and II are two agreements reached between the Soviet Union and the United States with the goal of limiting the possibility of nuclear war between the two superpowers. The next section aims at explaining how the dialogue between the two countries took place, and why it is a crucial event in Cold War history. In this context, the aim is to highlight the role that Henry Kissinger played in the dialogue and negotiations in Soviet-American relations.

If world peace and stability were the final normative aim, reducing tension by military power equalization was interpreted on the both sides as the key to achieving stable guarantees of peace. There was nothing more crucial than avoiding a nuclear war between Moscow and Washington. Consequently, the constructive idea Western and Eastern governments advocated after the Cuban crisis was regulating the arms race through limitation agreements on missiles and nuclear weapons.

SALT I and II have been praised as a milestone of peaceful coexistence between Washington and Moscow. From this perspective, it represented the essence of bilateral détente. At the same time, it shows the limits and the paradoxical nature of this policy: before, during and after the Treaty signature, the two governments struggled a great deal on the goals and means of the treaty, and different visions of world peace emerged. The behind-the-scene reality is one characterized by mutual suspicion and misunderstanding. In this perspective, the history of Salt II also describes the demise or decline of détente in the late 1970s, when the two world leaders started again to clash at the international level for world dominance.

In a recent interview, Henry Kissinger summarizes the entire rationale of the dialogue between the two countries Kissinger saying that ‘ ‘ our strategic objective was to prevent the Soviet Union from becoming the hegemonic country. Nixon came into office when the Soviet army had just occupied Czechoslovakia six months earlier, and one of the strategic events of our period was that forty-two Russian divisions were deployed on the Chinese border. So the use of Soviet military pressure was a feature of the Cold War world to be dealt with. Nixon also began by

saying that he was open to an era of negotiations, and we agreed to the opening of arms control negotiations on strategic nuclear weapons.”¹³⁰ As he said, the arms control negotiations were important, but the main focus was on the political aspect of the dialogue. It was the first time that the two tried to agree to relax their tensions.

A great feature in the Soviet-American relations is determined by the so-called back channels. This plays a great part in Kissinger's actions, and it will prove crucial in the dialogue with the Soviets. In fact, the first dialogue and talks started through Kissinger- Dobrynin relationship. The latter was the Soviet ambassador in the US and was a supporter of the process of détente. Back channels were basically confidential channels of communication, that left out official actors such as the State Department. This technique was not new and was used especially during negotiations to exchange views and avoid backlash from domestic actors or third countries. This time though was different as the Kissinger- Dobrynin back channel was not only to tackle a crisis, but it was also the instrument to deal with all sorts of issues that involved the two superpowers.¹³¹ This strategy will continue throughout Kissinger's permanence in office. In this way it was clear that the power was in Nixon and Kissinger's hands, leaving the rest of the American institutions external to the process. When this back channel was established the two countries expressed the willingness to open negotiations, and some of the potential topics of discussion were the Middle East and SALT.¹³²

A great impact on the discussions and in general as shaping the international scenario was the Vietnam war, which was a priority for the Nixon's administration, but this issue will be better analyzed in the following chapter of this elaborate.

The era of negotiation with the Soviet Union was opened by the SALT: Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. Both sides continue to express their interest in the negotiations that would open with preliminary discussion of the issues involved in Helsinki, in November 1969. SALT became the first effort to negotiate between the two superpowers. They lasted five weeks, in which

130 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019. pag 183

131 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 34

132 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. Pag 38

neither of them made a proposal, but they agreed that “each side is able better to understand the views of the other with respect to the problems under consideration.”¹³³

They also agreed to meet in rotating sessions between Vienna, that took place in April 1970, and Helsinki.

The Soviets thought they could improve the terms in their favor pushing on the American domestic pressures for unilateral cutbacks. They wanted to stop the American ABM program; they were as yet unwilling to face an offensive freeze, perhaps because their own buildup had not proceeded far enough.¹³⁴ The general atmosphere was one in which the Soviets were pushing to achieve an agreement, and knew that the US was torn by a debate on what arms and goals it had to focus.

In spring 1970, it was time to propose the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Vienna. As the possible proposals were innumerable, the main options reduced to four.

“Option A: Each country could build twelve ABM missile-defense sites, there would be no limits on MIRVs, and a high ceiling on offensive missiles would require no U.S. cuts. (The Pentagon liked this one.)

Option B: The same, except each side could have only one ABM site, which would be limited to protecting its capital.

Option C: The same as B, except there would be restrictions on MIRVs (Multiple Independently- Targetable Reentry Vehicles).

Option D: Each side would be limited to one ABM site, there would be deep missile cuts, but no MIRV restrictions.”¹³⁵

On option C, Kissinger attached the condition of on-site inspection, which as predictable, was immediately rejected by the Soviet Union, and as predicted by Kissinger, both would land on option B, which meant limiting the number of missiles rather than warheads.¹³⁶ This option would be never receive the support of the Congress, and Kissinger was aware of this mistake. Another mistake that Kissinger was aware of, was the fact of accepting one ABM each

133 United States and Soviet Union Conclude Preliminary Strategic Arms Limitation Talks: Text of Communique,” December 22, *State Bulletin*, vol. 62 (January 12,1970), p. 29

134 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 652

135Smith, Gerard C. *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I*. Stati Uniti, University Press of America, 1985., pag 109

136 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985. Pag , 140

protecting the national capitals. He knew that ABM was the strongest bargaining counter.¹³⁷ Kissinger tried for the following year to undo this mistake, using his Dobrynin back channel. To solve this situation, he proposed a deal to Dobrynin: he would, through the back channel, discuss an approach to SALT together with the Berlin problem, which the Soviets had wanted to settle since 1958.¹³⁸ The issue involved ways to guarantee western access to the city while regulating the relationship between western Germany and west Berlin in an acceptable way for the east. To negotiate these aspects, which Kissinger linked to achieve his goals, he used what was a constant in his approach: the back channels, leaving the State Department in the dark.¹³⁹ The United States announced the agreement on arms control on May 20, and the two countries agreed to try to agree on an ABM treaty together with measures that would limit offensive weapons.¹⁴⁰ Soon after, the Berlin agreement was also achieved. In brief, it is possible to say that the SALT I was the first step towards the limitation of nuclear arsenal in volume, and it was only the opening step towards a series of more complete agreements.

On April 20th, 1972, Kissinger made a secret trip, this time to Moscow. The trip was, as the previous one to China, a way to prepare the actual summit for Nixon's visit, but it was very different from the first secret trip to China that he made the previous year. First because in China he had made contact before, while not he was making sure that progress could be made regardless of the ongoing tensions in Vietnam.¹⁴¹ One of the first meetings Kissinger had with Brezhnev was entirely on the war, with one main goal on the American counterpart which was to bring an end to the American intervention.¹⁴²

While the US was bombing North Vietnam, the Moscow summit was taking place between President Nixon and Brezhnev on May 22nd, 1972. There was too much at stake for the Soviet Union, Brezhnev had put his reputation on the line and could not back out now.¹⁴³

137 Smith, Gerard C. *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I*. Stati Uniti, University Press of America, 1985. pag 147

138 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 605

139 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 606

140 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 609

141 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 206

142 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 206

143 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 219

There were many serious aspects to discuss in the meetings, and one of the major achievements of the summit was Nixon's signature of the SALT I agreements. The treaty was composed of two parts. The first one was an ad interim agreement on land and submarine based offensive nuclear weapons (SLBMs), and the second was an agreement on anti-ballistic missiles defense systems (ABM treaty). With the latter, the two agreed to deploy only two limited ground-based defense systems. They gave up nationwide defense systems against strategic ballistic missiles recognizing the risk of a new arms race. The goal of détente was considered attained. At the same time, Kissinger while Nixon attended his meetings with Brezhnev, oversaw the discussions on the agreement's details with Gromyko, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on potential discussions for middle east settlements and the Vietnam War.¹⁴⁴

In the 1972 meeting the US had a big agenda to discuss, as they had discussed with the Soviets for more than a year. According to Kissinger it was logical that they counterbalanced the rapprochement with China, showing themselves as a more viable partner. They let the summit happen even though the weeks before a huge escalation was taking place in Vietnam.¹⁴⁵ To Kissinger the significance of the agreement was that it was the first time that offensive weapons agreement was to be discussed, and it was successful since it managed to freeze the number of offensive nuclear weapons at the level already reached at the time, and it allowed the US to work on improving quality. It was a five-year interim agreement that could be worked up into a more complex negotiation. In his words, "it was an important step to reduce international tensions".¹⁴⁶ In addition, they had achieved a permanent agreement on the limitation of anti-ballistic missiles defense.

The ABM agreement had a positive impact on the two countries, because it allowed them to cut down the spending on that program. While the other part of the treaty, the one on offensive weapons allowed the Soviet Union to have higher limits on ICBMs and SLBMs, in a way the US kind of gave up American missiles' superiority.¹⁴⁷ As expressed by a conservative Republican member of the House of Representatives, John M. Ashbrook, the US was at loss in the

144 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 219

145 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 pag 91 -92

146 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 PAG 91- 92

147 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 221

agreement since it allowed to “ lock the Soviet Union into unchallengeable superiority, and plunge the united states and its allies into a decade of danger”¹⁴⁸.

The reality was very complex. The agreement did not cover many aspects, leaving to the US the possibility of improving the quality of MIRVs. However, the treaty presented one main criticism: the agreement did not stop the arms race, it only shifted it to different weapons.¹⁴⁹ Already throughout the 1969 the Nixon administration had been informed about the risks and needs of banning MIRVs, and the House of Foreign Affairs Committee issued a report for a negotiated freeze on the weapons.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, they were the ones left out from SALT I agreement. Kissinger himself was uncomfortable with MIRV technology, as he was aware of the power and destabilizing nature of it. However, he considered that discussing both ABM and MIRV would be too much on the plate and would be had a political difficulty in discussing arm control with the Soviets.¹⁵¹

The great achievement was more politically significant, picturing Nixon and Kissinger as the primary diplomatic figures of the time that were able to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union.

The two countries also signed a document called *Basic principles of relations between the United States and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics*. This document was negotiated by Kissinger and dealt with the peaceful coexistence of the two countries and regulated bilateral relations in light of the importance of security interests.¹⁵² It was not concrete, and Kissinger himself defined it as “general spirit which regulates the overall direction of the policy”¹⁵³.

Since SALT I did not prevent the two countries from enlarging, they force through the deployment of MIRVs, that was one of the first topics of discussion for the SALT II negotiations. The two countries still had differences in their points of view and priorities. Their negotiations discussed offensive arms systems, bans on new arms systems and qualitative limits.

148 Cited in Hersh, Seymour. *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. Stati Uniti, Simon & Schuster, 2013, 550.

149 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 222

150 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 593

151 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 595

152 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 222

153 Cited in Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985. Pag, 292

The agreement between the two countries was to set limits on the number of ICBMs, SLBMs and missile-launching submarines. The Soviet Union was allowed slightly higher number and the agreement was not ideal for either party. The two countries agreed to limit the timeframe for five years and to continue negotiations. The combination of the ABM treaty and the interim agreement on offensive strategic weapons did not mean an end to the nuclear arms race.¹⁵⁴

The Second Round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, commonly known as SALT II, began almost immediately after the first round ended in 1972. The negotiations led to a treaty on nuclear arms control that the United States and the Soviet Union signed in 1979. Although it was never ratified by the U.S. Senate, both countries adhered to the terms of the agreement.¹⁵⁵

In spring of 1973 the relationships between the US and USSR were unusually relaxed. A second summit between the two countries was planned to take place in the United States, and to prepare for the negotiations Kissinger went to Moscow at the beginning of May.

The starting point of the negotiations was slightly different from the SALT I agreement. In fact, the domestic difficulties caused by the first signs of Watergate affected Nixon and were showing their impact on foreign policy too. In the previous negotiations the two countries consciously differentiated their arsenal, American weapons were smaller and more precise and versatile, Soviet ones were more powerful. Each country had focused on its own development and the options that the bureaucratic machinery was making negotiations more difficult for Kissinger, since the options the Defense department insisted on equality in every weapons system.¹⁵⁶ The State Department went to the other extreme. It proposed a moratorium on all MIRV testing and deployment. This was no more negotiable since it would have excluded the Soviets from the MIRV field altogether.¹⁵⁷

154 The First Round of Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT), 1972, US Department of State <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/dr/103529.htm>

155 Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (SALT II)", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/t/isn/5195.htm>

156 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987.pag 724

157 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987.pag 726

It was hardly an environment conducive to conceptual thought when SALT II got under way in October 1972. The Soviets proposed the withdrawal of American ballistic-missile submarines from forward bases as well as mutual “restraint” in the development of new strategic weapons.

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What emerged from these talks is a statement of general principles, which was not specific nor precise. The clause on a future SALT agreement included those qualitative developments had to be included. The most concrete provision was that the parties would seek to conclude a new agreement before the end of 1974.¹⁵⁹

On a side, another type of negotiation was taking place: the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War. The idea of this project was remembered by Kissinger in his memoirs in the following way: “On my secret visit to Moscow in April 1972, Brezhnev took me aside to propose what he was pleased to call a “peaceful bomb” — a treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States renouncing the use of nuclear weapons against each other”¹⁶⁰ which was not feasible for the US. In over a year of negotiation the proposal had been transformed into a statement that the mutual goal was peace, applying as well to allies and third countries and premised on restrained international conduct, especially the avoidance of the use or the threat of force.¹⁶¹

The basis put by the Nixon’s administration in foreign policy, especially in the dialogue with the Soviet Union, will be continued by President Ford, who continued the negotiations. Kissinger continued to play a central role in the dialogue with the Soviets, but the signing of the SALT II will not take place until later in 1979, even if during the years the dialogue lost its initial significance and the process of détente will start to fade, as the next chapter will show.

As seen in the previous sections, the American foreign policy in the Nixon’s administration focused on some crucial pillars, as the beginning of negotiations with the enemy, the achievement of an agreement on the use and development of nuclear weapons and on the opening to China as a tool in this dynamic.

158 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987.pag 730

159 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987.pag 746

160 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979

Pag 1152

161 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987. Pag 776

However, the process of détente had not diminished the ideological differences between the two. The United States and the Soviet Union were and will remain ideological rivals, and the two during the years always attempted to contain and limit the other. In fact, regardless of the determination to achieve agreements on nuclear weapons, the two countries had found several theaters of confrontation through proxy conflicts. This is one of the main contradictions of the dialogue between the two countries: the effort of dialogue did not exclude the desire to prevail. This is true in the Vietnam War, as it is in several other contexts. The next chapter aims at analyzing more in depth this aspect and the contradictions that accompanied the dialogue between the two superpowers until the decline and defeat of the process of détente, since it is not possible to understand one without the other.

Chapter III- The contradictions and failure of détente

3.1 The Vietnam War

While the previous two chapters dealt with Kissinger's ideas and their application in foreign policy, the third one is aimed at analyzing the limits of détente and the declining phase of Kissinger and Nixon's foreign policy. The first section will analyze what is considered one of the biggest contradictions in opening a dialogue with Communist countries, and at the same time one of the darkest pages of American history: the Vietnam War. The conflict in Vietnam can be considered a contradiction because it is a proxy conflict to limit the spread of communism, and while the Americans troops kept fighting North Vietnam, which was supported by Soviet Union and China, President Nixon and Kissinger were discussing arms limitation with the Soviet Union and opening a dialogue with China. The second section will deal with the decline of the process of détente and how the bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and the United States stopped to be a priority, and how differences prevented them to achieve results. The third section will analyze the failure and conclusion of the process of détente and the demise of Nixon's administration.

The last phase of Nixon's political career is strictly connected to the beginning of his presidency, in 1969. When Nixon and Kissinger took office, the administration was left with cumbersome task of finding a solution to the American involvement in the Vietnam war. Kissinger had expressed his view on the war in an article for *Foreign Affairs* shortly after his appointment, pointing to the complexity of the issue and the impossibility to end the conflict rapidly.¹⁶² He doesn't know yet that the Vietnam conflict will oversee all actions taken in foreign policy for the next four years, as it is linked to other countries like Soviet Union or China.

The American involvement in the Vietnam War had started under President Kennedy in the attempt to avoid the spread of communism, by backing South Vietnam in the confrontation against the communist North Vietnam, which was supported by the communist countries: Soviet Union and China. It is at all effects a proxy conflict for the most dominant powers involved in Asia politics to fight for influence over the region, and indirectly, world politics. The conflict, which was born in November 1955 between North and South Vietnam, became at the center of American concern because if one Southeast Asian country fell to communism, the risk,

162 Kissinger, Henry A.. "The Viet Nam Negotiations." *Foreign Affairs*, 1 gennaio 1969, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1969-01-01/viet-nam-negotiations>. Accessed 9 February 2023.

according to the Kennedy's administration, was that other would have followed the same path. For this reason, Kennedy decided to increase US aid starting in 1962, and the Johnson's administration followed by a large-scale troop intervention.

In his article, Kissinger points to the fact that a conflict that involved many countries, two American administrations, and that lasted more than 20 years cannot be resolved quickly. The issues were complex and interconnected. By 1969, it was clear that winning the war was impossible, but for Kissinger they could not just withdraw, because credibility had to be maintained. Credibility played a huge role, and it is a recurrent theme in Kissinger's reasoning. According to him, stability depended on American promises, and those promises had to be kept.¹⁶³ On the issue, he also believed that military issues must be discussed with Hanoi.

According to Nixon, the only way was to assure Saigon's survival without the presence of the American army. And at that moment South Vietnam was not able to survive the Communist attack if the American troops withdrew. Building up South Vietnamese forces meant at the time being able to remove some American help from the ground. The main idea was to de-Americanize the conflict, and make it a regional conflict that involved local actors. This was Nixon's plan, which Kissinger did not support that much.¹⁶⁴

In the beginning, both Nixon and Kissinger were very optimistic for the conclusion of the situation in Vietnam, which will be in the background in all discussions with Soviet Union and China. However, the conflict did not end quickly. Soviet Union and China had all the interest in solving the matter and proceeding in their individual relations with the United States, but Vietnam was not the major point of discussions in the visits that Kissinger attended in Beijing or in Moscow. Kissinger and Nixon realized that the Soviet Union and China were not directly in control or command of North Vietnam. This clarity of perception permitted the administration to see to pursue possibilities for triangular diplomacy that had not previously been adequately recognized.¹⁶⁵

163 Kissinger, Henry A.. "The Viet Nam Negotiations." *Foreign Affairs*, 1 gennaio 1969, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1969-01-01/viet-nam-negotiations>. Accessed 9 February 2023.

164 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 pag 104-105

165 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 250

The first serious attempt to get Soviet attention on finding a compromise on the Vietnam War is the Kissinger-Dobrynin meetings in April 1969. On that occasion, Kissinger made clear that if American willingness to negotiate with Hanoi was not supported by the Kremlin, the President would have to escalate the war. In the case in which the Kremlin did not collaborate on the resolution of the Vietnam War, the dialogue on limitation of nuclear weapons that both countries wished for could not continue.¹⁶⁶

Dobrynin warned that Moscow had limited power on Hanoi, but that he would forward the negotiating proposals to Soviet leaders. He added that the Soviet leaders wished to continue negotiations for improved relations with the United States. Kissinger's interpretation of Dobrynin message was that the American actions in Vietnam, even escalation of hostilities, was not a Soviet's priority.¹⁶⁷

The United States was also pursuing parallel efforts to get the Chinese to mediate with the North Vietnamese through indirect and limited attempts since the nature of their relationship at that moment. While Soviet and Chinese assistance in moving Hanoi toward a compromise that would permit the United States to disengage without losing face remained an important part of the American strategy, it no longer had the central role hoped for in 1969.¹⁶⁸

After analyzing the situation, Kissinger's article basically became the base of the administration policy in Vietnam, as Kissinger embarked on a four-year path for a negotiated settlement. He started to believe that a way to reach peace was through Moscow. Again, it is possible to recognize a staple in Kissinger's theory: linkage. American policies toward the Soviet Union on all issues, like trade, arms control, Vietnam, were all linked.¹⁶⁹ The strategy of linkage initially did not work as planned, and the SALT talks went on a separate path, even if Vietnam was always in the background.

166 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 266

167 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 Company pp. 266-68;

168 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 257

169 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 306

While Kissinger was planning the right actions to take towards China and Soviet Union, Nixon had to decide how to proceed in Vietnam. The first action taken by his administration on the territory was to bomb communist headquarters in Cambodia in March 1969, that up to that moment was never bombed and had remained a neutral country so far. The decision to involve Cambodia, and as a consequence to spread the war to a neighboring country was due to the fact that North Vietnam had military bases along the border, and the fact that Cambodia was outside the conflict, allowed North Vietnam to have protected military arsenal and freedom of maneuver. Those bases were a threat to the American troops and to South Vietnam and bombing them was considered one of the few options to weaken the North, and push it towards a compromise.

The secret bombing continued for a year but were not successful and so Nixon ordered a full invasion of the country. While the invasion continued, in June 1969 Nixon and Nguyen Van Thieu, leader of South Vietnam, met to discuss the steps to take, agreeing to slowly withdraw American military from the territory. It then turned out that the withdrawal was taking place very slowly that it took three additional years of American support, which caused several protests in the US.¹⁷⁰ Kissinger did not support this policy. For him diplomacy and military presence were connected, and “It was unrealistic to have demanded a mutual withdrawal at the negotiating table while making unilateral withdrawals on the battlefield“.¹⁷¹ If the Americans were already withdrawing, but at the same time to push for a bilateral withdrawal, it was diminishing their bargaining power at the negotiation table.

One of Kissinger’s goals and challenges was not only to negotiate American withdrawal from Vietnam without compromising the credibility of the country, but also consider the post- Vietnam scenario and challenges, and what role could the United States have in intervention in foreign countries. In the post-Vietnam war scenario, certainly some role had to played by the triangular relationship between United States, China and the Soviet Union. The Vietnamization of the conflict, namely training the South Vietnam forces and leave the fight against communism to them, became part of a larger doctrine in foreign policy called the Nixon doctrine.¹⁷² In fact, Nixon stated that the US would no longer intervene in regional conflicts by sending its troops, rather would have close allies in the regions to fulfill the role of controlling the spread

170 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 442

171 Kissinger, Henry A. *Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*. Stati Uniti, Council on Foreign Relations, 1957 pag 50

172 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 452

of communism, and the US would intervene only in the case in which the Soviet Union or China attacked an allied country. On the one hand, this new strategy was needed because the United States could no longer afford to intervene as it did in Vietnam. On the other hand, it was a useful framework for the ongoing withdrawal. In this way it seemed part of a larger doctrine, and not a failure and error of miscalculation of the country's possibilities.¹⁷³

While Nixon and Kissinger met the North Vietnamese delegates in Paris for secret peace talks, Kissinger was also working on several projects: China and Moscow, and now also the negotiations with Vietnam. At the beginning of 1970 the second round of talks took place. This time, Hanoi sent Le Duc Thu, a top member of its politburo.¹⁷⁴ But the negotiations did not bring any result. In fact, the North Vietnamese were stubborn in their positions, demanding a unilateral withdrawal for American troops, instead of mutual withdrawal at the same time, as Kissinger advocated.

At the end of April, the round of negotiations broke off with nothing achieved. In the following months Nixon had to face quite a few challenges and decisions. In fact, Cambodia was undergoing protest and a coup, and the Americans were asked to intervene. With negotiations stalling, mounting tensions in Cambodia, and the withdrawal plan, the Nixon administration was torn by two sides. On the one hand, there was the decision to continue the withdrawal and use diplomacy to find a solution to the situation. On the other hand, there was Kissinger, who thought that military and diplomatic effort had to go hand in hand, and without the former the latter would not be credible nor achieve any major result. The new government of Cambodia was fighting North Vietnam communist, and the US had three choices: to wait and see, attack the communist bases in Cambodia with South Vietnamese troops supported by US air strikes, or sending American troops as well. Kissinger opted for the second one initially, but later, as Nixon was pondering the latter, he also became convinced that the use of American troops would make the most sense. All these decisions, as many others on all issues, were secret, or at least only few people close to Kissinger and Nixon were aware of them.¹⁷⁵

On May 1, 1969, South Vietnamese and American troops started the invasion of Cambodia, with the official aim of demolishing the communist bases used by North Vietnam. The decision

173 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 273

174 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 470

175 Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Stati Uniti: Little, Brown and Company. 1979 pag 306

was very controversial and inconsistent with, if not openly opposite to the claims that Nixon had always made to end the American involvement in Vietnam. In fact, instead of a withdrawal or a renewed attempt at the negotiation table, the Nixon's administration was enlarging the war to a neighboring country, sparking domestic protest and criticisms.

This decision was fully supported by Kissinger, which it could seem quite a contradiction according to the principle of credibility and the promises that Nixon had made to the electorate in the electoral campaigns about the withdrawal from the conflict. However, to keep American promises credible on both sides, at the domestic level and at the international level, the Cambodian bombing decision was kept secret. Secrecy is one of the pillars of Kissinger's actions during Nixon's first term. In this way, they were free to act, without having to deal with the domestic discontent and the opposition in Congress. Kissinger always focused on making American reputation credible and give to other countries, both allies and enemies, a reputation of a country that keeps its promises. At the same time Kissinger has always been obsessed with the image at the domestic level too, and many decisions and actions were taken secretly not to spark concerns and criticism in the public. Their strategy aimed at destroy North Vietnam bases in the way in which the country would be weakened. The American casualties were increasing and the only way to stop the enemy was to attack its bases. They hoped that with a weak North Vietnam, the two countries could sit at the negotiations table and lower North Vietnam conditions to achieve an agreement.

However, the Cambodian invasion was a disastrous chapter of the Vietnam conflict. Even if Nixon and Kissinger tried to portray it as a successful military achievement, it was not. North Vietnam achieved a great victory in Cambodia and the US had to abandon the hope to exercise any influence in Southeast Asia in the future after this failure. The military interventions continued during the years, and the same did the negotiations. However, the Nixon's administration was slowly withdrawing part of the troops, without stopping the military operations.

The general situation remained unchanged until October 1972, when North Vietnam decided to reach an agreement. It was only possible to achieve an agreement when after more than ten years of conflict and four of negotiations, North Vietnam came to accept what had been proposed by the US and always refused: the existence of Saigon's government.¹⁷⁶ From the very

¹⁷⁶ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti Random House Value Publishing, 1987. pag 53

beginning in the negotiation process, the North Vietnamese stuck to their initial position: there could be an agreement only if the US agreed to overthrow the Saigon government in the process of withdrawing forces. In October 1972, after Nixon was reelected to his second mandate, they decided to abandon their previous political requests and accept the American proposal for a military settlement only, that was offered at the very beginning of the negotiations. These Paris Accords together with cease-fire, assistance to Saigon, economic incentives for Hanoi seemed perfectly acceptable for South Vietnam's future.¹⁷⁷

According to Kissinger, what made the North Vietnamese change their minds about the agreement was an offensive that they carried out against South Vietnam, when no American forces were left on ground, just naval base and air power. Even if the defense was left to the South Vietnamese, they were able to win, and the North Vietnamese suffered a strong defeat in that occasion. This defeat, and the fact that Nixon was reelected and was going to continue with the same requests at the negotiations table, convinced them to find a compromise and accept the conditions that the American had requested previously.

The proposal that the US had suggested at the beginning was the essence of the final settlement. It was a project that no one thought to be feasible, but the delegation was able to achieve even better results than expected. Hanoi finally gave up on the overthrowal of Saigon's government, so the latter could remain in place. If the government had to change, it was due to the results of the will of the people and not because Hanoi external pressures. But the existing government would stay in office and would be a principal party to the enforcement of the agreement. That was the key concession.¹⁷⁸

In October of 1972 was the first time that the Americans had an advantage. Before then, Hanoi had predicted that the domestic factor, and the frequent protests would pressure the country to get out of the war and was correct on this aspect. For a long time, North Vietnam had conducted the negotiations with its demands and stalls and the Americans with the increasing withdrawals had lost some bargaining power.¹⁷⁹ Then the United States showed more determination than

¹⁷⁷Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 .pag 111

¹⁷⁸Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 .pag 118

¹⁷⁹Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019. pag 118

they had expected. North Vietnam suddenly panicked about what would happen if Nixon was reelected.¹⁸⁰ So at the beginning of September, they started to agree to end the war on a quick schedule. The final agreement, after the October 1972 concessions was achieved in January 1973.

The terms of the agreement more specifically were first a cease fire. In addition to that there was a prohibition of infiltration, and the possibility only to replace South Vietnam equipment in case of destroyed or damaged weapons. The compliance of the agreement would be supervised by a UN inspection system.¹⁸¹ In addition, there were some economic elements of aid to North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, to control the execution of the agreement. The Americans hoped that these incentives would switch the country's focus to reconstruction of the economy instead of breaking the agreement, together with the interests of China and Soviet Union to constrain North Vietnam.¹⁸²

This agreement, however, was strongly breached by North Vietnam, who after a while continued the attacks on the South, and even if on paper peace was achieved, the tensions continued until the North was able to win the South.

In the end of the Vietnam war resulted in a humiliating failure for the United States' foreign policy. Communist and Third World supporters celebrated this turning point, and a few months the Northern Viet Communist army conquered the whole country. Vietnam was soon declared a Socialist republic under the leadership of the Communist party. Their form of socialism was distinctly Soviet in its fashion and progress aims. The economy was directed through centralized planning, private ownership was cancelled, and agriculture was collectivized. Also, trade and markets were put under the control of the party. Two million Vietnamese fled abroad after the first reeducation camps started their brainwashing programs, and the conditions across the border in Cambodia were even worse. A fanatical group of Communists inspired by the more extreme forms of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution took power after the Us supported regime collapsed. ¹⁸³

180 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 pag 118

181 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987 pag 53

182 Lord, Winston. *Kissinger on Kissinger: reflections on diplomacy grand strategy and leadership*. Stati Uniti, All Points Books, 2019 Pag 120

183 Westad, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: A World History*. Regno Unito, Penguin Books, 2017

It is possible to say that the conflict in Vietnam was one of Nixon's priorities since the very beginning of his Presidency and has played a crucial role in American foreign and domestic policy. The Vietnam War has required American efforts for years and has played a major role both at domestic and international level. It is an issue at the core of foreign policy for three administrations, if considering also Nixon's and has shaped domestic consensus for the political sphere or, as it happened it sparked strong criticism and protests among American citizens. However, it is even more crucial when Kissinger and Nixon led an opening towards two communist countries: Soviet Union and China, and it has impacted the dialogue between the superpowers. In the very beginning, Nixon's ideas on the Vietnam War was included in the strategy of triangular diplomacy. Kissinger and Nixon thought that with the mediation of the Soviet Union it was possible. Linkage was applied to push the Soviets into pressuring North Vietnam to achieve an agreement, but this approach failed. The following effort, the was based on the same concept of the involvement of Soviet Union, was done with China. The Chinese did make an effort with North Vietnam in November 1971, trying to pressure North Vietnam to accept a compromise, but the effort did not achieved the hoped outcome. ¹⁸⁴

184 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 255

3.2 The worsening of US-USSR relationships in the 1970s

Although the United States and the Soviet Union had found a common ground in 1972, and the SALT I talks seemed to have developed a promising foundation for the development of their relationship, the dialogue between the two countries started to decline, not able to live up to its promises. There are several factors that contribute to the worsening of their relationship and the failure of détente cannot be attributed to one element only. Certainly, the two countries were increasingly brought apart by their different interpretation of détente and a lack of a code of conduct, and by their domestic issues, like Watergate, that affected the bilateral relations as well. Even though the countries continued their confrontation in third world countries, there were factors that affected the process that were outside of their direct control, as the global economic crises of 1973, that undermined the efforts of cooperation.

The two countries never stopped confrontation on third countries' territory, through the use of proxy wars, and the end of the Vietnam War did not stop this competition. In fact, after the Vietnam War the two superpowers found other scenarios in which to compete. This is the case of the Middle East, or the Third World countries like Angola. It is important to remember that the process of détente mainly focused on Europe, and it was not an omni-comprehensive attempt to reach peace and smooth out tensions permanently.

Even though there was always an ongoing dialogue, whether productive or stalling, the United States and Soviet Union never stopped their more or less indirect fight, both militarily and ideologically, through the use of several conflicts that involved third countries. This can be considered a constant variable in the relationship between the two. And it was not only in Vietnam. The conflicts in which the two superpowers confronted, backing the third countries that could be considered allied, were several, and will only be mentioned in this section, since it is outside the scope of this research. However, it is important to keep in mind that the goal behind the rapprochement between the two, was never the achievement of full peace, but the regulation of the use of nuclear weapons, in order to avoid a direct nuclear confrontation, that would be mutually destructive, and to give the possibility both to Brezhnev and to Nixon to focus on other aspects and not on the opponent only.

Both countries acknowledged the achieved nuclear parity but did not do anything to transform it into a common political standard to drive their actions in the rest of the world.¹⁸⁵ Instead, they kept confronting each other to achieve a geopolitical superiority and influence over the territories that they were not going to achieve.

One of the main causes of the decline of detente was, first of all, the failure of the superpowers to reach a standard code of detente. Because détente was based on a moralistic, political language, it did not readily provide a prescription for superpower behavior. As various events and policies began to militate against the national interest, each side attacked the other for violating its ill-defined code of conduct. These attacks produced anger, suspicion, and fear, causing a reaction against détente.

Ironically, in this failure to reach a standard code of détente lay both the strength of this process and its weakness: ambiguity leaves a door open to cooperation but still cannot help leaders in determining cooperation in one way or the other and does not make the others' behavior rational and predictable.¹⁸⁶

Détente, however, lacked a common long-term perspective. They rather focused on short term goals and never envisaged a permanent solution to their tensions. This, together with several other aspects, among which Nixon's fall, the Congress blocking and undermining Kissinger's credibility and freedom of maneuver in the negotiations, and the incapability of maintaining promises that the administration had previously made, certainly affected the effectiveness of the USA-USSR negotiations.

A relevant role was also played by the domestic actors. The Congress was increasingly posing limits on the process of détente, and one example is the Jackson-Vanik amendment. It was not perceived well by the Kremlin and shed light on the limits that Kissinger had in negotiations. Jackson's pressures were generating a crisis with Moscow at the precise moment when the American presidency was facing its period of greatest weakness since the Civil War, and the American Congress was systematically reducing the military budget.¹⁸⁷ The biggest impact of

185 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1074

186 Stevenson, Richard W. *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1953–1984*. Stati Uniti, University of Illinois Press, 1985

187 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. Stati Uniti, Diane Publishing Company, 1999 pag 271

the Jackson assault was to make it that much more difficult for the United States to come to grips with the changed military environment into which the new technology had projected it.¹⁸⁸

Moreover, Nixon built during the years a sort of understanding with Brezhnev, and the Watergate scandal impacted their relationship too as the former no longer had so much freedom of power. When President Nixon resigned, the process of détente was already stalling, and rapprochement was undergoing a series of challenges at the domestic level due to the renewed strength of Congress and the rising criticisms on détente and opposition to the processes already started in the first Nixon's term in foreign policy. However, it was not over. The two countries were struggling to find agreements, but the summits kept taking place, the last one a month before Nixon's resignation.

However, with the advent of the new administration, things started to change a bit. Gerald Ford did not have the same relationship with Brezhnev that Nixon had achieved during the years, and the mistrust continued due to the impediments caused by Congress. President Ford inherited the policy of détente, and confirmed it, as he also inherited Kissinger, who continued to shape and carry out foreign policy. In fact, Ford was an experienced politician and congressman, but he was not an expert on international affairs as Nixon was.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, negotiations on SALT II continued, and after Kissinger's visit to Moscow at the beginning of 1974, it was announced that Ford would meet with Brezhnev in November in Vladivostok. The talks went on identifying the final terms acceptable to the Soviet leaders. Brezhnev apparently indicated receptivity to either of two approaches: one would provide equal aggregates of strategic launchers and equal levels of launchers for missiles with MIRVs; the other would provide a differential that gave the Soviet Union a higher aggregate level and the United States a higher level of MIRVs.¹⁹⁰ If agreement were reached on equal levels, Brezhnev would consider either an overall aggregate of 2,400 and the American-proposed level of MIRVs of 1,320, or the American-proposed aggregate of 2,200 and a lower level of 1,200 MIRVs. The Soviet Union would not agree to reduce the number of its heavy ICBM launchers but they did,

188 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. Stati Uniti, Diane Publishing Company, 1999 pag 271

¹⁸⁹ See Ford, Gerald R. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. Stati Uniti, Harper & Row, 1979; Brinkley, Douglas. *Gerald R. Ford*. Stati Uniti, Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

¹⁹⁰ Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 445

however would defer consideration of American forward-based nuclear systems and the British and French nuclear forces.¹⁹¹

The Vladivostok summit took place in November 23 and 24. The discussions of SALT dominated the meeting and were essentially concluded on the first day. Agreement was reached on a framework for a ten- year agreement, including accord on an equal aggregate level (2,400 launchers and heavy bombers) and an equal sublimit for launchers of missiles with MIRVs (1,320). Ford had opted for the equal levels principally because he believed this solution would find greatest public support. ¹⁹²The Vladivostok agreement, however, was only the blueprint for a future treaty.

Even if the negotiations were quite successful, there were differences and criticisms on SALT within the administration and Congress, and the topic was very politically heated. A new obstacle to the dialogue, however, arrived, and the next round of talks were postponed: the indirect Soviet - American confrontation in Angola.¹⁹³ In this way, all the enthusiasm generated by the achievement of the Vladivostok Accords, was soon replaced by the collapse of bilateral trade arrangements negotiated at the highest point of détente and signed in October 1972. ¹⁹⁴According to Brezhnev the failure of the Nixon and Ford administrations to deliver what they had promised was a serious blow to détente. ¹⁹⁵

At the beginning of the Ford administration American- Soviet relations were constituted mainly of ups and downs, it was not a smooth process nor a constant one. Initially the Vladivostok summit and the associated SALT development was seen very positively by both sides. Moreover, the CSCE multilateral summit was achieved in Helsinki in 1975 which could seem a great success related to the bilateral successes that the two countries achieved, together with the improved relationship of the first years of dialogue. However, there were several obstacles and difficulties. A major issue, as previously mentioned, was the insistence and opposition of

191 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 445

192 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 447

193 Ford, Gerald R. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. Stati Uniti, Harper & Row, 1979.p. 345

194 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 452

195 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 466

Congress, which wanted to link bilateral trade normalization and internal Soviet political reform. This aspect was never put on the table before, and maybe it is the reason why during the Nixon's administration the dialogue worked in a way. At the same time, this was not only a problem just for the Soviet Union, but also for Kissinger, both under Nixon in the last period and under Ford, because it left him with little power of maneuver and no possibility of making nor maintaining promises. This aspect of Congressional challenge made the Soviet a bit less enthusiastic in further developing détente with the Americans.¹⁹⁶

At the same time there were some issues emerging with SALT in the Vladivostok accord. It was mainly the difficulty in finding an agreement on strategic programs and combining the different perspectives.¹⁹⁷ In order to make the dialogue work, Kissinger and Ford needed secrecy, which was increasingly contested as a method of diplomacy, but was at the same time the only way to avoid the bureaucratic limits of those parts of the American institutions that did not agree on the process itself.

While dialogue was in this situation, the competition and confrontation between the two in the rest of the world kept going and was increasingly breaking the relationship, without the dialogue on weapons to counterbalance it. The Soviets' complaints continued to focus primarily on two key areas: the Middle East, and China and East Asia.¹⁹⁸

The turning point in American- Soviet relations was 1976. There had certainly been a gap between the two countries and especially in the way they interpreted the code of conduct that they signed in 1972, the basic principles. The impact of the international developments around the world was strong and it had a profound effect on the way they directed their actions.

From the American viewpoint, particular issues were Soviet behavior in third countries and concern over a possible gain for communism in Southwestern Europe. From the Soviet standpoint, they were the American policy of excluding the Soviet Union from the Middle East, the

196 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. Stati Uniti, Diane Publishing Company, 1999 pag 273

197 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 466

198 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 466

attempt to use détente to intervene in Soviet domestic affairs, and the collapse of American economic normalization and facilitation of trade between the two countries.¹⁹⁹

On the Soviet side, even though there were doubts and reassessments, the process of détente was still pursued. On the American side though, there were rising doubts and the issue of peaceful coexistence was left after the elections taking place in that year. However, independently from the elections, there was a mounting discontent with President Ford and also with Kissinger, who was increasingly in contrast with the Congress.

Kissinger flew to Moscow for negotiations on SALT, which ran from January 20 to 23, 1976.²⁰⁰ Both sides wanted to find an agreement on SALT and, if possible, resume the summits that stopped in 1975, maybe with a summit in Washington, which never happened. The exchanges in January were the last ones for Kissinger's era. When he returned to Moscow, he was optimistic, telling the President that there were "considerable processes" towards SALT. Again, former President Ford recounts: "Agreement, it seemed, was very near. But when Henry returned to Washington, there were growing reservations."²⁰¹

Another cause of failure of détente was the lack of attempts to collaborate. The arms limitations talks were never detached from the political aspects of it. While the first talks showed some promise in collaboration to reach military security requirements, the SALT II shows exactly this lack.

When Kissinger returned from Moscow in January, he had expected to make one more trip to Moscow in early March to complete the negotiation. Now that prospect had disappeared, and the negotiation faded.²⁰² There were few more attempts, but the options proposed by the Kissinger and Ford through the Dobrynin back channel were rejected, and the Americans did not have much space of maneuver to propose something different. A new attempt was made by the

199Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 539

200 Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. Stati Uniti, Diane Publishing Company, 1999 pag 2006

201Ford, Gerald R. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. Stati Uniti Harper & Row, 1979, pp. 357-58.

202Ford, Gerald R. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. Stati Uniti, Harper & Row, 1979, p.437

Soviets, who were eager to resolve the negotiations, but the upcoming elections left everything in a stall, and then to permanent stop.

There are two main considerations that are crucial to understand SALT II. First, the treaty was never ratified by the Congress, which proves the controversial debate around the dialogue between the United States and Soviet Union. At the domestic level, the whole process of détente was questioned since Nixon's second term, and the tensions on the issue did not change during Ford's administration nor Carter's. The second crucial element is that SALT II shows the limits and the paradoxical nature of détente. The behind the scenes picture is one characterized by mutual suspicion and mutual misunderstanding. In fact, during the bargaining process, the two governments struggled a great deal on the goals and means of the agreement. Basically, two different conceptions of world peace and global emerged. After years of limited dialogue and attempts to reach a peaceful coexistence, the two world leaders started again to clash for world dominance.

3.3 The demise of détente and Nixon administration

The process of détente declined during the 1970s and failed permanently in 1979 with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. At least this is what American population thought of the policy. The Soviet Union and détente itself have been blamed for a series of critical developments. Both superpowers considered the other responsible for the failure of détente, and the mutual hostility and suspicion did not help find an objective consideration. The American position was that the Soviets were more focused on competing than on finding a common position, and the Soviet Union believed that the Americans detachment from détente did not depend on Soviet actions.²⁰³

One of the main causes of the failure of détente, however, was the different interpretation they had of the process as a whole. the American point of view, as described by Kissinger was “managing the emergence of Soviet power” into world politics in an age of nuclear parity.²⁰⁴ While the Soviet leaders saw it was of managing the transition of the United States from its former superiority to a more modest role in world politics in an age of nuclear parity.²⁰⁵

It is important to consider the difference in ideology. The Soviet ideology has at its base the gradual predominance of communism over capitalism and saw détente as a stable and secure way to guarantee change without the direct confrontation between the two countries and the avoidance of the use of a nuclear arsenal. When Nixon and Kissinger developed this strategy, the aim was to avoid the spread of communism and limit the risk of a nuclear confrontation. At the same time, they hoped that the gradual inclusion of the Soviet Union in the international scenario would soften their ideological drive. The common American and Soviet recognition of the need to avert war was of fundamental significance.²⁰⁶

203 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1069

204 Détente with the Soviet Union: The Reality of Competition and the Imperative of Cooperation, Statement by Secretary Kissinger, September 19, *State Bulletin*, vol. 71 (October 14, 1974)

205 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1069

206 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1069

There is an additional cause in the demise of détente, which is related to the domestic factor. Both the United States and the Soviet Union failed to understand the connection between international politics and the domestic ones. The Soviet Union failed in understanding the political dynamics and process that characterized the United States, and Kissinger, who led the dialogue for the American side overestimated the degree of authority and autonomy that he and the President had. The Soviets trusted the words that the American promised, without considering the importance of Congress nor the internal processes of the country's institutions. Moreover, while Nixon, Kissinger, and Ford were careful to relate linkages to foreign policy issues, Congress attempted to make its own linkages with Soviet internal affairs.²⁰⁷

Moreover, the Carter administration that followed Ford, strongly criticized détente, and decided to follow another path, prioritizing the protection of human rights. President Carter had little understanding of the Soviet political leadership or of Soviet political processes. President Carter was especially insensitive to the necessary limits on détente as a medium for influencing the internal political affairs of the Soviet Union.²⁰⁸

The previous administrations, especially Nixon-Kissinger, understood that the active ongoing competition between the two was not stopping any time soon. But tried to picture détente as a new structure of peace, and this create expectations in the public, that resulted in blaming the Soviet Union when these expectations were not met. Nixon's and Kissinger overestimated their ability to manipulate and manage both international and national affairs.

Combining all these elements, the result is that the dialogue, that initially showed some potential promises, stalled during the 1970s, until it faded completely.

The previous section analyzed the decline in the dialogue between the Soviet Union and the United State. The process of détente was at its twilight. The following section will focus on the domestic aspects and its consequences. Nixon's presidency was at its end. Watergate will be remembered as the scandal that ended Nixon's career. In this context, it is important to overview the impact of the events, to understand the consequences it had on foreign policy, in particular

207 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1078

208 Garthoff, Raymond L. *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. Stati Uniti, Brookings Institution, 1985 pag 1079

towards China and the Soviet Union, and on Kissinger's career. In particular, the following pages give prominence to the effect of Watergate on the two processes that are covered in chapter two, and that are considered the pillars and major successes of Nixon's first term: dialogue towards the two major communist countries, and how these processes, so successful in the beginning, when influenced by American domestic policies, will fade.

In April 1973 a bomb was about to explode on the administration. The scandal of Watergate was so broad that it was impossible not to involve high profile figures in the administration. The issue itself started in June 1972 and lasted until August 1974.²⁰⁹ Watergate began as an attempt to bug the Democratic Party's headquarters, but has developed into cover-up and additional illegal activities, which involved Nixon and his top aides.²¹⁰

The event that brought the scandal to light took place on June 17, 1972, when the police arrested five burglars in the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in Washington DC. The name Watergate quickly became the term that referred to all the events stood for the events surrounding the break-in, and to all the investigations that exposed cover-up, wiretapping and other related activities.²¹¹

On April 30, 1973, Nixon addressed the nation in a speech that defined the issues as "what has come to be known as the Watergate affair. These include charges of illegal activity during and preceding the 1972 presidential election and charges that responsible officials participated in efforts to cover up that illegal activity."²¹² For this occasion the resignation of Harry Robbins Haldeman and John Ehrlichman were announced. They were the first top staff change, but it would not be the last, as many figures of the Nixon's administration will be impacted by the Watergate scandal. With the speech, and a series of changes in the administration personnel, the President thought that he could lead a sort of reformed administration and the issues would fade on their own.

The scandal was the most discussed issue in the papers for months, and strongly impacted all aspects of the American administration and reputation both at the domestic and international

209 Olson, Keith W. *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal that Shook America*. Stati Uniti, University Press of Kansas, 2003. Introduction

210 Isaacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. Regno Unito, Simon & Schuster, 2013 pag 925

211 Olson, Keith W. *Watergate: The Presidential Scandal that Shook America*. Stati Uniti, University Press of Kansas, 2003. Introduction

212 Nixon's April 30 statement announcing the resignations of Haldeman and Ehrlichman can be found in Stanley Kutler (ed.), *Watergate: The Fall of Richard Nixon*. St. James, Stati Uniti, Brandywine Press, 1996

level. In fact, as Kissinger would worry, impacted strongly also foreign policy, undermining the credibility of the American words with allied countries and its credibility against enemies.

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When on September 22, 1973, Kissinger became Secretary of State, things started to change. He now had more power and had to deal with many more issues, without the privilege to choose those he wanted to deal with. Nixon was weak as Watergate investigations went on and it was difficult to exclude the President direct involvement in the scandal. This situation made Nixon willing to have a strong Secretary of State, contrarily to what he had previously avoided. Watergate hit him, and the only solution to keep the foreign policy going was to appoint Henry when Rogers resigned that summer. His appointment is another consequence of the scandal. Nixon, contrary to what had believed through the first term, needed strong people to continue foreign policy, people that he could trust, and he could not lose Kissinger. Without the scandal, Kissinger would not have been made to that role.

The major impact on foreign policy and on Kissinger's operations in that period was Watergate. With Nixon busy on the effects of the scandal, Kissinger was able to carry out foreign policy in a more independent way, but at the same time he had different constraint at the domestic level. This, helped him to detach his figure from the failures of Nixon's administration and Watergate, in fact, Kissinger is the only important figure in the Nixon's administration who remained in office after Watergate, and after the President's resignation he remained at the White House to work for President Ford. Kissinger interventions in foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, allowed his reputation to grow, while Nixon's plummeted.²¹⁴ The effects of Watergate on foreign policy did not stop at the renewed reputation for Henry. Nixon's weakness opened the way for new and more open criticisms in Congress, several congressmen opposed the granting of MFN status to the Soviet Union and started to question and obstacle the process of détente between the Soviet Union and the United States. At the same time the full normalization of the Sino-American relation was impossible.²¹⁵ Carrying out foreign policy with the ghost of Watergate in the background was not making the task easy on Kissinger. Again, the domestic aspect played a crucial impact on the effectiveness of the American

²¹³ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987 Pag 349

²¹⁴ Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 333

²¹⁵ Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 333

presence in the international scenario, and the actions and strategies implemented in Nixon's first term could not be continued.

The country was so impacted by the scandal that President Nixon would be forced to resign two years after the first episode that started the investigations, having underestimated the powerful impact of such events. The only one that appeared to have survived it in the entire Nixon administration is Henry Kissinger.

Another aspect that was strongly impacted by Watergate and by the Congress actions is South Vietnam. According to Kissinger, the decisions to cut aids to Saigon had a severe impact on the country, that could not resist a North Vietnamese attack. In 1973–74 the Nixon administration's ability to live up to the agreement and promises to Saigon was severely affected by Watergate and the growing Congressional resistance to the administration's Vietnam policy.²¹⁶ South Vietnam would have failed anyway, North Vietnam was supported by Beijing military help, which peaked in 1973, and South Vietnam was in strong disadvantage. By 1974 Beijing started to cut its aid to Hanoi and shift towards Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as a Chinese ally.²¹⁷

In November 1973 Kissinger visited China again, but due to Nixon's bothersome situation, he could not promise anything, and the normalization of the relationship between Beijing and Washington that Nixon promised in his second term it was difficult to keep. In fact, Kissinger came back from the visit without any concrete achievement. China was concerned for the relationship that US was developing with the USSR, the normalization towards China stopped and he could not make any guarantees on the issue of Taiwan, which was a Chinese priority.

At the same time within Congress there were also quite some criticisms on the process of détente. One of the major critics was Democratic Senator Henry Jackson. His main criticisms were two: first of all, the giving away of American nuclear superiority. In fact, he introduced the amendment to the SALT I treaty that arms control agreements could not leave the USSR in a position of superiority. This would complicate SALT II negotiations. Secondly, he was worried about emigration from the USSR and linked it to Soviet-American trade under the principle of most favored nation. Adding the Jackson-Vanik amendment on trade, the senator constrained

216 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 334

217 Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004. pag 334

economic relations to the limitation of emigration from the Soviet Union. The Soviets were disappointed for the direction on which this was going. Watergate had not created the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, but it clearly provided a favorable overall context for a rising Congressional challenge to the administration's détente policy. When Kissinger became Secretary of State in September 1973 the Soviet MFN status remained unresolved.²¹⁸

Kissinger was frustrated by the stalling situation with the Soviet Union. "What I want to give the Russians is something to start the SALT process working smoothly. I do not want to give them a final position and tell them to take it or leave it. SALT can't go down the drain."²¹⁹ While resigned to the fact that no major Soviet- American agreements would be concluded in 1974, Kissinger needed something. He had to have "an analysis which convinces Brezhnev there is something to be gained from the small ones," Kissinger concluded.²²⁰

Nixon proceeded with the third summit meeting in Moscow in June, but his ability to pursue new initiatives or even to persevere with established policies was greatly weakened. This weakness proved especially damaging to SALT. Nixon's final visit to Moscow in late June and early July 1974 took place at the apex of the Watergate scandal. A month after this last trip to Moscow, the Nixon's administration will come to an end, succumbed under the events of the investigations.

August 9, 1974, the President addressed the nation in a live television and radio broadcast announcing his resignation. He did not confess but proceeded to talk about the successes in foreign policy achieved during his presidency.²²¹ At the domestic level, when Nixon resigned, the American people stood uncommonly united on the President resignation. The country demanded the President to leave office because he had obstructed justice, abused of his powers, and hidden information to the American public.

At the international level, in particular on the aspects covered by this elaborate, it is possible to say that Kissinger left the situation in a stall. The relationship with China was constrained by the domestic positions of Congress, and the SALT II was not going anywhere. The process of détente seen in the previous sections had failed, and the goals achieved by Nixon's first term

²¹⁸ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987 pag 2670

²¹⁹ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987 pp 991–994

²²⁰ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. Stati Uniti, Random House Value Publishing, 1987 pp 991–994

²²¹ Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. Regno Unito, Oxford University Press, 2004 pag 355

were no longer seen as a priority. However, not the entire administration was declining with him.

While the Nixon White House was sinking, Kissinger was at the peak of his career. In fact, even though the Watergate strongly impacted the country as a whole, it did not mean the end of Kissinger's career, as he will continue to be Secretary of State under the Ford administration, that followed Nixon's.

The contradictions of the bilateral dialogue emerge at the end of the 1970s, culminating with the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

However important this confrontation may be, the real reasons why the process failed to maintain its stability is not in the competition that was taking place in third countries, as that always was like that, even in 1972 which is considered the most successful year for the nuclear weapons limitation talks. The factors that contributed to the demise of détente are several, and they are connected both to the international scenario and to the domestic American situation. In fact, the impact of Watergate and the end of Nixon's administration strongly affected the dialogue with the Soviet Union, but especially changed the balance at the domestic and institutional level.

If most of foreign policy actions in Nixon's first terms entailed an element of secrecy, after Watergate the Congress was empowered to challenge President's actions and positions, and this strongly limited Kissinger in carrying out his policies towards the Soviet Union. In fact, most of the obstacles in dialogue, that enraged Brezhnev, were connected to Congress decisions, amendments, and limits posed by congressmen that opposed and strongly criticized the process of détente itself.

Even though none of these events is the primary cause of defeat of détente, all these aspects are linked together. Kissinger lost his power of secrecy, as everything was increasingly monitored after the scandals, and therefore the process of détente falls, as one of his main actors: Nixon. The process of détente had many flaws and carried many limitations, but it was certainly a crucial aspect to analyze in Nixon-Kissinger's permanence at the White House. Nixon and Kissinger shaped part of American history in the few years in office. Throughout these events Kissinger, in particular, emerged as a relevant and unique, yet controversial figure. Even after

he left office in 1977, he remained one of the main experts in foreign policy, and continued to write, to develop, and to elaborate his thoughts on international matters until nowadays.

Conclusion

In the Cold War scenario the American foreign policy underwent a crucial shift, that led to the opening of dialogue with the Soviet Union. For Kissinger the concept of stability was pivotal. The goal is to create a stable system, in which some actors, like the US and USSR, must accept the legitimacy of that system and respect the rules. Kissinger's geopolitics is based equally on equilibrium and acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the system. It is through this dual characteristic of the international scenario that showed the conservatism of Kissinger's vision of world politics. Nixon's administration foreign policy, and consequently the actions taken, are based on these concepts elaborate by Kissinger. Thus, his contribution is crucial for the years 1969-1974 and continued in Ford's administration until 1977. His positions are the development of his theories as a scholar on international relations and foreign policy.

As a consequence, in the framework of the Cold War a new approach emerged: *détente*. *Détente* can be understood as both an era and a strategy. In the early 1970s, the policy of reducing military tension through negotiations and agreements with countries based on dramatically different ideological foundations reached its peak. *Détente* was a conservative policy aimed at stabilizing a situation threatening the proper functioning of American foreign policy, especially considering the Vietnam War and the escalation in a nuclear arms race.

The first goal of *détente* is to avoid war, and a legitimate bipolar order could allow posing limits on rearmament. At the same time, this process was useful to both superpowers on other goals: to avoid that third countries, or those under the sphere of influence of one of the two, tried to escape their direct control. *Détente* was a deterrent to centrifugal tendencies and a way to keep control of the system. To summarize, *détente* was necessary to guarantee order and stability, which had always been at the center of Kissinger's focus both as a scholar and a political figure. Kissinger had also a crucial role in another key policy: opening to China. The process of rapprochement with China is considered one of the major successes of Nixon's foreign policy. The decision to improve the relationship with the People's Republic of China is unprecedented and meant the end to a more than twenty years of hostility and isolation between the two countries. The tense relationship with the Soviet Union allowed the United States to step in, and promote themselves as the solution to the Soviet security threat. This Chinese card, played to leverage the Soviet Union into continuing the SALT talks, was a powerful strategy used by Kissinger and Nixon, to reach their goal. Initially, it is possible to say that the concept of linkage, which is a pillar of Kissinger's strategy, worked well, giving the Americans some leverage on both the Soviets and the Chinese.

At the same time, Kissinger was working on SALT I and II, which have been praised as a milestone of peaceful coexistence between Washington and Moscow. From this perspective, it represented the essence of bilateral détente. It is thus possible to say that the changes in foreign policy in Nixon's first mandate, were considered quite successful. However, they had limits and contradictions as the Vietnam war. The conflict in Vietnam was one of Nixon's priorities since the very beginning of his Presidency and has played a crucial role in American foreign and domestic policy. The Vietnam War has required American efforts for years and has played a major role both at domestic and international level. It is an issue at the core of foreign policy for three administrations, if considering also Nixon's and has shaped domestic consensus for the political sphere or, as it happened it sparked strong criticism and protests among American citizens. And in the end, was considered both a contradiction and a failure. The conflict was a confrontation between North Vietnam, a communist country supported by Soviet Union and China, and the South, supported by the US. In conclusion, confrontation continued through dialogue. The confrontation between the two never stopped, and partly was due to the fact that neither was willing to give up the fight for influence.

The lack of code of conduct based on a common interpretation was at the base of the worsening of the relationship between the two countries. there are also other factors that contributed to the demise of détente are several, and they are connected both to the international scenario and to the domestic American situation. In fact, the impact of Watergate and the end of Nixon's administration strongly affected the dialogue with the Soviet Union, but especially changed the balance at the domestic and institutional level.

In conclusion, as a whole, the policies that started with Nixon and Kissinger ended in failure, but characterized the 1960s and 1970s in a way that remained in the books and it is still important to analyze and research.

Kissinger has been and still is a relevant figure, still nowadays continues to give new perspectives and to participate in the international debate. He has shaped American foreign policy, and it is difficult to compare him to any other figure in the American political scenario. He became a crucial figure for the United States, even if controversial and contested at times, starting from

a Jewish refugee community. From being nothing, he became the symbol of the American dream, of the possibility to reach a high-profile figure from invisibility. And all this was possible for his wit, his intelligence and strong personality. Even his most driven critics admit that he is a rare figure in the political scenario. During the years he has been extremely contested, whether correctly or not it is not the aim of this elaborate to reach. But certainly, he has written a page of American foreign policy, diplomacy, and history.

Summary

When discussing American foreign policy at the end of the 1960s and 1970s, there is a crucial figure to take into consideration: Henry Kissinger. He is considered the architect in Nixon's foreign policy, and he is the only relevant person in the Nixon's administration to survive the scandal that in 1974 brought the President to resign. His theories in international relations and his views of bilateral relations shaped the foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, by opening a dialogue on the limitation of nuclear weapons, and towards China, by starting a dialogue with the country after years of isolationism and lack of diplomatic relations.

The aim of the following elaborate is to highlight the figure of Kissinger in American foreign policy, and in particular his role shaped the dialogue with Soviet Union in what is considered a relevant and debated passage in American history such as *détente*. The process is strongly tied to his architect and his views, which are the product of his life. Kissinger is a figure in American politics different from all others and his thoughts and controversialities will be at the core of these chapters.

The following pages are the result of a careful reading of Kissinger's memoirs and primary sources of the events covered in the elaborate. Among the latter, a particular role was played by FRUS documentation. On a second phase, the content of memoirs and FRUS was compared to secondary literature of the most relevant figures on the topics covered. A particular attention was paid to Mario Del Pero, Walter Isaacson and Jussi Hanhimäki's works.

The first chapter will focus on Kissinger's life, background and on his views. In order to better understand the policies that Kissinger will develop in the Nixon's and Ford's administrations, it is important to first understand his thoughts and theories on international relations, history, leadership and bilateral relations. The focus on his experiences is crucial to understand the origins of his geopolitical vision. His early years in Germany, leaving the country and becoming a young Jewish refugee in the United States, and the experience in the army have shaped the first ideas, that he later developed and researched as a scholar in Harvard. The second part of the chapter will analyze his years in the academic field, and the topics and positions that were crucial to him. These concepts, as order and stability for example, will play a crucial role in his years in office as a National Security Advisor, and later Secretary of State.

The second chapter is dedicated to two of the most important policies of Nixon's first term. The main focus will be to understand the ideas and reasons behind the process of détente, and how this process took place. Nixon's administration at the same time, was working to open a dialogue with China, in light of the strategy of triangular diplomacy. Kissinger in these two major policies played a crucial role, not only as an architect but as a mediator and diplomat. These policies are crucial in the context of the Cold War and meant a change in direction for American foreign policy. One of the major achievements of the Nixon's administration was the SALT I (strategic arms limitation talks) agreement on the use of nuclear weapons, which will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

The third chapter, instead, is dedicated to the limits of these policies, and how they ended up failing. The first limitation discussed is the Vietnam War, a scenario of confrontation for the two superpowers, which continued even during the talks. The two countries, in fact, never stop their competition for influence, and to stop their interventions in third countries was never considered in their dialogue. The Vietnam War is not the only limit of détente. There are several aspects that contributed to the worsening of the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, which are both at the international level and at the domestic one. At the domestic level, the Watergate scandal will have a crucial impact, that will spread its consequences in foreign policy too, affecting the bilateral relationship between the two countries. The last part of the third chapter is focused on the demise of détente and of Nixon's administration.

Henry Kissinger certainly played a crucial role in American foreign policy, and continued until nowadays to participate in the debates on the international scenario. It is possible to say that he shaped foreign policy during the Nixon and Ford presidencies, and he is a crucial figure. His thoughts and theories in international relations were developed during his years as a student and scholar in Harvard, but the foundation of his positions can be found in the childhood years spent in Germany from a Jewish family, and in the years as a refugee in the United States, until he joined the army and became a naturalized citizen.

These early years and experiences are fundamental to understand the core of his theories, which aim at achieving order and stability in a political scenario grounded in the Cold War. His opinions on bilateral relations and stability in the international scenario shaped his positions even when he was no longer part of the academic world, but slowly became part of the political field,

first joining the Council of Foreign Relations, and then as a National Security Advisor and Secretary of State.

The framework in which he developed his thoughts was characterized by the Cold War and a constant tension between the United States and Soviet Union. Kissinger believed that peace could not be the final goal to achieve. The two countries were achieving nuclear parity and there was a need to regulate and limit the use of nuclear armaments. This view, however, did not exclude smaller, limited confrontations in third countries, or proxy wars. This was the only way to achieve a balance that could be durable in time. It was no longer possible to create an international system in which the Soviet Union was excluded, or the two countries would have been in constant tensions. The only way to achieve a balance was to create a dialogue, and a common ground with the Soviet Union. In this way, the opponent would be legitimized into the system, and it was possible to regulate the use of nuclear weapons, that was posing an increasingly dangerous threat.

However, this dialogue alone was not the entire strategy developed by Kissinger and Nixon. In fact, in this complex scenario there was an actor that they thought it was crucial to include: China. The opening of a dialogue with China was due to many reasons. It was becoming certainly relevant in the Asian continent and it could have been a powerful tactical card to use as leverage for the Soviet-American relationship. In fact, the two communist countries were increasingly competing both because each of them believed that their way to communism was the right one, and because they were important actors in Asia.

Due to the clashes between the two in March 1969, the United States were able to convince the Chinese that a dialogue with the United States could counterbalance the Soviet security threat. Thanks to these events, a Sino-American rapprochement started. At the same time, Washington started a dialogue with Moscow that will end in the SALT (strategic arms limitation talks) agreement, signed in 1972. However promising this dialogue might have seemed, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. This process, called *détente*, did not mean the end of ideological nor military confrontation between the two, which continued to clash militarily in several conflicts, and ideologically remained unchanged.

In fact, the process does not mean the acceptance of the other's point of view nor giving up the fight for supremacy. Détente meant that the two countries were trying to agree on limiting the use of nuclear weapons, first of all to avoid a nuclear confrontation, which was mutually destructive, and secondly, to focus on domestic issues that were at the top of the two countries' priorities. On the American side, in fact, at the domestic level there were several mounting tensions due to the Vietnam war, and on the Soviet side, Brezhnev was implementing the Brezhnev doctrine and switching the focus to pursue a more global policy, less oriented on Europe, and more focused on the third world countries.

However, there are several aspects of contradiction and limitations to the process of détente. As previously mentioned, the two continued to clash, for example in the Vietnam war, which was one of the major contradictions of the dialogue between the two. The fact that détente lacked a code of conduct with a common interpretation, was at the same time a strength and a limit of this process. In fact, on the one hand it allowed the countries to engage in confrontation through third actors, but on the other, it resulted in the worsening of the relationship between the two, and eventually in the failure of détente. When considering the worsening of US-USSR relationship there are several factors to include.

One major impact is represented by the Watergate scandal and its consequences. In fact, after the outbreak of the scandal that involved the entire Nixon's administration excluding Kissinger, the Congress raised challenges and doubts on the process, which did not allow Kissinger to negotiate freely, nor to keep the promises made to the Soviet Union. This, together with the clashes in Third World countries that were increasing, and the threat of Soviet spread contributed to the end of détente. At the same time, a change in administration and the arrival of President Carter, who was much focused on human rights rather than dialogue with the Soviets, stalled the process until it officially ended with the intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. These policies, carried out by Kissinger and Nixon, and later by Ford, are the pillar of a change in pace in foreign policy during the Cold War, and a new course of action taken by the Nixon's administration.

To conclude, in the Cold War scenario the American foreign policy underwent a crucial shift, that led to the opening of dialogue with the Soviet Union. For Kissinger the concept of stability was pivotal. The goal is to create a stable system, in which some actors, like the US and USSR,

must accept the legitimacy of that system and respect the rules. Kissinger's geopolitics is based equally on equilibrium and acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the system. It is through this dual characteristic of the international scenario that showed the conservatism of Kissinger's vision of world politics.

Nixon's administration foreign policy, and consequently the actions taken, are based on these concepts elaborate by Kissinger. Thus, his contribution is crucial for the years 1969-1974 and continued in Ford's administration until 1977. His positions are the development of his theories as a scholar on international relations and foreign policy.

As a consequence, in the framework of the Cold War a new approach emerged: *détente*. *Détente* can be understood as both an era and a strategy. In the early 1970s, the policy of reducing military tension through negotiations and agreements with countries based on dramatically different ideological foundations reached its peak. *Détente* was a conservative policy aimed at stabilizing a situation threatening the proper functioning of American foreign policy, especially considering the Vietnam War and the escalation in a nuclear arms race.

The first goal of *détente* is to avoid war, and a legitimate bipolar order could allow posing limits on rearmament. At the same time, this process was useful to both superpowers on other goals: to avoid that third countries, or those under the sphere of influence of one of the two, tried to escape their direct control. *Détente* was a deterrent to centrifugal tendencies and a way to keep control of the system. To summarize, *détente* was necessary to guarantee order and stability, which had always been at the center of Kissinger's focus both as a scholar and a political figure. Kissinger had also a crucial role in another key policy: opening to China. The process of rapprochement with China is considered one of the major successes of Nixon's foreign policy. The decision to improve the relationship with the People's Republic of China is unprecedented and meant the end to a more than twenty years of hostility and isolation between the two countries.

The tense relationship with the Soviet Union allowed the United States to step in, and promote themselves as the solution to the Soviet security threat. This Chinese card, played to leverage the Soviet Union into continuing the SALT talks, was a powerful strategy used by Kissinger and Nixon, to reach their goal. Initially, it is possible to say that the concept of linkage, which is a pillar of Kissinger's strategy, worked well, giving the Americans some leverage on both

the Soviets and the Chinese. At the same time, Kissinger was working on SALT I and II, which have been praised as a milestone of peaceful coexistence between Washington and Moscow. From this perspective, it represented the essence of bilateral détente. It is thus possible to say that the changes in foreign policy in Nixon's first mandate, were considered quite successful. However, they had limits and contradictions as the Vietnam war.

The conflict in Vietnam was one of Nixon's priorities since the very beginning of his Presidency and has played a crucial role in American foreign and domestic policy. The Vietnam War has required American efforts for years and has played a major role both at domestic and international level. It is an issue at the core of foreign policy for three administrations, if considering also Nixon's and has shaped domestic consensus for the political sphere or, as it happened it sparked strong criticism and protests among American citizens. And in the end, was considered both a contradiction and a failure. The conflict was a confrontation between North Vietnam, a communist country supported by Soviet Union and China, and the South, supported by the US.

In conclusion, confrontation continued through dialogue. The confrontation between the two never stopped, and partly was due to the fact that neither was willing to give up the fight for influence. This is the result of a lack of code of conduct based on a common interpretation, which was at the base of the worsening of the relationship between the two countries. there are also other factors that contributed to the demise of détente are several, and they are connected both to the international scenario and to the domestic American situation. In fact, the impact of Watergate and the end of Nixon's administration strongly affected the dialogue with the Soviet Union, but especially changed the balance at the domestic and institutional level. In conclusion, as a whole, the policies that started with Nixon and Kissinger ended in failure, but characterized the 1960s and 1970s in a way that remained in the books and it is still important to analyze and research.

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