CHAPTER IV

DETEENTE AND SALT II
In the 1970s, detente was a decisive factor in bringing about relaxation of international tension. As a result of the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. it was possible to conclude several important and substantial accords, notably SALT I and ABM agreements. However, in the late 1970's detente lost momentum, especially after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan which almost rang its death knell. Thereafter, Soviet-U.S. relations saw deterioration, which ultimately resulted in the second Cold War. In the previous chapter, we discussed the changes in Soviet leadership, Brezhnev's policy of peaceful coexistence and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. It is logical here to further delineate the diverse issues relating to detente and its resulting anti-climax in the 1980s. In this chapter we have to investigate the causes of the down turn of the events and relate it to our main frame work of study. Here, we take up the following issues in their logical sequence; SALT II process, causes and implications of Soviet-military intervention in Afghanistan, Reagan's SDI programme and the beginning of the new Cold War.

Soviet-U.S. relations have been marked by one of rivalry, competition and potential threat to each other. They have been militarily antagonistic to each other since the end of World War II. This antagonism was indeed all pervasive. 1

1. The antagonism was because of different goals pursued by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The U.S. had a mission to help rid the world of communism which meant an explicit hostility toward the Soviet Union. Because they believed that the Soviet system was illegitimate, Contd ...
There was scarcely an aspect of international relations that was not affected by this overriding factor. Broadly speaking, till the Cuban missile crisis, their relationship continued to remain politically highly charged and hence was a major cause of international tension.

The U.S. Political Manoeuvring

During the first Cold War period the U.S. adopted the policy of "containment" and engaged in various forms of anti-Communist activities, including building military alliances and unleashing ideological crusades. Even Richard Nixon's time, which saw detente anti-communism drives did not diminish. In the late sixties and early seventies, however, Nixon was enough of a realist to see that a different tactic was needed if he were to get to the White House. This time, it was "negotiation instead of confrontation". Moreover, by this time, the Americans had learnt that there were differences between the Soviet Union and China which could be exploited to their advantage. To quote Henry Kissinger, "We will have to learn to deal imaginatively with several competing centres of Communist power.... in a subtle triangle of relations between Washington, Peking and Moscow, we

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improve the possibilities of accommodations with each as we increase our options toward both.³ Tactically, Americans were trying to exploit differences within the disintegrated socialist bloc to their advantage by simultaneously opening up with China and the Soviet Union. It was believed that detente would depend on the ability of the U.S. to convert the Soviet Union from a "revolutionary power with unlimited ambition" to a "legitimate" state with more circumspect objectives. What mattered enormously to Kissinger was that the external goals of Soviet Union would have to be adjusted to the over all imperatives of a stable world order.⁴ Evidently, the U.S. wanted to co-opt the Soviet Union into the world system and bring it to the negotiating table instead of isolating them. Kissinger saw detente as a

3. Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), p.165. "The Chinese, in accordance with a Maoist analysis - chose to make a detente with the less dangerous, as Mao and Chou saw it, of China's two potent adversaries, the U.S. against the more dangerous, the Soviet Union. The Russians, on the contrary, chose detente with the more dangerous of their two potential adversaries, the U.S. for various reasons including the hope of economic benefit. The U.S. more pragmatic and ideologically flexible than either..., made a detente with both. It gave the U.S. a flexibility and capability for diplomatic manoeuvre superior to either China's or the Soviet Union's". In this sense detente may be seen as strategy for the management of adversary power for all three of the main groups of policy makers - Americans, Chinese and Russians. See Coral Bell, The Diplomacy for Detente (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1979), p.5.

means of inducing Soviet-self-containment, when the U.S. was no longer able to enforce containment through traditional military means.

Moscow was uneasy over its China problem. This made it tilt towards the U.S. And of course, the Soviets had an interest in stabilizing the strategic arms race too. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union apparently wanted to create a community of interests based on their common need to avoid a nuclear arms contest.

Hope of New Beginning

In the early 1970s, both the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. were euphoric about detente. President Nixon talked about building a "new structure of peace" and visualised the concept of detente as marking the end of superpower rivalry, while the Soviets saw detente becoming a reality which was revealing the utter bankruptcy of the Cold War dogma. In the Soviet perception, the beginning of detente was irrefutable proof that the "correlation of forces" in the world had

5. Nixon and Kissinger sought to introduce a web of incentive into the relationship with the Soviet Union that would give the Soviet Union a state in a more stable world order to induce it to operate with greater restraint. Thereby, a measure of self-containment on the part of the Soviet leaders would be introduced. For further analysis see Alexander L. George, Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), pp.20-21.

shifted to the Soviet Union’s advantage. And this change was believed to be "irreversible". For the Soviets, detente was meant to provide not only appearance of superpower equality but the reality, too.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that detente was a conceptually coherent design or policy orientation. Because it was a series of tactical responses to key problems, which meant relaxing strained relations between the Soviet Union and the USA. The concept of detente was actually evolved through international practice, in large degree, as a response to the mounting challenges of world affairs and the heightened danger of conflict. In this sense, detente was an "overcoming" or a negation of Cold War and a continuation of peaceful coexistence. Of course, it was neither a love pact between the Soviet Union and the U.S. nor a blue print for the convergence of two systems. To quote Marilyn Bechtel, "it was just an attempt to create an atmosphere of sanity and to cut down a world tension". It was seen as "a movement from


confrontation to negotiation, from conflict to cooperation".  


Although detente was seen as a means of stabilizing East-West relations and was hoped that increased commercial and cultural contacts would be facilitated by the relaxation of tension and this would encourage further relaxation, it was never assumed that detente would lead to the resolution of fundamental differences between the East and the West.  

However, in that particular phase, detente was imperative for both superpowers; they found it necessary for consolidating their own position vis-a-vis each
other. Of course, the benefits of detente were obviously mutual.

**Origin of Detente**

There are various opinions regarding the origin of detente. Some analysts maintained that detente had started around the 1971-72 period, with Nixon's visit to China and the Soviet Union and the conclusion of SALT I and the limitation of ABM. Others claim that it was an outgrowth of the Cuban missile crisis which led to the limited nuclear test ban treaty and the establishment of the "hot line" between Moscow and Washington. During the period of detente, it appeared as if "The world had found a way out of the hostility and stupidities of the cold war". In fact in the tense atmosphere everybody was looking for an answer to the questions of Cold War. It took many years for


Soviet military power. By the 70's the Soviet Union emerged from isolation and became a power of global rather than continental dimension. This power, which was essentially military power, forced the Americans to come to the negotiating table. They felt that they should grant the Soviets an equal status of superpower, at least in a symbolic sense. This happened in 1972. And this articulated the detente for the first time in a meaningful way.

Evidently, for the Soviet Union, detente was acceptable only after the attainment of rough parity in conventional and nuclear capability. They did not want to give up those hard-won positions. Even after attaining superpower status, their desire to preserve their superior position continued. For that they had all kinds of ideological justification. This was evident from the statements of Soviet officials. D.P. Zhilin, for example, emphasized that all the talk about the end of the "era of wars" and the arrival of an "era of universal peace" was premature and dangerous. He, in fact, warned that it was pointless to relax in matters of

safeguarding the security of the Soviet state and felt the need for keeping the armed forces on the alert. 18

Detente could never reach a point where a conflict situation is ruled out. It could not happen because both sides were sceptical about each other. The condition of relaxation and stability was the result of mutual fears of war. Perhaps certain antagonistic elements still remained in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. It was not smooth sailing for detente. During the Middle East crisis, in 1973 detente was badly shaken, especially when both superpowers threatened direct intervention. 19 Of course, here detente had a positive effect on that situation. 20 Whenever it suffered jolts, it relapsed into cold war like situation.

American policy makers, who were known for "their business like approach", must have anticipated certain gains in their relations with the Soviet Union; they were bound to be disappointed as in America any extension of Soviet


influence was not only seen as an American loss but also considered a threat to American interest. They were even uneasy about any talk of parity between the two powers.

Disillusionment to Opposition

By the middle of the 1970s, Americans started getting apprehensive and somewhat disillusioned about detente. Indeed, President Ford prohibited the use of the word detente during his election campaign. President Carter made some attempt to revive the concept of detente, though, when he assumed power in January 1977, detente had been in limbo. It was not clear which direction U.S.-Soviet relations would move. There was a wide reaction against detente in the US, because military parity was acceptable to them. Those who were opposed to detente viewed the period between 1972 and 1979 as a "series of tragically missed opportunities" and a "tragic sellout of U.S. interests in pursuit of an illusionary goal of accommodation with the Soviet Union". They viewed it as a ploy permitting Soviet military build up without strong U.S. reactions which was meant to lull the U.S. into a false sense of security. They maintained that the Soviet Union had favoured detente in order to obtain Western, especially American, technology and credits to facilitate industrial and managerial efficiency and modernization in the non-military sectors of the Soviet


This criterion seems to be valid as the Soviet's main interest in detente was to get Western technology.

Detente was bound to founder since there was a frontal attack on it. American Sovietologist, Richard Pipes, dismissed the very concept of detente as futile; "we are told that detente is vital because the only alternative to it is a 'nuclear holocaust'. This, however, is an appeal to fear, not to reason". It goes without saying that Americans were not comfortable with detente. In fact, in American political life, there has been a deep rooted antipathy toward the Soviet Union which was one of the responsible factors for the breakdown of detente. But it was also encouraged by a carefully orchestrated campaign (Committee on the Present Danger) designed to alarm Americans about the consequences of alleged "weakness" in the military sphere of relation to the Soviet Union, and about detente being a one way street in Moscow's favour. They called it a mistaken policy from the start, again for Soviet Union. They carried on an intensive


campaign about the "Soviet threat" which actually provided justification for new military programme and renewed hostility towards the Soviet Union.26 Senator Henry Jackson was the foremost opponent of detente. He tried to scare the American public by his demagogy. American political scientist, Elliot Goodman, had gone so far as to say that the Soviet Union wanted normalization in order to increase its military superiority over the Western powers.27 Thus it is evident from both Soviet and US positions, both powers wanted detente on their own terms. Detente implied a status quo balance of power position, whereby each side could maintain military parity vis-a-vis the other, or if possible even superiority.

Why did Detente Collapse

Certainly, it is not difficult to understand why the American popular mood was against detente. Few reasons can be identified. Firstly, the U.S. was no longer able to dominate the international scene to the extent to which it


27. It is interesting that the opponents of detente produced an interesting set of bed fellows. All of them believed in the mode of Cold war rather than in the mode of detente that could check the power of Soviet state. See Bell, n.4, p.203.
was accustomed because of the Soviet Union's growing military strength. Secondly, the balance of military power had shifted significantly in the Soviet's favour, permanently ending the era of decisive American military superiority. This change had deeply shaken the U.S. They were uncomfortable at the thought of a world in which America was not predominant. Moreover, the US military industrial complex which sustained the US domestic economy, was never interested in detente, or arms cuts, which would cut into their profits. Besides, the U.S. faced a series of crises which had nothing to do with Moscow - the Vietnam War, the Watergate Scandal and the economic recession in the West. Thirdly, U.S. domestic politics was apparently taking a rightward shift. As a result, opposition to detente was increasingly gaining ground. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was made the scapegoat. Of course, the Soviet Union cannot be absolved from its share of the blame.

The main accusation against the Soviet Union concerned Soviet behaviour in the Third World after the mid 1970s. Soviet adventurism in these areas was deemed by the U.S. to be incompatible with detente. President Carter criticized the Soviet Union for not abiding by the rules of behaviour laid down in 1973, that would reduce the risk of


conflict. Though Soviet activities in the Third World created genuine fear in the West, especially in the U.S., at times, Soviet activities were exaggerated in the West, to maintain tensions necessary for internal cohesion and development of military industry. While at the high point of detente (1971-1973) the U.S., not the Soviet Union, was very active in the Third World - most notably in Vietnam, Chile and the Middle East.

It seems that the superpowers status in a period of detente permitted to US pursue their respective global interests aggressively in areas such in Africa or Central Asia without risking the central strategic relationship; but, to their surprise, it actually eroded the very basis of the central aspect of detente.

U.S.-Soviet trade relationship was also an area that became very controversial. It affected the lives of American farmers willing to sell their farm products for lucrative profits. Detente did not leave any area of mundane life untouched. Such a state of affairs lasted till the end of the 80's, when detente ultimately somersaulted. Several factors were responsible for it.

Three events were of particular significance. The December 12, 1979, NATO decision to deploy INF missiles in


31. Stoessinger, n.4, p.100.
Europe, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the non-ratification of the SALT-II Treaty by the American Senate. This was the end of an era in Soviet-U.S. relations which culminated in Cold War.

It seems that this disappointment came largely due to the excessive expectation from detente. The Soviet wanted to use detente to safeguard their influence, while the Americans were determined to use it as a cover up for the elimination of Soviet influence. Detente progressively revealed the simple reality that both the Americans and the Soviets held contrary approaches to the reasons and objectives of detente.32

The Soviet-American relationship exhibited a paradoxical, sometimes identical, character in which appearance and reality often have been confused and inverted. Soviet relationship with the West remained ambiguous and subject to differing interpretations often of comparable plausibility.33 Thus it can be argued that the Soviet-U.S. relationship was highly complex and no development in the relationship can or could be traced to a single cause.


33. Weltman, n.10, pp.89, 91.
SALT II

During the late 1970s, a lot of importance was attached to the SALT II treaty. It was all the more important as both superpowers had acquired overkill capacity almost without historical precedent. So "it was not SALT that really mattered, rather it was the peace that was really important". But it could be achieved only by regulating their strategic arms race and reducing tension between them. The SALT Treaty was undoubtedly an attempt in this direction. It was, indeed, considered to be the only hope of putting a lid on arms race which was not only proving to be a major barrier to peace, but also becoming an economic burden for both superpowers. Of course, a desire for mutual survival also enabled them to negotiate on strategic arms control. This forced the superpowers to interact for peace which was a


significant thing in itself, because only then could they resolve their problems by peaceful means and avert direct military confrontation.

**Expectations from SALT II**

Evidently, there were many expectations from SALT. Some had hoped that it would sharply reduce defense spending, while others hoped that it would usher in a new era of Soviet-U.S. cooperation and do away with military rivalry across the board. Such hopes were, of course, legitimate. It appeared that it was going to be realized, especially when, in the early seventies, the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. had apparently agreed to do everything they could do to prevent an outbreak of nuclear war. They, in fact, had "convincingly" demonstrated to the world that they were "capable of jointly solving even the most complex and delicate problem". However, in reality, permanent peace was a distant dream, because both of them were afraid that they might fall behind and get superseded by the other. In the garb of parity,


38. See "Arms Control: Limiting the Strategic Arms Race", *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol.71, No.2030, August 1979, p.10. The debate as to who was responsible for arms race is futile as both superpowers had their share of the blame. However, the Soviets have always argued that they were forced to respond to the U.S. See Alexei Korenin, "To Stop the Perilous Race", *New Times*, Vol.52, Dec. 84, p.5, while the U.S. has accused the Soviets for the arms race. On the argument of Western scholars, see Geoffrey Jukes, "Perspective on Soviet-Conld..."
both superpowers actually wanted to become "number one" so that they could enhance their power and influence all over the world. It was really a paradoxical situation; for example, the U.S. wanted an arms control agreement but then they also wanted to negotiate "from a position of constant and sustained national strength". 39 That is to say, they wanted to enhance their military strength, because they never trusted each other. This distrust was rooted in their very perception. Of course, they did not expect that SALT II was going to end the competition. Nor did they assume that SALT was a substitute for strong defense. However, they did expect their competition to be safer and more predictable 40 - which would presumably have led to a healthier state of Soviet-U.S. relations.

The establishment of rough parity between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union was largely due to the military balance, that is, the balance of forces on both sides. Though this

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helped in the negotiation of arms control, it also complicated the matter. 41 Thus the SALT process was quite complex from the beginning. The major impediment was the difficulty in bringing the U.S. and the Soviet Union to a point of agreement. But the problem was not merely the disagreement to come to terms, it was also the absence of a commitment to reverse the arms race and demilitarize the global system. 42 However, it did not lessen the importance of SALT negotiations for good relations between the superpowers.

The SALT II summit was the 10th such summit between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. since World War II. Twenty three rounds of the strategic arms talks covering the period 1969-79 were carried out. 43 After the signing of the SALT II treaty by Carter and Brezhnev, the U.S. Senate was supposed to ratify it. Here it is important to emphasize that we have already discussed the difficulties involved in the SALT talks. One of the most difficult and crucial aspects of arms control was the problem of symmetry or reducing arms across the board with respect to all the categories. Under the SALT II treaty, the U.S. Cruise missile and the Soviet backfire


43. Sh. Sanakoyev, "Important in Soviet-American Relations", International Affairs, No.9, September 1979, p.3.
bombers were not included. The Americans were of the view that Soviet backfire arms should also be counted as strategic weapons, while the Soviet Union, in turn, wanted tight restriction on Cruise missiles. Since both sides were strident on their respective positions, the treaty remained a very restricted and limited one, because both had their share of ideological hardliners, military and other group opposed to East-West recommendations on arms control and related matters. But this is not to suggest that there was no agreement.

SALT II stipulated that, once it came into force, each side had to limit land-based launchers of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and submarine-launched ballistic (ASBM) with a range over 600 km. aggregate number were not to exceed 2,400 units. In a joint communiqué, though, the Soviet Union and U.S.A. hoped that the conclusion of the SALT II treaty would make an important contribution toward


the non-proliferation objective.\footnote{Joint Soviet-U.S. Communique on signing of SALT II treaty, \textit{Reprints from the Soviet Press}, Vol.XXVIII, No.12, June, 1979, p.44.} In reality, however, the treaty was meant to manage the arms competition, not to halt it, because both sides were not willing to create a world in which military would play no role. Neither made any attempt to freeze nuclear arsenal nor did they call into question the legitimacy of the nuclear weapons of both superpowers, because the nuclear deterrent from both sides were supposed to contribute to detente. In a way, SALT II had implicitly allowed the development of the Trident submarine, the long range Trident missile, the Cruise missile and the neutron weapon. The SALT process, as one analyst maintains, "discouraged a genuine halt to the growth of armaments". He, in fact, questioned if at all the SALT treaty was desirable enough to reverse the arms race.\footnote{Johansen, n.9, pp.42, 46-47.} In fact, Cobin S. Gray argued, SALT encouraged the dangerous fallacy that strategic questions were really "arms control questions".\footnote{See Cobin S. Gray, "The SALT II Debate in Context", \textit{Survival}, 21 September - October 1979, p.202.}

\textbf{The SALT II debate:}

The SALT negotiations were accompanied by intense debate in the U.S. The issue was will the nation's security be better served by ratifying the SALT II or by repealing it? Several private organizations came into being. A rather complex situation developed around SALT II in the U.S., taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the fact that,
prior to the signing of the treaty, its content was not made public. The opponents intensified their campaign to stop it from being ratified. Here it is important to remember that its discussion and ratification closely coincided in time with the start of the new presidential election campaign. The rival group naturally got an opportunity to exploit the treaty in their own interest. Once again there was same old circular arguments; "one way street", "we have nothing to gain from it". They were opposed to the treaty because they believed that it would legalize the Soviet Union's strategic superiority and it did not ensure the U.S. sufficient control over compliance with the treaty. But some of the top U.S. officials and policy makers maintained that the treaty would strengthen the national security of the U.S. They emphasized that there was nothing to worry about for the treaty was equitable and verifiable. Moreover, they argued, Americans did not need to believe


52. The opponents of SALT II argued that the U.S. would become almost defenseless while the Soviet Union would become militarily strong. See Bilgrami, n.45, p.48. See also CDSP, Vol.XXVI, No.19, June 6, 1979, p.1. V. Matveyev, "SALT II in the Light of Experience", International Affairs, No.10, October 1979, pp.52, 57.

and/or trust the Soviets because they have highly sensitive and sophisticated means of verification. Hence, there was no chance of the Soviets violating the agreement. Moreover, the Soviets had agreed to regularly exchange precise data with the U.S. on each country's missiles. Yet, there was opposition to the SALT II treaty. Evidently, the opponents of the treaty wanted the Senate not to ratify it. Ratification fell victim to the crisis in Soviet-American relations which erupted following the NATO decision to deploy new American missiles in Western Europe and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The crisis that erupted in late 1979, had been brewing for some time. In 1979, the crisis reached its climax. Thus Soviet-U.S. relations sharply deteriorated.

SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE DECLINE IN SOVIET-U.S. RELATIONS:

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was a turning point in Soviet-U.S. relations. Inevitably, the


intervention brought the world on the threshold of a new U.S.-Soviet confrontation. Their tone increasingly became harsher, clearly indicating towards a new Cold War and signalling the end of detente. The U.S. internationalized the Afghan issue by reacting sharply, because the Soviet intervention had sent the wrong signal to the U.S. As a result, the U.S. adopted a confrontationist attitude. President Carter recalled his Ambassador, Thomas J. Watson Jr., from Moscow, suspended the sale of grain to the Soviet Union, boycotted the Moscow Olympics, 1980, imposed economic sanctions, and, most importantly, the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the SALT II treaty which, according to Leonid Brezhnev, would have opened the way to major steps in

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p.1. Afghanistan marked the end of detente since the relations continued to worsen. In the U.S. the Soviet intervention was perceived as "adventurist and expansionist". Peter Wallensteen, "Focus on American - Soviet Detente: What Went Wrong", Journal of Peace Research (Oslo), Vol.22, No.1, 1985, p.2.


the field of disarmament.\(^{60}\) Admittedly, the American reactions indicated that one chapter in Soviet-American relations had been closed.\(^{61}\) In fact, in America there were already two trends with regard to detente. Those who undermined detente were trying to launch a second Cold War.

Although it has shocked the world, particularly the West, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan appeared inevitable, given the kind of relationship that had developed between the two countries, over the years. Over a generation, the Soviet Union had provided generous economic and military assistance and had trained hundreds of Afghan Army officers. In this process, economic links between the two countries developed in such a way that they created a dependency relationship with obvious political implications and complete dependence on the Soviet Union.\(^{62}\) As a result, the Soviet Union emerged as the leading influential power in Afghanistan.

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The Soviet Involvement:

However, the period of intense Soviet involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan began with the revolution of April 27, 1978, which toppled the government headed by President Mohammed Daoud Khan and established a pro-Soviet regime with Nur Mohammed Taraki as the Prime Minister. Moscow's prompt recognition of the Taraki regime and conclusion of 29 different aid agreements with it between April 8 - December 1978 clearly indicated its interest in the regime's survival. Within eight months following the revolution in December 1978, military cooperation was formalized by the Soviet-Afghan treaty, 63 on the pretext of which, in December 1979, Soviet military entered Afghanistan. Thus Afghanistan became the most contentious issue, intentionally.

U.S. Counter Action:

The U.S. viewed Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan as 'invasion' and the greatest threat to peace. 64 The problem was obviously seen as emanating from Moscow, though the Soviets have claimed that they entered Afghanistan at the "invitation" of the Afghan government, which fully


accords with the U.N. Charter. It does not seem to have convinced the West. However, one cannot deny that the Soviets had vital interests in Afghanistan which compelled them to intervene militarily.

It was this importance that President Carter asserted that "an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interest of the U.S.A. and it will be repelled by use of any means necessary, including military force". President Carter's response to Afghanistan was to threaten the Soviet Union with a second Cold War. In the toughest diplomatic exchange he warned the Soviet Union "to withdraw its forces or face serious consequences". The Afghan crisis was not solely a Soviet creation. In fact, Washington has publicly acknowledged the U.S. involvement and arms supply to the Afghan "counter revolutionary" forces. This was first stated


The U.S. perceived the Soviet intervention as a part of a grand design to control the Persian Gulf, to secure the warm water ports and sea lanes over which oil flows to the Western world. Alvin Z. Rubinstein saw the intervention in terms of: a defence reaction to the growing concern about possible instability spilling over into the Soviet Uzbek and Tadjik Union republic; fear that the U.S. and China would exploit a Soviet setback and acquire increased influence in the Muslim compliant world; a desire to merely install a compliant satrap; the belief that the U.S., by its passive acceptance of the April 1978 Cap, had recognized Afghanistan as being in the Soviet sphere of influence; a necessary step toward turning the country into a stepping stone for Soviet advance to the Indian ocean; and a manifestation of traditional Russian imperialism. In the American view, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had "enhanced Soviet capacity for intervention in Iran". Of course, it was a


70. To some analysts, Soviet intervention appeared as a logical extension of historical Russian moves and Soviet expansionism and a drive towards the Indian Ocean.

matter of concern for American policy makers. It is important to note that the U.S. depended upon this area of the world for roughly 25 per cent of her annual imports of oil. American "stake" in the region, however, goes beyond oil, and beyond economics. Since modern economic life and political power depend substantially on oil, the latter had become a key factor in the overall power balance between the USA and the Soviet Union. The U.S. always feared that a slight left-ward swing of domestic politics in the oil producing countries would be sufficient to deny oil to the West. Richard Nixon wrote, "so more than ever, the question of who controls what in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East was the key to who controls what in the world". This was the importance of this region. Not too long time had passed when, in 1973, the big shock for the West came from the Arab countries which in the context of the Arab-Israel conflict declared a embargo on oil exports to several Western countries, including America.

In view of these developments, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had created a critical situation for the U.S., complicating its relations with the Soviet Union and with the States of the region as well as threatening its strategic


interests in the Middle East and South Asia. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan actually caught the U.S. government off guard. Thus, a major problem for American in the area was how to contain Soviet power in the area, discouraging a repetition of the Afghan intervention. As a result, the U.S. became very active in this region and did everything possible to oppose the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan.

The Soviet Assertion of Power:

The Soviet intervention, as Richard Nixon observed it, was an assertion of the Soviet Union's global power which posed a challenge to American status of superpower. It appeared that the U.S. superiority in some sphere had been lost to the Soviet Union. It was really difficult for the Americans to face the changed situation in which the U.S. did not enjoy pre-eminent superpower status, which was indeed a


uncomfortable position for U.S. now that the Soviets had apparently switched to an offensive strategy. It had disturbed the U.S. because Soviet intervention was not only seen as an assertion of Soviet power at the international level, it was also seen as a reaction against American global power. However, the U.S. had always dealt with the Soviet Union as the junior superpower because, for the U.S., parity with the Soviet Union was unacceptable. It is believed that policy makers in Washington were determined to find some place in the world to apply American power. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was "a heaven sent opportunity for them to put their notion into practice". Even before the Soviets sent their troops into Afghanistan, opinion polls in the U.S.A. showed a hardening of attitude with respect to the U.S.-Soviet relations. In the public perception, the power of the U.S.A. was declining. Public opinion wanted firmer and more decisive leaders and preferred increased defense spending. Evidently in the U.S., public pressure was mounting against detente, which showed detente was no longer a popular policy. Now there was a different mood on which politicians successfully cashed in.


By the end of 1979, the Soviet Union had come to realize that detente was not paying off. The SALT II treaty was not going through the U.S. Congress, and Americans were courting China. Hence, there was no hesitation in going into Afghanistan to sustain a communist government which was likely to be overthrown if it received no assistance. But the Soviet calculation proved to be disastrous, because, eventually, Afghanistan emerged as Soviet Union's Vietnam. With the Soviet intervention, the character of resistance changed. The Civil War became a national liberation movement and the resistance spread. The military costs of the war were greater than Moscow anticipated; in the economic sense the Afghan intervention proved to be an extra burden for Soviet economy, just like another backward republic of the Soviet Union the deficits and development expenses of which had to be met from Moscow. In all ways, it was a losing proposition for the Soviets.


82. Because it proved Moscow gross error of judgement. See Gunter Knobe, "the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan", Central Asia Survey (U.K.), No.213, 1988, p.133.


Towards Confrontation:

As a reaction to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the U.S. focussed its foreign policy on confrontation with the Soviet Union. President Reagan made this the prime issue in world politics. The argument was that there has been a fundamental shift in the military balance between the East and West over the past decade (1970-80) and the Soviet Union's "misbehaving", carrying out expansionist, aggressive or risk taking policies in the Third World. It was up to the West to counter this Soviet "expansionism", by reasserting its influence and superiority there. This was the beginning of the Second Cold War.

However, it was not that the Soviets were doing what would have amounted to the violation of the rules of detente. They were doing what the Americans have always been doing. The Soviet Union had only narrowed the gap between itself and the US, in terms of military presence in the Third World. They had not become stronger than the U.S., though; nor were they weaker.

The overall international balance sheet on the Afghan intervention has certainly been negative. True, the U.S. has also done many destructive things to poison the international atmosphere, and Soviet policy had certainly played its part.

85. Halliday, n.81, p.137.
in the worsening of international climate that produced the new Cold War. The Soviets agreed that the New Cold War had already begun, but this did not absolve them of part of the responsibility for the final outcome. 88

Reagan and SDI

Reagan's "Star Wars" (Strategic Defense Initiative programme) seems to be a logical culmination of "one that had been in preparation for many years". To a great extent, it was a result of a certain amount of uneasiness in U.S., and a reflection of U.S. attitude towards the Soviet Union which aimed at establishing unconditional U.S. supremacy. 89 For the Reagan Administration saw parity and Soviet pursuit of defense as dangerous. 90 Moreover, Americans always believed that strategic superiority was the best guarantee for security and the best way to remain "number one". Of course, for that they would have to deny any Soviet aspiration to equality. 91 Essentially they were looking for some solution other than the continuing reliance on nuclear


arms, so that they could negotiate with the Soviet Union from a "position of strength". It was basically a Union from a "position of strength". It was basically a "struggle for power in the international community". In brief, Reagan's much talked about star war programme involved the relationship between the Soviet Union and the USA.

Campaign to Resurrect the Cold War:

In fact, since 1972, ever since the Soviet Union attained strategic parity, there had been multiple efforts at various levels to negate this essential equivalent parity. In the mid seventies, a coalition of new conservatives, dedicated opponents of detente and arms control, and disgruntled elements of the national security bureaucracy wanted a powerful campaign to resurrect the atmosphere of the Cold War. Several organisations came into being which started vigorous campaign against detente and arms control. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan gave boost to opponents of detente and SALT II. The most important organisation in this campaign was the "Committee on Present Danger" which was jointly sponsored by Paul Nitze and U.G. Rostov. Many other important figures in American society, including Ronald Reagan, became members of this organization. With the election of President Reagan, the ideology of the Committee on Present Danger was given an official start.


Apart from the President himself, 50 members of the Committee joined the new administration and were appointed senior advisors. With Reagan coming to power one could very well anticipate the attitude of the administration toward world affairs and particularly the Soviet Union.

The Reagan Administration entered office with a goal of reasserting American pre-eminence which, he believed, was eroded during the era of detente. In order to achieve pre-eminence he adopted a more aggressive and confrontational posture vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. In his initial speeches after coming to power, President Reagan proclaimed "a new beginning for America" and promised to lead the country "along a fundamentally new course" to accelerated economic growth on "a better future for all citizens". He advanced the slogan of increasing American's military might which he said, was the only thing that could ensure peace, because there had been a world wide perception of growing Soviet military strength and American weakness. Hence, Reagan seems


to have realized a general need for American rearmament to restore what they called "balance of forces". This thinking played a major role during the Reagan Administration in shaping his defense projects most notably the "Star War" programme.

Revivalism of American Hegemony:

In March 23, 1983, President Reagan called for a major national effort aimed at exploring the feasibility and effectiveness of active defense against ballistic missiles. His speech reopened a major debate over the role of defense in the U.S. strategic posture. The first concrete outcome of Reagan's address was the launch of the 'Strategic Defense Initiative' (SDI) as also funding comprehensive military research programmes. This, Reagan claimed held "the promise


98. The advocates of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative argued that the US must develop a space defense against Soviet ballistic missiles; for details, see Donald G. Gross, "Negotiated Treaty Amendment: the Solution of the SDI ABM Treaty Conflict". Harvard International Law Journal (Cambridge), vol.28(1), Winter 87, p.31. Such defense would at first reduce and ultimately eliminate the utility of offensive ballistic missiles. See "Addressing to the SALT Agreement", Congressional Digest (Washington) 65(10), October 1986, p.231.

of changing the history" and expected that it would make the nuclear weapons obsolete and it would provide the U.S. with a world free of nuclear weapons. Evidently Reagan's coming to power signified a sharp turn in American policy. He, in fact, revived the key idea of American hegemony in the world. The Soviets viewed this as an attempt to undermine the strategic parity that had been established and an attempt to achieve military superiority over the Soviet Union. Admittedly, the Reagan administration wanted to establish undisputed superiority over the Soviet Union.

Reagan's project was a major doctrinal departure in American strategy. They assumed that their security would no longer depend on international agreements, coexistence and cooperation but on a new generation of superweapons - such as space combat, beam weapons and war fought by machines. Evidently this was a major departure in American policy of militarism.

100. The SDI is a programme to provide a better basis for deterring aggression, strengthening stability and increasing the security of the U.S. and our allies. See "The President's Strategic Defense Initiative", Department of State Bulletin 85(2096) March 85, p.65 though in reality, as George W. Ball argued, Reagan's defense initiative reflected a fantasy that nuclear danger could be eliminated through some wonderful new invention. See, "War for Star War", Mainstream (New Delhi) 23(43), June 1, 1985, p.32.


Immediately after the President's speech, two groups were formed to investigate technical issues and policy issues pertinent to the SDI, including Soviet reactions.\textsuperscript{103} The Soviet reaction was very important in the entire Star Wars programme because, basically, it was directed against the Soviet Union. However, in actuality, the 1983 announcement of SDI programme by President Reagan did not mark the beginning of activity by either the U.S. or the Soviet Union in the field of modern strategic defense. To a varying degree, both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had maintained work since 1972 in these areas not banned by the ABM treaty.\textsuperscript{104} Americans maintained that the ABM treaty explicitly permits the kind of research envisaged under the SDI which the critics argued that the star war programme was incompatible with the ABM treaty, in fact, it was in violation of the treaty.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{104} See Alan B. Sherr, \textit{The Other Side of Arms Control} (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p.219.
Though the Soviets accused the U.S. of the "militarization of outer space", the Soviets themselves were not far behind in this field. In fact, critics have observed that Soviet propaganda hides the decidedly military nature of their space programme which they call "Mir" (their space station) meaning "Peace", while in reality Mir was dedicated to military activities. Of course, there was marked difference between the Soviet activities in space and Reagan's SDI programme.

The SDI was presented as a defense initiative, threatening no-one(?) and creating a more stable strategic relationship between the super powers. The SDI was to contain, as the name indicates, three different aspects: strategy, defense and initiative. It was strategic in that it concerned the relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union, especially in the field of nuclear weapons. The second aspect is defense. The goal is "mutual assured security" and the elimination of offensive weapons. Seen in this light, it was meant to be a political initiative. It was a new policy that had a high priority in the administration, which saw it as a necessary initiative due to Soviet actions in this area.

The White House in its pamphlet, released in January 1985, stressed that the U.S. was only pursuing an

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increased emphasis on defense systems. The SDI programme is
a precedent response to the very active Soviet research and
development activities in this field and provides insurance
against the Soviet effort. The Soviets have long been hard
at work in this area. The Americans were uncomfortable to
think that the Soviet Union might gain technological
advantage that could in time be converted to a military
advantage over them. 108 But this fear was unfounded, in view
of the American technological superiority. On the contrary,
the "Star Wars" programme was an expression of the American
technological superiority. Because the U.S. has always tried
to find "technological solutions to political problems" 109.
There is also evidence to show that, the US military
establishment and the Pentagon gave greater credence to
Soviet technological superiority than what actually existed,
so that they could get increased funding for technological
spending. When the Soviet Union had its nuclear tests in
1949, the American response was to develop Hydrogen bomb. 110
Over a period of time, in the U.S., a militarization of

108. See, "The President Strategic Defense Initiative",
Department of State Bulletin, 85(2096), March 1985,
pp.68, 70-71. For moral evaluation and principal moral
argument for the SDI see Steven Lee, "Morality, the SDI
and Limited Nuclear War" in Henry Shue, ed., Nuclear
Deterrence and Moral Restraint (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1989), pp.381-417. How self-
interested consideration have been dressed up as a
moral concern. See Joff McHohan, Reagan and the World"
Imperial Policy in the New Cold War (London: Pluto


110. Ibid.
political thinking and a politicisation of military thinking had been taking place simultaneously, primarily because of super power conflict. This culminated into the militarization of the very international political process.111

No matter what justification the U.S. gave for launching the Star Wars programme, the Soviet Union continued to perceive it as an attempt to achieve permanent military superiority.112 President Reagan seemed eager to disturb the existing parity in arms between the USA and the Soviet Union and sought to acquire superiority. Evidently the essence of the "Star Wars" was to deny the Soviets an ability to retaliate.113 All this was done in the name of security. Because the search for more security, whether real or imaginary, justified practically any weapon.

Of course, the SDI would fundamentally transform warfare and geopolitical relationship. The single biggest justification which was given, was the "Soviet threat". But, all along, this has been used by the Pentagon to push through

111. Ian Clark, The Hierarchy of States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.188.


its military programme and to justify its aggressive designs. Actually, the very existence of nuclear weapons, including the SDI, was rooted in the mutual political hostility of the two super powers.

The U.S. Motive Behind the SDI

It was in this context of hostility that, it is believed, the US motive behind the SDI had been to "cripple the less robust Soviet economy, ultimately bringing about the collapse of the Soviet system from within". The U.S. believed that the socialist system could be broken down by economic pressure, by forcing the Soviets to spend more on defense, which they cannot afford. Of course, the US did it through huge build up of sophisticated and costly space arms. Even the Soviets have admitted that the US was


116. Ibid., p. 3.


capable of winning the arms race, while they would not be able to bear the burden, especially in economic terms. The US knew this fact. Their economic strength was three times bigger than that of the Soviet Union.

However, not everybody in the USA was comfortable with the SDI. In fact, there has been widespread scepticism and criticism among scientists and the arms control community. It had been debated extensively. Thousands of scientists, including some Nobel laureates, signed petitions opposing the SDI, as being a dangerous illusion, and vowing not to support its funding. Very few have supported Reagan on this score.

The late 1970s witnessed a series of deterioration in the relations between the Soviet Union and the US. Many observers and politicians in the West accused the Soviets for this. While this deterioration began under the Carter

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Administration, it found an especially clearer reflection in the policies of the Reagan Administration.  

However, despite several criticisms, the SDI had one merit - perhaps only one merit - i.e., the Soviet Union became convinced that it should return to the arms control negotiating table it left so abruptly at the end of 1983. Indeed, the late 1980s phase was a hectic period of disarmament talks between the Soviet Union and the USA, especially with Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power.

Conclusion

One of the major causes of international tensions has been Soviet-US hostility. In fact, this hostility has been an overriding factor that was clearly visible in all spheres of international politics since World War II. However, in the sixties, there was a marked shift from 'confrontation' to 'negotiation'. It was because the USA sought to adopt a different approach toward the Soviet Union, especially when


the US realised that there were differences between the Soviet Union and China. The US desired to take advantage of this rift through diplomatic manoeuvring. It was sheer exploitation of the situation.

While Khrushchev was at the helm of the Soviet affairs, the Sino-Soviet discord reached a point of no return. In such a situation, the Soviet Union naturally tilted toward the USA. The US wanted to co-opt the Soviet Union into the world system, by bringing it to the negotiating table. The real motive was to induce "Soviet self-containment", because America had realized that other methods were ineffective. The idea was to convert the Soviet Union from a 'revolutionary' power to a legitimate state with more circumspect objectives. Of course, the Soviet Union also wanted to avoid any confrontation with the US. This necessitated detente, which was basically a means of stabilising East-West relations. The US also hoped detente would increase Soviet-Chinese differences and thus strengthen the West.

The concept of detente itself had evolved through international practices which aimed at the relaxation of strained relations between the Soviet Union and the US. In the seventies, it appeared as if the super powers had found a way out of the hostilities of Cold War, especially with the signing of several substantial agreements, notably SALT-I and the ABM agreement. Though detente played a major role in the seventies, it could not reach a point where a conflict
situation could have been ruled out. Because, both sides remained sceptical about each other and it seemed that certain elements of antagonism still remained latent in their bilateral relations.

Both the Soviet Union and the USA found it (detente) necessary for consolidating their respective positions vis-a-vis each other. Both sides had anticipated certain gains out of it. For example, the Soviet Union wanted Western technology to safeguard their influence, while the US wanted to use detente as a cover-up for the elimination of the Soviet influence. Admittedly, this was a conflicting situation which eroded the very basis of detente.

In fact, by the middle of the seventies, the American disenchantment began. The Americans viewed this period as a tragic sell-out of US interest in the pursuit of an illusionary goal of accommodation with the Soviet Union, permitting Soviet military build up. One of the reasons why the Americans were not comfortable with detente was that they had deep rooted antipathy toward the Soviet Union and could not accept parity with the Soviet Union. This, however, was further encouraged by a carefully orchestrated campaign designed to alarm the Americans about detente being a one-way street in Moscow's favour.

The SALT-II treaty was understandably one of the most important attempts to regulate strategic arms race and reduce tensions between the Soviet Union and the US. It was, in
fact, not SALT that really mattered, it was peace that was really important. And it was precisely for this reason that some of the observers had even hoped that SALT would usher in a new era of Soviet-US cooperation which would do away with 'military rivalry'. The SALT negotiations were, however, accompanied by intense debates - whether to ratify this treaty or oppose it. Much to the astonishment of those observers, the number of statesman in the American camp opposing the signing of the treaty had increased considerably. They viewed it as one-sided in favour of the Soviet Union which they described as an "imperial expansionist power". The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 furnished them a heaven sent opportunity to vindicate their opposition. Thus, the SALT II treaty could not be ratified.

Undoubtedly, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan came as a final blow to detente. With this development one phase of Soviet-US relations was over. The US viewed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a 'military invasion' - the greatest threat to peace. However, it would be wrong to suggest that the Afghanistan crisis was solely a Soviet creation. While the US had left no stone unturned to overthrow the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan, in fact, Washington had acknowledged US involvement in aggravating the situation in Afghanistan.
The Soviet intervention was believed to be an assertion of the Soviet Union's reaction against the American global power which supposedly posed a challenge to the US status of being a super power. To some analysts, the US superiority in some spheres had been lost to the Soviet Union, especially given that the US had always dealt with the Soviet Union as the junior super power. The Soviet Union was charged with 'misbehaving and carrying out expansionist, aggressive policies in the Third World'. But actually, the fact is that the Soviet Union was then behaving, to some extent, in the manner Americans had often acted. Yet, in order to control Soviet expansionism, the US reasserted its influence of superiority. Of course, Soviet policy did play its part in worsening the international climate.

In order to reassert its superiority, the USA launched a much controversial "Star Wars" (SDI) programme. The programme primarily involved the relationship between the Soviet Union and the US. The Americans always believed that their strategic superiority over the Soviets was the best guarantee for security and the best way to remain 'number one'. In this sense, it was also an expression of American technological superiority - a typical American way of technological solution to political problems. The Reagan Administration had entered the office with a goal of reasserting American pre-eminence which he believed had got eroded during the era of detente. However, the Reagan phenomenon was primarily a result of the correlation of
forces comprising of new conservatives, dedicated opponents of detente and arms control and disgruntled elements of national security, aiming at the reassertion of the atmosphere of Cold War. Reagan was just speaking their language - the language of military combat. The Reagan phenomenon, therefore, had ultimately intensified the process of the politicization of military thinking and in turn leading to the militarisation of the very international political process.

The real motive behind the SDI programme had been to "cripple the Soviet economy and bring about the collapse of the Soviet system within", by dragging them to a highly expensive arms race. The USA succeeded in their motive and the USSR fell victim to this design.

This, then was the trend of the relations between the two superpowers during this crucial period of international history. In a way, it moulded the events for the 80's. The Soviets, because of the Afghan intervention and spiralling arms race, overextended themselves in the military sphere, while neglecting other crucial sectors of their economy. This militarization was disastrous for both the Soviet economy and the social consciousness. Since all problems of the Soviet society were bottled up, the political and economic space had been occupied by militarism.