

The Soviet Union's New Cold War

Ideological conflict between the Communist powers and Western democracies continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Much of the animosity revealed itself in a nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States. The leaders of both nations pursued dangerous policies which threatened the security of both nations, as well as the world at large. Policy changes on both sides led to a redefining of the relationship between Russia and the U.S.

In October 1964, after the ousting of Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev came to power over the Soviet Union. With the assistance of a new prime minister—Alexei Kosygin—the two men pursued a policy toward the United States of peaceful coexistence, while aiding communist revolutions around the world.

Throughout the 1960s, the two superpowers were often on opposite sides of the Vietnam War. Publicly appearing sympathetic to the United States' deepening involvement in Southeast Asia, the Soviet Union was the primary weapons supplier of the North Vietnamese. The Soviets also provided military advisors to the North Vietnamese.

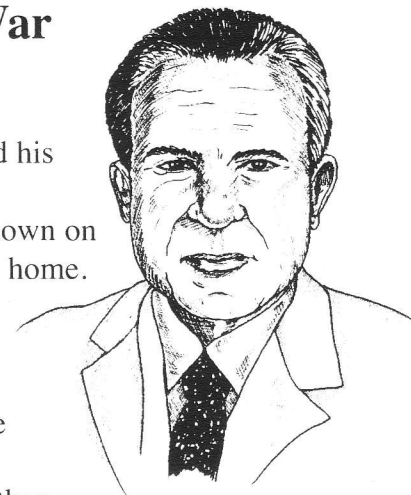
By the early 1970s, as the war in Vietnam came to a close following the withdrawal of United States troops from South Vietnam, Brezhnev and the American president, Richard Nixon, both called for a reduction in the arms race and Cold War tensions which had threatened the world for a generation since World War II.

Known as *détente*, Nixon and Brezhnev worked to bring their nations closer together while managing to keep a watchful eye on one another. This period witnessed the emergence of nuclear arms reductions talks designed to slow down the pace of nuclear weapons expansion. These talks were referred to as Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, or SALT.

In 1972, these talks bore fruit in the form of an agreement—the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, or SALT I. Under this treaty, both sides agreed to limit their antiballistic missile systems. (Such systems had the capability to launch nuclear-tipped warheads at the other side.)

Throughout the remainder of the 1970s, the United States continued to pursue *détente* with the

Soviet Union. Leonid Brezhnev consolidated his power throughout the decade and clamped down on Eastern Europe and at home. With the resignation of Nixon from the presidency in 1974 (a result of the Watergate scandal), Brezhnev negotiated with two other U.S. presidents of the 1970s—Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.



Richard Nixon

During the Carter administration, *détente* appeared to break down. In 1979, after Carter officials negotiated a second nuclear arms treaty, known as SALT II, the U.S. Senate rejected the treaty, claiming it did not require enough of the Soviet Union. By 1980, the Soviets invaded neighboring Afghanistan when the Communist government of that nation appeared to be on the brink of collapse at the hands of Muslim Afghan rebels.

When the Soviets sent in their military against the Afghans, the Carter administration condemned the Soviet policy and withdrew U.S. grain sales to the Soviets. (Carter also organized a boycott among other Western powers of the 1980 Olympics to be held in Moscow.) With the election of a new American president that year—conservative Republican Ronald Reagan—a new turn in Soviet-American relations lay on the horizon.

Review and Write

1. Describe the policy of *détente* between the Soviet Union and the United States.
2. What might each side have to gain by pursuing *détente*?
3. From your reading, what type of leader do you think Leonid Brezhnev was?