

FROM KANSAS TO THE KREMLIN:
RICHARD NIXON, PRESIDENTIAL PERSUASION, AND THE SELLING OF DÉTENTE
AT HOME AND ABROAD

by

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Abstract:

From Kansas to the Kremlin investigates Richard Nixon's unique use of presidential persuasion powers through informal diplomacy. This paper seeks to reconsider contemporary thought surrounding Richard Nixon as an American president. As divisive political figure, Nixon persists in historical scholarship as an awkward, unsure, and insecure politician. However, Nixon persuaded the Soviet Union to sign two bilateral arms agreements, and got a Democratic congress to support him, which conveyed his strength in the powers of persuasion. His predecessors struggled to do what Nixon did. How did Nixon's personality and deep knowledge of his political role allow him to come out on top? As this paper will reveal, his personality, prior political experience, and use of alternative forms of diplomacy was central to his success in the domestic and foreign spheres.

Introduction:

On January 25th, 1972, President Richard Nixon received a curt, irritated, and temperamental letter from the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, after they disagreed on matters regarding the war in Vietnam.¹ Though harsh rhetoric was typical of Soviet foreign policy, the abruptness of Brezhnev's communication had Richard Nixon questioning the fast-approaching 1972 US-Soviet Summit in Moscow. Two imperative bilateral arms agreements were on the docket, and a friendship with the Soviet leader seemed impossible to Richard Nixon after receiving this letter.

The President and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger pushed their luck. Four months later, on May 22nd, 1972, during United States-Soviet Union Summit, Brezhnev expressed interest in creating and maintaining a personal relationship with Richard Nixon—one

¹ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 586.

full of cordiality and warmth. The President responded, “That is the kind of relationship that I should like to establish with the General Secretary.”² While in the car on the way to the General Secretary’s dacha in Zaechye, a rural area outside of Moscow, Leonid Brezhnev “put his hand on my [Nixon’s] knee and said he hoped we had developed a good personal relationship.” Further, Brezhnev told Nixon “God be with you,” and called him, “the present President and the future President.”³ This is intimate. Though he sent a testy letter, Brezhnev was true to his word—he wanted an earnest, kind friendship with Nixon. Two world leaders, representing countries that were engaged in a decades-long feud, forming a friendship could have never been predicted.

However, this is incredibly jarring for contemporary figures. Richard Nixon is portrayed as an awkward, insecure, and unsettling American politician. In a 2015 article by writer Evan Thomas, he wrote that Nixon is “often remembered as a brooding, vengeful, and almost cartoonish figure.”⁴ Editor David Frum published a piece in 2017 called “1960s Awkward Richard Nixon” under the headline “Cringe”, calling his 1960 presidential debate with John F. Kennedy “the saddest moment in televised presidential debate history” and “excruciating.”⁵ For writers who remember Nixon as an “awkward American icon”, Nixon’s capabilities as President are overlooked.⁶

This paper changes the conversations that surround Richard Nixon’s personality. His presidency is often maintained by scholars as the exception to the traditional presidential norm, citing his unorthodox Cold War foreign policy, interpretation of presidential authority and power, or bold willingness to violate legal codes for a political career. Nixon’s presidential

² Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 610.

³ *Ibid.*, 620.

⁴ Evan Thomas, “The Complexity of Being Richard Nixon,” *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2015, Top of Page.

⁵ David Frum, “1960s Awkward Richard Nixon,” *The Daily Beast*, April 21, 2017, Top of Page.

⁶ “Awkward American Icon” is a portion of Katelyn Fossett’s article from Politico. Katelyn Fossett, “Richard Nixon, awkward American icon,” *Politico Magazine*, April 21, 2014.

actions are not the sole subject of scrutiny—his personality is also included. He is known to be a politician who disliked people, a public man who could not be vulnerable, was elusive, and made his innermost feelings “almost totally inaccessible.”⁷ Nixon was once the most-respected and the most-loathed American.⁸ In light of this commentary, how did Nixon effectively persuade others? Combined with his personal success—entering American politics in 1946 as a freshman in Congress then becoming Vice President of the United States in six years—Nixon found a way to achieve various political goals that many viewed, and thought, were impossible for him. From getting hardliners in his own political party to support his thaw of relations with the Soviet Union and finessing legislative success with a Democratic congress, Nixon, though detested, was an effective president. Perhaps, our perception of Richard Nixon is incorrect. His ability to convince political antagonists showed his deft understanding of the American political system and presidential abilities.

This thesis will investigate how Nixon used his personality to secure domestic congressional support and pursue a thaw of tensions with the Soviet Union. Richard Nixon learned the ultimate presidential power, persuasion, as a young politician. He created his own version of presidential persuasion during his time as president, marked by informal diplomacy. Though scholarship asserts that he is a two-fold figure, there is only one Richard Nixon—a deft risk taker. This is not to excuse criticism against Nixon; this paper merely explains how an “awkward American icon” strategically used the powers of the presidency to relax tensions with the Soviet Union—something that not even the most charismatic presidents before him could do.

⁷ Paul Johnson, “In Praise of Richard Nixon,” *Commentary* (Fall 1988): 50 as cited in David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003): xvii.

⁸ David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), xviii.

The United States presidency is complex. When we think about what historian and political activist, Arthur Schlesinger, calls the “imperial presidency”, the assumption is made that presidents have more flexibility and autonomy in the foreign sphere than in the domestic. While there are limitations of domestic presidential power through checks and balances, this assumption harbors the understanding about presidential power regarding foreign policy. It is important to consider *what* presidential power is, and *how* it is used in various ways. The president’s greatest power, as distinguished presidential scholar Richard Neustadt eloquently states, “presidential power is the power to persuade.”⁹ As he explains, the status of the presidency, along with its authority, provide the individual with power to bargain, to persuade.¹⁰ Through Neustadt’s framing and analysis, the President of the United States enjoys a vast amount of autonomy regarding how, when, and who to persuade. Each president employs different tactics, emphasizing individuality in a seemingly binding role.

Richard Nixon learned this lesson during his time as Vice President of the United States under Dwight D. Eisenhower. This role does not have the same level of power that the president does, but it holds same autonomy and ambiguity. As scholar Joel Goldstein asserts, the vice president and its role depend greatly on the administration, the people, and their influence.¹¹ The flexibility of the office allows individuals to center the vice presidency around themselves, much like the presidency. This role has seen many individuals obtain the presidency, signaling that there is continuing education of presidential powers while serving in this role. Between 1952-

⁹ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Powers and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹ Joel K. Goldstein, “The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Volume 38 (September 2008): 375.

1976, each vice president was a presidential candidate, omitting Spiro Agnew.¹² Thus, vice presidents have an eminent understanding of the presidential system and its underlying powers.

This paper will put the domestic and foreign aspects of the presidency in one analytical frame. I argue that this framework displays the impact of the domestic sphere on the foreign, and vice-versa. Since the 1890s, presidents and White House officials have conducted foreign policy on a case-by-case or moment-by-moment basis and decisions were influenced by perceptions of domestic politics, and vice versa. Francis Bator, former President Lyndon B. Johnson's National Security Advisor, asserted that without considering the various domestic efforts Johnson was trying to push through Congress, such as voting rights, Medicare, and proposals for the Great Society, it was difficult to understand President Johnson's choices in Vietnam.¹³ Bator emphasized the importance of considering the domestic and foreign sphere as one unit—not two isolated sectors. While severance of the two allows for rich analysis, it places limitations and obscures interactions between the two. Further, one frame aids awareness in how presidents approach challenges. Richard Nixon's endeavor to thaw relations with the Soviet Union was no different. He sought support for the relaxation from two groups that indirectly influenced each other: Leonid Brezhnev and Soviet officials (1) and his congressional allies (2).

I bridge the domestic and foreign policy gap by investigating how Richard Nixon's personality and personal relationships gave validity to his specific approach and use of presidential persuasion—informal, or also known as backchannel, diplomacy. While backchannel diplomacy is not specific to Richard Nixon, he did promptly make it a defining

¹² Joel K. Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Volume 38 (September 2008): 376.

¹³ Francis M. Bator, "No Good Choices: LBJ and the Vietnam/Great Society Connection," *Diplomatic History* Volume 32 (June 2008): 313. See also Mark A. Lawrence and Mark K. Updegrove, *LBJ's America: The Life and Legacies of Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

characteristic of his approach. Through investigating his knowledge and experience gained during his vice presidency with a Kansas Republican, his friendship with another Kansas Republican in the Senate, and selling of relaxed tensions to a Democratic congress and the Soviet Union, Richard Nixon's effectiveness as President of the United States will disprove the perception of him as a 'two-fold' character. Furthermore, focusing on his interpersonal relationships and how he used such helps understanding of how a thaw of relations was possible.

Contextualizing the American Presidency:

Presidential personalities impacting foreign policy choices occurred before Nixon's time as president, and he witnessed such. After the end of World War II, it was Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union that decided the future of Europe. There were two competing ideologies for governmental systems and unsureness about the future. The allies, including China, were tasked with keeping peace and stability throughout the international order. Within the United States, former President Frank D. Roosevelt shifted American foreign policy away from isolationism and toward internationalism.

Roosevelt had an abundance of steadfast confidence. He had a knack for reading people, including political figures. He deduced that the Soviets were desperate to prevent another German invasion that costed mass casualties. Furthermore, Roosevelt's levelheaded personality made talks with the Allied powers easy. He never anxiously read between the lines for ulterior motives with the Soviets, and his confidence came from the success of his New Deal programs, Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America, and shift away from isolationism.¹⁴ During postwar talks, Roosevelt advocated for open-minded, tolerant discussions of foreign policies that

¹⁴ Frank Costigliola, "Personal Dynamics and Presidential Transition," in *Recapturing the Oval Office*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Brian Balogh (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015): 37 and 39.

lacked emotionally charged rhetoric. Roosevelt emphasized the importance of personal relationships because it would keep the alliance strong against weaker nations.¹⁵ His personality and emotional intelligence was how he used the power of persuasion and found political success. A young Richard Nixon was working for the Office of Price Administration and witnessed how Roosevelt's personality impacted United States foreign policy.

Historians explain that after Roosevelt's sudden death in 1945, Harry Truman was concerned with proving that he was fit to be the new president. Roosevelt was known as a collected and confident President—the new president was noticeably none of these qualities. Truman had many traits that mirrored an older Richard Nixon. He was insecure, felt comfortable in spaces where his closest friends were present, and hid behind the same mask Nixon did: proud, brash, and bold. Truman was told by W. Averell Harriman, former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, that the Soviets did not know limits or boundaries, to view them as “international criminals”, and to “teach them how to behave.”¹⁶ It was during Truman's administration that the tensions between the US and USSR came to fruition. He endorsed the use of the atomic bomb and created military alliances. Furthermore, in 1947, President Harry Truman outlined his foreign policy approach in the form of the Truman Doctrine where the United States, along with the North American Treaty Alliance (NATO), dedicated themselves to multilateralism and the spread of western democracy.¹⁷ This doctrine impacted arms agreements

¹⁵ Frank Costigliola, “Personal Dynamics and Presidential Transition,” in *Recapturing the Oval Office*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Brian Balogh (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015): 40.

¹⁶ William E. Pemberton, Harry S. Truman: *Fair Dealer and Cold Warrior* (Boston: Twayne, 1989): 44, referenced by Frank Costigliola, “Personal Dynamics and Presidential Transition,” in *Recapturing the Oval Office*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Brian Balogh (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015): 49.

¹⁷ “The President and the National Security State during the Cold War,” The University of Virginia/Miller Center, accessed 1 April 2024, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/teacher-resources/recasting-presidential-history/president-and-national-security-state-during-cold-war>

until Nixon takes office in 1969. Truman's insecurity caused him to be transactional in nature, relying on his advisors and ambassadors to communicate pressing issues and make decisions.

Former President John F. Kennedy's first year as President was dominated by foreign and domestic policy. Kennedy experienced the "domestic politics of foreign policymaking" because of the continuation of McCarthyism (domestic) and rise of Chinese Communism (foreign).¹⁸ He never established a firm National Security strategy, instead choosing to stockpile defense programs and act as his own Secretary of State. Furthermore, his bureaucracy was a "ministry of talent" with "action-oriented, pragmatic policymakers."¹⁹ Kennedy's younger brother, Robert Kennedy, Attorney General and confidant, encompassed the driven, realist policymaker that was needed. John leaned on his brother for personal and political reasons, and the two laid the foundation for Nixon's later success. Kennedy used informal diplomacy through using a backchannel communication system to resolve tensions and created a personal "pen-pal" relationship with General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev.²⁰ This was how Kennedy ended the Cuban Missile Crisis—informal diplomacy was a strong tactic.

During his first year, the United States endured traumatic situations with Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba. In 1961, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 called Kennedy's lack of national security strategy into question. Robert Kennedy negotiated a deal with Anatoly Dobrynin, Ambassador of the Soviet Union to the United States, and Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary, that triggered de-escalation. Khrushchev's personal relationship with the president gave him willingness to trust American guidance and advice.²¹ This

¹⁸ Marc Selverstone, "Epic Misadventure: John F. Kennedy's first-year foreign policy stumbles taught hard-earned lessons," *First Year: Where the Next President Begins* Volume 2 (2017): 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ Marc Selverstone, "Epic Misadventure: John F. Kennedy's first-year foreign policy stumbles taught hard-earned lessons," *First Year: Where the Next President Begins* Volume 2 (2017): 5.

²¹ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Lincoln: Potomac Publishing/University of Nebraska, 2012), 7-8.

diplomacy, including the informal aspects, was coined as “flexible response” where it was recognized that foreign policy did not necessarily need to be controlled or influenced by domestic institutions.²² However, ‘flexible response’ endorsed the isolation of foreign policy. Presidents could intentionally leave out domestic institutions that were vital to foreign affairs, such as the Department of State and Congress.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States dedicated itself to addressing the arms race and limiting nuclear capacities. Kennedy carried Truman’s multilateral approach through with the endorsement of the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. American historian Ronald Powaski details the intention behind this agreement, explaining that the United States hoped that the agreement would establish a foundation for future treaties with countries to reduce the chance of nuclear war and proliferation.²³ He further explains that the progress made toward a nuclear test ban treaty during the first two years of Kennedy’s term was invalidated by the president’s choices in Cuba.²⁴ The US, faced with this, pushed forward. Despite backchannel talks, the Soviets rejected multiple forms of these agreements. When General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev took power, he expressed his dedication to preventing another world war. However, as scholar David Tal explains, Leonid Brezhnev’s choice to invade Czechoslovakia in summer 1968, gave the US enough reasoning to halt talks²⁵. Now, it was the United States who refused to engage.

Much of Richard Nixon’s early political career was defined by the complex relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. The power of the President was changing quickly, and presidents were using different institutions in their foreign policy approaches. Nixon

²² Marc Selverstone, “Epic Misadventure: John F. Kennedy’s first-year foreign policy stumbles taught hard-earned lessons,” *First Year: Where the Next President Begins* Volume 2 (2017): 6.

²³ Ronald E. Powaski, *March to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1939-present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 107.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁵ David Tal, “Absolutes and “Stages” in the Making and Application of Nixon’s SALT Policy,” *Diplomatic History* Volume 37 (November 2013): 1092.

was a member of Congress when National Security Council (NSC), National Security Agency (NSA), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were created in 1947.²⁶ Rhetoric regarding Communism and the Soviet Union produced Nixon's anticommunist attitude. Further, the Republican party was fragmenting on the issue of how foreign policy ought to be conducted.

Richard Nixon came to the office of the presidency with a detailed understanding of this diplomatic baggage. With his bold personality, Nixon wanted to take a different approach. Nixon was a strategic risk taker—an alternative method of diplomacy was essential to his form of affairs. Understanding the logic and tactics used by Nixon's predecessors is imperative in measuring Nixon's effectiveness as president—did he do more or less? Further, was Nixon a case of personality (Roosevelt), advisor influence and insecurity (Truman), or usage of various forms of diplomacy (Kennedy)? Perhaps, he is, in fact, all three cases, combined with the Eisenhower administration, where Nixon grew in his abilities. Through this analysis, it contributes to a deeper historical and political understanding of various forms of diplomacy that leaders employ to achieve political aims.

From California to the Capitol: Richard Nixon's Early Political Experience

Richard Nixon's humble beginnings shaped his personality, his view of politics, and his approach to the presidency. He was born in Yorba Linda, California, a place he describes as "idyllic" because of the "rich scent of orange blossoms" and "glimpses of the Pacific Ocean to the west, the San Bernardino Mountains to the north."²⁷ His father had a knack for politics, which stayed with young Richard. Educated at Whittier College and Duke University School of Law, instead of Harvard and Yale where his colleagues graduated, he was a well-read individual

²⁶ "The President and the National Security State during the Cold War," The University of Virginia/Miller Center, accessed 1 April 2024, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/teacher-resources/recasting-presidential-history/president-and-national-security-state-during-cold-war>

²⁷ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 3.

who took his education seriously. While achieving good grades and keeping his scholarships, Nixon participated in extracurriculars. At Whittier, he was active in the social club called the Franklin Society, college debate, and sports. At Duke, he was a member of Duke's law review, worked in the law library, and was president of the Student Bar Association.²⁸ His former Aides stress his intellect. He had a hunger to learn more about the world, the people, the setting he was in, and the history of different subjects that provided him with immeasurable knowledge.²⁹

When Nixon campaigned for the House of Representatives in 1946, he sought to represent the 'common' American—not the elite. Unlike the Roosevelt or Kennedy families that had generational success in achieving American political office, Nixon's campaigns took grit and dedication. Nixon felt there was a corruption issue in the federal government, that communism was threatening American democracy, and that governmental intervention in the lives of Americans had reached a dangerous level. Political scientist Michael Riccards explains that Nixon used anti-communism to "climb his way to the top of the political pyramid."³⁰ He was selected to serve on the prosecution of the Alger Hiss case two years into his political carrier. This case changed how Americans viewed communism because of the betrayal by Hiss and provided Nixon with the opportunity to demonstrate his strength as an attorney and his anti-communist. The prosecution found Hiss guilty of perjury and exposed him for being a Soviet spy in January 1950. Nixon was quickly building his reputation.

During the 1952 presidential campaign, Dwight D. Eisenhower had many odds pitted against him. First, the election took place during the peak of Joseph McCarthy's popularity.

²⁸ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 17, 19 (for Whittier extracurriculars), and 21 (for Duke School of Law involvement.)

²⁹ "Nixon and the Democratic Congress," CSPAN, accessed 23 October, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?444761-1/richard-nixon-democratic-congress>

³⁰ Michael P. Riccards, "Richard Nixon and the American Political Tradition," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Volume 23 (Fall 1993), 741.

Considering the expose of Alger Hiss, McCarthy dedicated himself to exposing communists in the State Department, and the American public was filled with anxiety and fear of potential betrayal. Anticommunist traits, ones like McCarthy had, were important to American voters because there was a desire to avoid betrayal and continuously build US nationalism. Second, Eisenhower ran against isolationist Robert Taft, who was known for his opposition to NATO, the United Nations, and overall foreign contact because of the threat posed by communism. Eisenhower, in comparison, was not devoted to anticommunism in the same way of Taft or McCarthy. He was notably moderate—realistic and pragmatic while remaining fairly anticommunist. To stand a chance with American voters and against anticommunists, Eisenhower needed a dedicated anti-communist to strengthen his campaign. Richard Nixon was the poster of an anticommunist, yet a moderate politician that represented his views. The performance of the young politician on the Hiss case persuaded Eisenhower to make him his running mate. This was strategic because it illustrated the Eisenhower's dedication to an anticommunist agenda. Nixon was a vital part of Eisenhower's eventual election win in November 1952, and Eisenhower's persuasion tactic.



Figure: From left to right, Richard Nixon, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Republican National Committee Chairman Arthur Summerfield at the Republican National Convention in July 1952. Courtesy of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

Once elected, Eisenhower wanted to address atomic power, but a challenge arose. To pursue atomic peace, the US needed to interact with the Soviet Union, as they posed the greatest threat—how was Eisenhower supposed to do such a thing after he got elected with a staunch anticommunist as his running mate? Would he not be labeled a hypocrite? He needed to formulate creative ways to persuade the anticommunist hardliners that interactions with competing ideological powers was not inherently harmful. He wrote in his presidential diary that “long patient negotiations, understanding, and equality of treatment will have to be used” because “we cannot expect that it will be accepted unless we convince others by persuasion and example.”³¹

Though presidential power is the power and ability to persuade, the power itself must originate somewhere. Richard Neustadt explains that the continuation of personal relationships stimulates power growth for the President.³² Eisenhower did this in various ways, but primarily, it was through his tactics used to influence those around him. Eisenhower expected everyone to contribute fairly, and equally—he loved to cold call during meetings. He wanted people to listen, and in turn, he would return the favor.³³ He needed various ideas, but he also wanted to share his own. His confidence in interpersonal skills and delegation, caused by his military background, served well. Eisenhower was organized; officials knew that he met with legislative leaders on Mondays, held press conferences and met with the NSC on Wednesdays, and cabinet meetings on Fridays.³⁴ Richard Nixon was present at all of these. He made it a priority to be present for

³¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Diary Entry, 6 January 1953, Box 1, DDE Diary Series, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

³² Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Powers and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 49.

³³ Irwin F. Gellman, *The President and the Apprentice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015): 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

important political events and policymaking meetings and observed how Eisenhower conducted business—individuals advocated for issues they believed to be important, not what their respective departments believed.³⁵ While Richard Nixon observed how Eisenhower conducted business, he gradually began formulating his own view of presidential persuasion.

To achieve his aim of atomic peace, Eisenhower employed personal diplomacy through his 1956 People-to-People program. He cited that world peace was a “terrific force” that would “change the spirit that had characterized intergovernmental relations of the world during the previous ten years.”³⁶ As historian Glen Leppert noted, the People-to-People initiative was the useful and effective way to dismantle the Cold War.³⁷ Eisenhower persuaded people domestically and internationally through writing letters to various international leaders, setting up one-on-one meetings with visiting figures, stressed the importance of changing perceptions on communism, and embarking on four “goodwill tours selling as it were good will, [and] peace and understanding.”³⁸ The People-to-People initiative mirrored Richard Nixon’s later doctrine that promoted a “structure of peace”, Eisenhower’s personal diplomacy influenced Nixon’s interactions with people, the 1972 and 1973 Soviet Summits mirrored the “good will tours.”

While the President was working to create the foundation for People-to-People, Richard Nixon was learning how to conduct foreign policy. There were two international campaigns that were fundamental to Nixon’s cultivation of confidence in diplomacy: the 1953 trip to Asia and

³⁵ Ashley Neale “Restructuring the National Security State: President Richard M. Nixon, the War in Vietnam, and Executive Reorganization,” (University of Kansas, 2020): 65-66 with citation of Irwin F. Gellman, *The President and the Apprentice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

³⁶ Glenn W. Leppert, “Dwight D. Eisenhower and People-To-People As An Experiment in Personal Diplomacy: A Missing Element for Understanding Eisenhower’s Second Term as President,” (Kansas State University, 2003): 28 with citation to Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1955*, #161 “Radio and Television Address to the American People Prior to Departure for the Big Four Conference at Geneva, July 15, 1955,” 701.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 with citation to Merriman Smith, *A President’s Odyssey* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), xi.

the 1959 visit to the Soviet Union. Nixon had not been overseas since his naval service during World War II in various South Pacific nations, such as New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea.³⁹ Now older and in a different position, Nixon's overseas campaigns taught him how to persuade and interact with international figures outside of the United States.

Nixon's 1953 trip to Asia included thirteen countries, beginning in New Zealand, and ending in Iran. This experience was a landmark moment in Nixon's vice presidency because he learned how to conduct foreign policy with figures and in regions that were unfamiliar to him. Richard Nixon represented the United States—he was attending dinners, conducting meetings with leaders, and was seen publicly doing such. Nixon told the State Department to pack his schedule with meetings that included different kinds of people; he listed businessmen, students, farmers, military figures, laborers, and politicians. When the State Department pushed back, he told them he would take it upon himself to organize the meetings if his request was not fulfilled.⁴⁰ Nixon's desire to interact with different kinds of people shows his interest in personal relationships. The Ambassador to Saigon, Donald Heath, reported that the trip was paramount in the relations between Vietnam and United States, and Nixon's "tireless and sincere interest, and friendliness in meeting people of all walks of life made a definitely good impression."⁴¹

It was Nixon's 1959 trip to the Soviet Union that solidified his strength and knowledge of the presidency. Eisenhower's health began to decline, and upon a recommendation from the United States Information Agency, he agreed to send Nixon to the Soviet Union for the American National Exhibition. The intention behind the exhibit was for the Soviet citizens, including governmental figures, to learn about various aspects of American life to cultivate

³⁹ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴¹ Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952-1954, Indochina, Volume XIII, Part 1, "Telegram from the Ambassador at Saigon (Heath) to the Department of State," 857.

understanding. Nixon remembered the heavy amount of briefing done by Eisenhower before he left, citing that he "read everything I could find about the Soviet Union and its peoples...I spent several evenings learning Russian words and phrases."⁴² Furthermore, Eisenhower suggested a "cordial, almost light atmosphere" for discussions.⁴³ Further, Nixon was advised to "not be afraid to talk substantive matters and to be positive with the Soviets" and communicate that the American perspective of the Soviet Union had.⁴⁴

Despite Nixon's firm understanding of US-Soviet baggage and intense briefing, he wanted to be bold and known. He made the prior decision to debate Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev rarely invited international figures to the Soviet Union, and those who did visit reached the consensus that he was a bully.⁴⁵ On July 24, 1959, Nixon and Khrushchev visited the American National Exhibition in Moscow and found themselves in an American kitchen exhibit. Khrushchev had a long history of promoting Soviet technology, stressing that it had more capability than American versions. Additionally, recall Neustadt's explanation of how presidential persuasion power comes with stimulation of personal relationships—Nixon did this during the Kitchen Debate. He cracked jokes with Khrushchev to provide the light atmosphere where friendships could form. Both Nixon and Khrushchev exchanged laughs, gestured grandly, then reengaged in a serious tone.⁴⁶ This showed Khrushchev that while Nixon is a political leader capable of discussing pressing topics, he could be jovial as well.

Nixon learned two key aspects to negotiating with the Soviets during his 1959 trip. First, patience was a virtue. Despite Khrushchev's intensity at times, Nixon remained calm, open, and

⁴² FRUS, 1952-1954, Indochina, Volume XIII, Part 1, "Telegram from the Ambassador at Saigon (Heath) to the Department of State," 857.

⁴³ FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume X, Part 1, Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus, Document 93, 332.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 203.

⁴⁶ "The Kitchen Debate," Richard Nixon Foundation, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/1959/09/the-kitchen-debate/>

even cheerful. He told Chairman Voroshilov, the President of the Soviet Union, that it was vital not to put pressure on the other and patience was key, because “it is possible to be friends and argue at the same time, but arguing must with done with words rather than fists.”⁴⁷ This was a reflection on Eisenhower’s perspective on talks with the Soviets. Further, Nixon drew upon his briefings, but was not afraid to make political moves. His ability to engage in a ‘push and pull’ shows his effectiveness as a diplomat and leader. It made those around him willing to engage.

Second, Nixon gained experience in how the Soviets communicated, conducted diplomacy, and approached political affairs. However, while Khrushchev joked with the vice president, he tested how flexible Nixon could be. He challenged Nixon’s ability to adapt, constantly pressing the vice president to discuss nuclear arms and Soviet capabilities at every turn. Nixon switched communication tactics repeatedly. For example, while debating respective technologies, Nixon refined the conversation by suggesting a discussion of mutual respect for innovations, rather than one with undertones of superiority.⁴⁸ Nixon made a decision that reflected on his knowledge of open, cordial atmospheres. Stimulating a relationship with the USSR was important to continuing discussions to prevent a communication stalemate.

Vice President Nixon made important advances as a diplomat in the foreign sphere and was successful at developing relationships in domestic politics. Due to his inquisitive nature, Nixon made the noticeable effort to be incredibly hands-on with Eisenhower and his government. In the Presidential Diary on May 14, 1953, Nixon was listed as a younger figure vital to Eisenhower administration.⁴⁹ Nixon possessed an admirable desire for knowledge,

⁴⁷ FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume X, Part 1, Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus, Document 94, 335. Do note that Chairman of the Soviet Union and General Secretary are different.

⁴⁸ Irwin F. Gellman, *The President and the Apprentice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015): 523-524.

⁴⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Diary Entry, 14 May 1953, Box 1, DDE Diaries Series, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

including information on each political role he held. On January 20, 1957, *Evening Star Magazine* detailed how Nixon asked the Library of Congress about what the public thought about the role of the vice presidency. He obtained four typewritten pages from Louis Clinton Hatch's book, *A History of the Vice Presidency of the United States* and found these so intriguing that he brought them to dinner that night.⁵⁰ The eagerness Nixon exuded for new information was endearing and commendable. His visible presence and effort were important to securing future political office.

Nixon's relationship with members of Congress was imperative and vital to his later success. Having been served in Congress before, Richard Nixon was not unfamiliar with the culture of the Capitol. During his vice presidency, he did not have an office at the White House—the vice president's office remained on Capitol Hill until 1977 owing to the fact that the vice president was the President of the Senate.⁵¹ In the eight years he served in this role, he broke eight ties in the Senate, including two in 1953—his first year.⁵² Nixon's contact with members of Congress was consistent throughout the Eisenhower Administration, becoming a familiar face to many, and maintaining his role as a powerful Republican.

Nixon, having learned that the power of the president is to persuade, began observing ways to stimulate Republicans loyalty. Forming new alliances is no easy task, but the young, charismatic vice president was eager for the challenge. Knowing that there was a conservative coalition in his own party, Nixon reflected in a similar fashion to a president: creative ways and diplomatic tactics were going to be necessary to stimulate relationships with not only his allies to

⁵⁰ *Evening Star Magazine*, January 20th, 1957, 8.

⁵¹ "Nixon and a Democratic Congress," CSPAN/Richard Nixon Foundation, accessed 3 October 2023, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?444761-1/richard-nixon-democratic-congress>

⁵² "Occasions when Vice Presidents Have Voted To Break the Votes in the Senate," United States Senate, accessed 3 April 2023, www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/VPTies.pdf.

ensure support, but his foes. Once he secured personal relationships, presidential persuasion would naturally occur. Or so Nixon thought.

The function of political systems, notably in a democracy, occurs beyond the formal structure of institutions. There are innumerable examples of politicians using quid-pro-quo to advance personal aims, compromise and consensus-building are crucial parts of how American politics truly works. Richard Nixon, as did other politicians, spent much of his time and energy learning how to persuade and convince his political opponents—whether they be foreign leaders or Congressional foes. It is difficult to distinguish between what is considered ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ diplomacy because of subjectivity, so framing these practices in context is vital.⁵³ Traditionally, ‘formal’ diplomacy consists of formal meetings, summits, or visits, along with policy statements and public communication. In 1981, long after Richard Nixon had left politics, political psychologists William D. Davidson and Joseph Montville refined theories surrounding political persuasion into what they called “track-one diplomacy” and “track-two” diplomacy.⁵⁴ The latter is defined as “unofficial, nonstructured interaction...open minded...altruistic and...strategically optimistic.”⁵⁵ Informal diplomacy emerges in many forms, such as ‘secret’ talks (backchannel correspondence), gift-giving, holding meetings in alternative settings that seek to promote more sociability (such as the presidential yacht). As Nixon once stated, “there have been more backchannel games played in this administration than any in history because of we couldn’t trust the God damned State Department.”⁵⁶ While this quote is quite brash, it

⁵³ For clarity, ‘informal’, ‘backchannel’ and ‘track two’ will all be used interchangeably; ‘formal’ and ‘track one’ will also be homogenous.

⁵⁴ William D. Davidson and Joseph V. Montville, “Foreign Policy According to Freud,” *Foreign Policy* No. 45 (1981): 154.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁶ The Nixon Tapes, Conversation 308-313, National Archives, Nixon Presidential Material, White House Tapes, in FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume II, Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1969-1972, Document 29, page 68.

conveyed the length that Nixon went to employ backchannel diplomacy. He was the president, presidential persuasion is ambiguous, and circumventing the State Department for a backchannel space was part of his persuasion method.

Prior to and during Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign, the American hold on global hegemony cracked. As the Vietnam War continued, it was a major source domestic discontent. Historian David Farber writes that social unrest from the sixties that eventually erupted in 1968, represented a push from protesters toward "the government of the United States being returned to the People."⁵⁷ Furthermore, foreign relations scholar Jeremi Suri writes that the message and effort that Farber described gained traction international awareness, group interaction, and literacy as the key factors in societal dissent spreading quickly.⁵⁸ The main forces behind societal change were members of the younger generation who demanded action from the federal government, many of them college students. The US, shaken by transformative changes, faced a new era in the international system where it had to assume the role of the 'dependent' and abandon the role of the 'provider'.⁵⁹

Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey, Vice President to Lyndon B. Johnson, in the 1968 presidential election and inherited the unstable political system. Furthermore, Vietnam became his war, not Lyndon B. Johnson's. Nixon's priority was to find a way out. Previous administrations, such as Eisenhower and Kennedy, were involved in Vietnam to flex their anticommunist muscles, until intervention became an undeniable part of American policy toward Vietnam in the early 1960s. Nixon attempted to continue the interventionist policy in April and May 1970 with the decision to invade Cambodia. J. W. Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate

⁵⁷ David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): xv.

⁵⁸ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 92.

⁵⁹ Thomas Borstellman, *The 1970s: A New Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

Foreign Relations Committee, urged Nixon to consider the domestic implications, and cited that such an action would cause a “a disaster of great proportions to American foreign policy in Asia...[and] would induce a wave of recrimination at home...culminating in a disaster to American democracy.”⁶⁰ Through Vietnam, two aspects were apparent. First, the foreign and domestic spheres directly impact the other. Second, intervention increased tensions, conflict, and fostered negative relations instead of much-desired stability.⁶¹ Nixon shifted his foreign policy approach and looked toward a relaxation of tensions with the Soviets that emphasized cordiality and communication—known to history as *détente*.

‘*Détente*’ is an extremely debated term in historical scholarship. Literally, *détente* translates from French to “relaxation of tensions.” However, the true meaning of ‘*détente*’ is ambiguous. Many Cold War historians have attempted to define the concept and have labelled various historic moments as ‘*détentes*.’ The cause of historical discourse traces back to the differing conceptions of what *Détente* is, how it is used, and who participates. Truthfully, if tensions are being ‘relaxed’ (by an objective definition), it is considered a *détente*. For the sake of clarity, this paper specifically investigates the well-known *Détente* between the United States and the Soviet Union between 1969 and 1973, and the relaxation of tensions will be referred to as *Détente*. It is important to note, however, that the labelling of this historical moment came only after the event occurred. The US-Soviet *détente* was not supposed to be an isolated instance.

Richard Nixon was committed to his doctrine—a structure of peace. Under this policy, the United States was to avoid nuclear confrontations, remain faithful to promises made in

⁶⁰ Richard Halloran, “Fulbright, Fearing a ‘Disaster’, Urges Nixon to End War This Year,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1970, pg. 11.

⁶¹ Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

treaties, and cautiously consider military and economic assistance before providing.⁶² Furthermore, Nixon and Dr. Henry Kissinger, his National Security Advisor and a scholar of foreign relations, felt that Détente was an appropriate way to approach and negotiate with the Soviet Union because it emphasized reaching a shared perspective. Kissinger explained that détente was “the search for a more constructive relationship...It is a continuing process, not a final condition.”⁶³ The former president reflected stated, “All we can hope from détente is that it will minimize confrontation in marginal areas and provide...alternative possibilities in the major ones.”⁶⁴ This goal defined the American perspective of détente. Nixon was uniquely strong in his contact with the Soviets because of his prior political experience; as a result, he approached the détente with backchannel diplomacy.

The crises of 1968 gave Richard Nixon the opportunity to pursue such a daring initiative.⁶⁵ Nixon knew that a major reorientation of US Cold War policy toward the Soviet Union would take both political and diplomatic skill. He needed the Soviets to sign treaties such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). Not to mention, he needed Senate ratification. He used the powers of personal and presidential persuasion, along with informal diplomatic tactics, to achieve his plan. It was here that Nixon began to intertwine the domestic and the international. In terms of foreign policy, the United States government could reap the benefits of collaboration with the Soviets, including trade, agreements, and future collaboration. Domestically, Détente showed American citizens that the

⁶² FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume 1, Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972, Document 3, “Article by Richard Nixon.”

⁶³ S. Rifaat Husain, “Soviet-American Détente: Theory and Reality,” *Strategic Studies* Volume 1 (October—December 1977): 12 with reference to a speech given by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 11 September 1975, pg. 101 included in U.S. News and World Report, Volume XXVIII, No 25, 23 June 1975.

⁶⁴ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 941.

⁶⁵ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Lincoln: Potomac Publishing/University of Nebraska, 2012), 26.

president, his administration, and his party was dedicated to keeping the nation out of war, going as far as to meet with a political foe.⁶⁶ It was risky, but Nixon had the skills to succeed.

Selling Détente to a Cold War Congress:

During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Democrats began to see internal fragmentation because of Lyndon Johnson's embrace of civil rights. Southern Democrats, who had caused headaches for the Northern and Midwest liberals, continued the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt and began voting against their own party. By 1972, the average Southern Democrat in the House of Representatives was voting with the party 44% of the time.⁶⁷ Nixon's Deputy Assistant for Legislative Affairs, William (Bill) Timmons, argued that Nixon would be able to reap the benefits of support from the 91st Congress than his predecessors partly because of this fragmentation.⁶⁸ This is thought-provoking because Nixon faced a difficult challenge—the opposing party was controlling the legislative branch. Typically, having the opposition party in power would signal that legislative efforts would be difficult. Nixon's impressive strength in personal and presidential persuasion, along with informal diplomacy was how he managed to gain benefits from a Democratic congress.

In the US Senate—the proprietor of treaty ratification—Nixon faced a variety of different challenge in terms of attracting support for détente. For understanding, it is helpful to view the Senate in four blocks Nixon faced into (1) The Loyalists: pro-Nixon, pro-Détente, (2) The Pacifists: anti-Nixon, pro-Détente, (3) The Antagonists: anti-Nixon, anti-Détente, and finally, (4)

⁶⁶ Julian E. Zelizer, "Détente and Domestic Politics," *Diplomatic History* Volume 33 (2009): 654.

⁶⁷ David W. Rodhe, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶⁸ William E. Timmons, "Memorandum for the President regarding The Record of the 91st Congress," (Government document, Washington D.C., 1971), 1.

The Skeptics: pro-Nixon, anti-Détente.⁶⁹ Through these four blocks, this case study will investigate the personal relationships that Nixon created, maintained, and used to garner support for détente. Shoring up political support for not only his initiatives, but for himself, came in the form of personal relationships made with The Loyalists. In the same way Eisenhower wrote letters to global leaders for the People-to-People initiative, Nixon did the same with Loyalists. Forming a strong coalition against the Antagonists was imperative, and Nixon was good at creating spaces and environments where persuasion could occur.

Group I—‘The Loyalists’—included figures such as Robert Dole and George H.W. Bush. The Loyalists in the Senate played an essential role in securing Nixon’s objectives. Richard Nixon sought close relationships with these individuals, and such was key to securing his base and finding political success. The success of détente resided in Nixon’s ability to achieve strong backing in Congress. As Henry Kissinger stated, “the acid test of a policy...is its ability to obtain domestic support...a statesman will tend to have great difficulty legitimizing his policy domestically because of the incommensurability between a nation’s domestic and its international experience.”⁷⁰ Loyalty was paramount—Nixon needed this group to keep him in good graces while him and Kissinger conferred with the Soviets.

Group II—The Pacifists—was the members dedicated to the anti-war agenda. Figures like George McGovern and Frank Church took a principled stance against the war. In a speech given on the Senate floor, called “The Vietnam Imbroglio”, Church calls out President Johnson for his interventionist actions in Vietnam, but maintaining that he is a peaceful man. Church

⁶⁹ I am in debt and grateful to Historian Jeremi Suri for helping me formulate this matrix and assisting me on this case study. Jeremi Suri, Professor; Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, personal conversation, 29 February 2024.

⁷⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company and Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1957): 326 and 328.

quotes Johnson directly when he stated, “We will not be defeated”; Church responds, “His pledge is sealed with American blood already drawn. The whole world is witness.”⁷¹ Church, among other anti-war figures, had a desire to avoid more intervention, lives lost, and war cost. When Nixon took office in 1969, though there were dissenters regarding his approach to Vietnam, these individuals prioritized Nixon’s détente policies because it did not include intervention. Personal feelings toward the President were outweighed by his bold initiative of détente.

Group III, the Antagonists, includes figures such as Barry Goldwater, Nixon’s political mentor, and Harry ‘Scoop’ Jackson, a Midwestern Democrat who had taken a hawkish stance on the Soviet Union—he criticized Eisenhower in the 1950s for being too “soft” on Russia. These figures felt that Communism still posed the same threat as it did at the beginning of the Cold War. Further, they were suspicious of the Soviets and argued that allocating time and attention to negotiating treaties and/or agreements that potentially could be violated was a waste of time. These individuals felt betrayed by Nixon, who once had been a hardline, anticommunist too.

Finally, Group IV—the Skeptics—were figures that were not convinced that the Soviets were committed to friendly relations, but still supported the President and his legislative agenda. These are figures such as Jesse Helms, who formed the National Congressional Club to build, what he called, the “New Right.” He was close to Nixon, held a vast amount of political and economic power in Congress and southern politics, but Helms was more concerned with mobilizing the younger generations than foreign policy.⁷² The President could depend on figures like Jesse Helms, but his persuasive tactics needed to be strong.⁷³

⁷¹ “The Vietnam Imbroglio by Senator Frank Church,” 89th Congress, 1st Session, 14628.

⁷² Julian Zelizer, “Détente and Domestic Politics,” *Diplomatic History* Volume 33 (September 2009): 666.

⁷³ The graph shown below is a product of the author and the personal conversation had with Professor Jeremi Suri, Mack Brown Distinguished Chair for Leadership in Global Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.

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|--|--|
| <p>II:</p> <p>“The Pacifists”</p> <p>Anti-Nixon Pro-Détente</p> <p><i>Frank Church J. William Fulbright</i></p> | <p>I:</p> <p>“The Loyalists”</p> <p>Pro-Nixon Pro-Détente</p> <p><i>Bob Dole George H.W. Bush</i></p> |
| <p>III:</p> <p>“The Antagonists”</p> <p>Anti-Nixon Anti-Détente</p> <p><i>Barry Goldwater Harry ‘Scoop’ Jackson</i></p> | <p>IV:</p> <p>“The Skeptics”</p> <p>Pro-Nixon Anti-Détente</p> <p><i>Jesse Helms</i></p> |

Table 1: Allegiances in the 92nd Congress (Senate) in Respect to Richard Nixon

Nixon employed the Loyalists to ensure support for his political agenda. Nixon learned through his vice presidency that power resides in the ability to persuade; thus, he had to find a way to get individuals outside of his administration and party affiliation to support him; furthermore, he had to get a Democrat-controlled Congress to consider his legislative agenda. Furthermore, upon deciding to seek re-election in the 1972 election and get another four years in the Oval Office. If he could not win the Democrats, he could gain ultimate trust within his own party. Nixon began to make a conscious effort to express his gratitude to members of Congress, beginning life-long friendships. The ultimate loyalist was Kansan Robert ‘Bob’ J. Dole, a close friend of Nixon’s for over thirty years.

Bob Dole, born and raised in Russell, Kansas, had a very similar background to Richard Nixon. He attended the University of Kansas where he originally wanted to play basketball and football but opted for a social club. He left university to serve in the US Army, then continued his academic career at Washburn University where he received his bachelor's and law degree. Dole went through a similar humble upbringing and was not a member of the elite circle of American politics. A Washington official said, "In Dole, Nixon saw himself. And in Nixon, Dole saw himself."⁷⁴ He was just a common Republican man from Kansas, just as Nixon was a common Republican man from California.

Dole used Nixon to persuade Kansas voters throughout his political career. In 1960, during Dole's first campaign for the House of Representatives, he appealed to Republican voters in Kansas when he distributed pieces campaign papers, he included an excerpt of Richard Nixon's Acceptance Speech for the Presidential at the Republican National Convention on July 28th, 1960.⁷⁵ Not only was Dole campaigning for himself, but it appeared he was also campaigning for Nixon too. The election between Nixon and Kennedy was neck-and-neck—Nixon needed all the votes he could get. Dole's use of Nixon's speech boosted both politicians' reputations and showed Dole's respect for Nixon and his party.

In turn, Nixon used Dole to persuade senators. Referred to as the "Sheriff of the Senate", the driving force for the Loyalists in the Senate was Bob Dole. Dale Grubb, Special Assistant to the President, debriefed Nixon on the nine senators who were loyal to Nixon's legislative efforts in Congress. Grubb tells Nixon that Senator Robert (Bob) Dole was "willing to speak out always on the Senate Floor on your behalf" and had "been doing real yeoman duty for you on the

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Kolbert, "For Dole, Nixon Was a Mirror and a Mentor," *The New York Times*, June 21, 1996.

⁷⁵ Personal Items, Box 2, Promotional Card to Elect Bob Dole to Congress, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

ABM.” The ABM was a vital document in détente. Paired with SALT, the ABM sought to limit these missile systems because it would reduce the arms race, and the US and USSR hoped, ultimately create an atmosphere of negotiation. Dole’s open dedicated and support to Nixon and his nuclear treaties did not go unnoticed. Dole cracked a joke when a counterpart pointed out his suit, saying “that’s what you get when you support the Administration.”⁷⁶ Though Dole was known to be comical and loved to laugh, his words held weight. This joke was quite persuasive. A new suit for supporting the president—what else could one receive if you supported Nixon?

Richard Nixon employed informal diplomacy with Loyalists and other members who proved their loyalty. A prominent example of informal diplomacy used by Nixon was the abundant letters that Bob Dole received a letter from Nixon. In one letter from June 1969, Nixon wrote, “having you in my corner means more to me than you will ever know.”⁷⁷ In a letter on October 15, 1969, Nixon said, “you deserve the appreciation not only of the administration but also of the nation” Such a lyrical expression of appreciation was common between Nixon and Dole. On Dole’s desk phone, he had seven people on speed-dial: Elizabeth Dole (his wife), Ted Kennedy (Senate Majority Whip), Panda Garden (a Chinese restaurant Dole enjoyed), the White House, John Mitchell (Attorney General for the Nixon Administration), his ‘folks’, and finally, Richard Nixon, labelled as ‘Dick N.’⁷⁸ Nixon was not labelled as “The President” or “Richard Nixon” or even just “Nixon”—he was labelled with a nickname and placed on the same speed-dial as Dole’s wife, Elizabeth, and his family. Dole’s phone reveals the level of friendship that the two men maintained—one that was deep and valuable.

⁷⁶ Dale Grubb, “Memorandum for the President,” (Government Document, Washington D.C., 1969), 1-2.

⁷⁷ “Richard M. Nixon to Bob Dole, June 18, 1969”, VIP Letters, Box 10, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics.

⁷⁸ Dole Memorabilia Collection, Circa 1980s Black Cortelco Desk Phone with Speed Dials, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

Dole was a faithful supporter of the President, and naturally, he was dedicated to reducing the arms race and engaging with the Soviets for Détente. Though, Dole's constituents were not pleased with engaging with the Soviets. Many of them were begging him to not vote for the ratification. As Dean Plinsky, a citizen of Tescott, Kansas, wrote to his Senator on February 3, 1969, "I am opposed to any treaties with the Russians as I understand them [to] have broken most former treaties we have made with them...I feel we are making an agreement with a proven liar."⁷⁹ Though Kansas voters urged him to vote against ratification, Dole made an important decision to vote yes. By maintaining his position his pro-détente position, Dole, including other Loyalists, quickly became a part of Nixon's persuasion spaces.

The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) were the first bilateral nuclear arms legislation between the US and USSR. The 1963 Test Ban Treaty and 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty were multilateral agreements between various countries that were products of years of negotiations, input from different political parties, and support of American presidents. ABM and SALT were different because they did not include many actors. Talks regarding these documents only included the Soviets and United States—this was to remove other influences from the persuasion space. The US was primarily focused on the benefits of a joint agreement. For them, treaties with the Soviets were a shift away from interventionist foreign policy and toward cooperation. Additionally, there was less emphasis on the *threat* of communism; such was now allocated toward *understanding* communism.

⁷⁹ "Letter from Dean Plinsky of Tescott, Kansas to Senator Bob Dole Regarding Ratifying the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty on 3 February 1969," Issue Mail, Box 312, Folder #24, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

SALT and ABM were to be paired together to be signed at US-Soviet Summit in May 1972 to give détente political legitimacy. Furthermore, the idea of pursuing a US-Soviet summit where both documents would be signed by political leaders was bold but had the support of the Loyalists in Congress. Nixon told Kissinger in a conversation that Bob Dole was supportive of the summit, along with New Jersey senator Clifford Case and Massachusetts senator Edward Brooke, both Republicans, making speeches to encourage support on the matter.⁸⁰

The Loyalists worked with the Pacifists to push Nixon's ABM through the Senate. Barry Goldwater, head of the Antagonists, expressed his concern and exposed how Soviets had "repeatedly demonstrated that...it has actively and aggressively promoted such tensions [between the East and West] on a worldwide basis."⁸¹ Goldwater felt as though the negotiating with Soviets and ABM was a waste of legislative energy. Loyalists teamed up with other members to counter Goldwater's points. Howard Baker—who was not a Nixon supporter but feared nuclear escalation—and Bob Dole were close friends in the Senate and formed an alliance. As Baker stated in an interview, "I never liked the idea of Mutually Assured Destruction, I never liked the idea of being held hostile to Russian missiles...and on the position if it was technologically feasible, I took the position that we would never know until we tried."⁸² Dole held the same outlook, and when it came time to vote, Dole confidently expressed his

⁸⁰ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIII, Soviet Union, October 1970-October 1971, Document 178, "Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)".

⁸¹ "Address by Senator Barry Goldwater at a Luncheon Meeting of the West Point Society of Washington D.C.," Issue Mail, Box 312, Folder #25, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

⁸² Interview of Howard Baker, Jr. by William Cooper, John Sherman Cooper Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Library, June 25, 1984.

unwavering support for the President “in his position on the ABM, for I am sure he and his close advisor have secret and confidential information...to arrive at realistic decision in this matter.”⁸³

The Senate was only briefed on SALT and ABM after it was signed—this was on purpose. The bilateral characteristics of the agreements could be lost if no caution was used. Loyalists and Pacifists received more intricate details to prepare them to advocate for ABM and SALT. Nixon told supporters in a meeting in June 1972 that him and Kissinger had “gone the extra mile” with the Soviets by “agreeing on what arms limitation brings.”⁸⁴ Briefing prepared these individuals to play the game of politics in the Senate. In July 1972, the Subcommittee on National Security and International Operations brought in a professor of politics and international relations, William R. Van Cleave, to discuss the issues of SALT. In his speech, Mr. Van Cleave said, “The U.S. preparation for SALT, as it has been described by the President and by Dr. Kissinger, was an enormous analytical effort.”⁸⁵ Those outside of the US government speaking on the President and National Security Advisors effort showcased the validity and legitimacy of the document. Finally, on August 3, 1972—the same day that the ABM was ratified in the Senate—the New York Times reported that Senator Harry Jackson, an Antagonist who had a deep history in relentlessly blocking any legislation that he deemed unfit, formulated his own resolution and coalition to strengthen the arms documents. He called for the US to push for equal talks with the Soviets to put the US in the stronger position for later negotiations.⁸⁶ Senator Jackson’s resolution, while remaining antagonistic and skeptical in nature, shows the

⁸³ “Letter to Miss Florence Wilson of Topeka, Kansas on 25 April 1969,” Issue Mail, Box 312, Folder #25, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

⁸⁴ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, Document 326, “Conversation Among President Nixon, Members of the Republican Congressional Leadership, and Others”.

⁸⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Security and International Operation of the Committee on Government Operations, 92nd Congress, Second Session, July 25th, 1972.

⁸⁶ William Beecher, “Senators Seek to Bolster U.S. Arms-Pact Position,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 1972, 1.

convincing nature of Nixon's loyalists. Well-known hardliners and opposing forces were now looking toward future negotiations, agreements, and other forms of engagement with the Soviets. This was an incredible moment and win for Nixon; Antagonists were furthering his political agenda.

Nixon followed in John F. Kennedy's footsteps by formulating a backchannel communication system with the Soviets in 1970. Through the backchannel, Nixon created more persuasive spaces and used informal diplomatic tactics to produce SALT/ABM. Though Nixon was successful in bringing about ratification—SALT was ratified on a vote of 88-2 on September 14, 1972—he made the intentional decision to shelter the backchannel negotiations away from congressional backlash. The next section will detail the intricacies that only four people witnessed.

Can You Pass the SALT? Getting Creative with the Soviet Union

While Nixon was working to shore up domestic political support in Congress, he also had to make strides with the Soviets. The collaboration and creation of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) was first time that the Soviets were willing to negotiate with the United States. It took upwards of two years to negotiate the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT and backchannel diplomacy became an unmistakable part of Nixon's foreign policy. Though the impact of this moment should be recognized, it was not without challenges and stagnation.⁸⁷

Backchannel diplomacy defined SALT negotiations. However, to achieve rich analysis on how the United States used track two diplomacy, it is important to understand the Soviet system and the personal traits of General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. Henry Kissinger once

⁸⁷ For further reading about the Soviet government, structure, and practices, see the following texts: Vladislav Zubok, *Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021). Rebecca Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.)

stated, “when domestic structures...differ widely, statesmen can still meet, but their ability to persuade has been reduced for...they no longer speak the same language.”⁸⁸ Here is how people who speak different diplomatic languages ultimately met in the middle. Nixon and Kissinger provide Leonid Brezhnev with the ‘formalities’ that he desires, such as cars, black tie dinners, and journeys on the presidential yacht. Brezhnev gave Nixon and Kissinger the arms agreements, cooperation, and cordiality.

Known to be a laid-back, personable, and friendly character, Leonid Brezhnev was General Secretary of the Soviet Union from 1964 until his death in 1982. He was born in Kamenskoye (Kamianske), Ukraine in 1906 and was brought up during some of the most divisive times in Soviet history. He was fifteen when the Great Famine began (1921), twenty-two when the first Five Year Plan was launched (1928), and thirty-one during the Great Terror (1937).⁸⁹ He became General Secretary after participating in the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964. No one, not even Brezhnev himself, could have predicted he would grow into a position of power, let alone be General Secretary. He is remembered as the leader that provided the Soviet Union with economic stability but ruined such with his launching of the disastrous war in Afghanistan in 1979. A clear aspect of Brezhnev’s foreign policy was moving away from Khrushchev’s policy of brinkmanship. Soviet historian Susanne Schattenberg questions whether General Secretary Brezhnev had any political aims while in his position.⁹⁰ This conversation is not unfamiliar, nor is it an attempt to discredit his leadership, but it is merely to draw attention toward the lack of specific political goals. Brezhnev tended to approach foreign policy as a

⁸⁸ Henry A. Kissinger, “Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy” in *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Reader in Research and Theory* ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: The Free. Press, 1969), 262.

⁸⁹ Susanne Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*, translated by John Heath (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

realist and heavily relied on his ministers of foreign affairs, Andrei Gromyko, and diplomats, such as Anatoly Dobrynin. Such practices are similar to Richard Nixon, and this is what gave success to the thawing of tensions.

The Brezhnev Doctrine was a step toward a noticeable, and rather bold, expression of Soviet foreign policy. The use of the doctrine during Prague Spring in 1968 caused many to question his foreign policy approach because it endorsed intervention. It directly went against Brezhnev's personal beliefs because he was committed to preventing another world war.⁹¹ Using military force to intervene was something that confused many about the doctrine because of Brezhnev's personal experience serving in World War II, which is remembered in Soviet scholarship as an incredibly dark time because of the high death toll. SALT and a summit with the US were the perfect way for Brezhnev to prove his pledge to world war prevention and bolster his foreign policy.

To effectively produce an arms treaty and a thaw of the ice-cold relations, Henry Kissinger suggested a private communication channel between the 'core four': Leonid Brezhnev, Anatoly Dobrynin, Henry Kissinger, and Richard Nixon. There were premature forms of the backchannel, but Dobrynin explained that the backchannel "did not become *fully* operational until 1971."⁹² Nixon and Kissinger asserted that their version of diplomacy "depended on the circumvention of standard procedures" to achieve foreign relations because "without secrecy...the superpowers could not deal frankly and effectively with power."⁹³ It was a curious approach to international relations, especially for a statesman who argued that domestic

⁹¹ Susanne Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*, translated by John Heath (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022). 201.

⁹² Richard A. Moss, *Nixon's Backchannel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 48.

⁹³ Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2014), 46.

structures limit the ability to negotiate. The two Americans went as far as to provide Dobrynin with a specific door in the East Wing of the White House to maintain privacy.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Nixon told Brezhnev “You should rely on what I say in the private channel, not on what anyone else tells you” for the reasoning of “there are not only certain forces in the world, but also representatives of the press, who are not interested in better relations between us.”⁹⁵ This is the direct reason for SALT and ABM being bilateral agreements—the effort and attention given to this matter had potential to be interrupted.

The backchannel communication was essential to improving relations for three reasons. First, relations with the Soviets would have remained unchanged. While the United States engaged in prior negotiations, such as the instance between Robert Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis, contact would be limited, and levels of trust kept low. Second, SALT was essential to reducing nuclear threats. Preceding multilateral legislations contributed to progress, but SALT addressed areas important to just the US and USSR. Finally, Nixon and Kissinger had to work efficiently and effectively during the administration’s first term. The Soviets were not limited by elections and term limits, but the United States was. Instead of succumbing to constant formalities, the backchannel system provided quick communication that allowed for (comparatively) ‘fast-paced’ negotiations. SALT was achieved in year two of Nixon’s first term, but without the backchannel, it could have taken double the time.

The process of negotiating SALT was lengthy, grueling, and carefully executed. Kissinger and Nixon understood this and approached the Soviet Union by using track two diplomacy. As Dr. Kissinger stated, “the reputation...of most leaders depends on their ability to

⁹⁴ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 369.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 617.

realize their goals, however these may have been arrived at.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, Kissinger thought “the correct way to win... would be to negotiate while the United States was still the stronger party.”⁹⁷ Despite such an opinion, it was the Soviets who held the power. It took well over two years to produce an arms agreement that both parties felt was adequate and met the needs of both.

In the same sense that Nixon used Bob Dole, he did the same to Henry Kissinger. The President and the National Security Advisor were incredibly close, and Nixon entrusted Kissinger with many delicate tasks—most of which were vital to the president’s agenda. While backchannel communication was occurring, Kissinger travelled to Russia two separate times to meet with Dobrynin and Brezhnev in person. These trips were crucial to formulating personal relationships with two important Soviets. It is noteworthy to point out that Kissinger’s trip to Moscow is known in the archives of Foreign Relations of the United States as ‘Kissinger’s Secret Trip to Moscow’—the stages of SALT and what will become known as détente were kept entirely in the dark until President Nixon arrived in Moscow on 22 May 1972. This was intentional. Nixon and Kissinger lied to various members of the administration regarding contact with the Soviets, posing it as “an exchange of letters between the president and the Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin.”⁹⁸

Nixon was familiar with the Soviet Union because of his trip in 1959 and contact throughout his career, so it could be assumed that he would be greatly helpful in preparing Kissinger for his trips. Though Nixon observed how to be an outwardly well-respected statesman

⁹⁶ Henry A. Kissinger, “Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy” in *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Reader in Research and Theory* ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: The Free. Press, 1969), 264.

⁹⁷ David Tal, “Absolutes” and “Stages” in the Making and Application of Nixon’s SALT Policy,” *Diplomatic History* Vol 37 (2013): 1095.

⁹⁸ Richard A. Moss, *Nixon’s Backchannel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 65.

while serving as Eisenhower’s vice president, his briefings and private conversations could have not been more dissimilar. When Nixon was sent on the Soviet campaign in 1959, he was extensively prepared and coached on how to negotiate with the Soviets in a cordial manner.⁹⁹ Henry Kissinger received the opposite. In a conversation on April 19, 1972, a few days prior to Henry Kissinger embarking on a trip to Moscow, Nixon prepared Kissinger. Within this conversation, he referred to Brezhnev as a “son-of-a-bitch” then later stated “give them a little bullshit to the effect that President has great respect for Mr. Brezhnev—he’s a strong man, a determined man.”¹⁰⁰ He provided Kissinger with nothing short of a monologue of adoration for the General Secretary while being disrespectful toward him. Why does Nixon do such a thing? In Nixon’s own words, “You might as well use flattery. You know the Russians use flattery.”¹⁰¹ Nixon directly spoke to Brezhnev’s desire for respect and recognition.

Thus, Kissinger’s various trips to the Soviet Union were vastly different from a young Richard Nixon’s. Richard Nixon was deceiving, Kissinger was persuading. Brezhnev took him hunting—complete with a hunting outfit, a bottle of vodka, and Zakuskiy (Russian entrées).¹⁰² Kissinger ate caviar, “slugged” more Russian vodka, and stayed up into the wee hours of the night handling foreign affairs that would define the international order.¹⁰³ Brezhnev was nothing short of hospitable toward Kissinger; he showed off the Tsar’s chambers and explained that it

⁹⁹ Irwin F. Gellman, *The President and the Apprentice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015). 517.

¹⁰⁰ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, Document 126, “Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)”: 428 and 440.

¹⁰¹ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, Document 126, “Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)”: 442.

¹⁰² Sukhodrev, *Yazyk moy*. Pp. 307-311, 315; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 298 as cited in Susanne Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*, translated by John Heath (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 300.

¹⁰³ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, Document 39, “Memorandum of Conversation,” January 21, 1972.

would be “an honor to have the American president staying at the Kremlin.”¹⁰⁴ Providing Nixon with the opportunity to share a space that, formally, was dedicated to the head of state explains Brezhnev’s respect for Nixon. Additionally, inviting an American into such a historically sacred space shows the seriousness of the thaw. Twenty years prior, such an offer would have been blasphemous. During Kissinger’s trip, Kissinger, in this position, is no longer controlling negotiations; he is merely a visitor and experiencing the Soviet system firsthand. Originally, it was in American interests to create a power dynamic between the US and the Soviets but giving the Soviets the illusion of having more power.

Kissinger learned how to understand and participate in the Soviet style of diplomacy. He became familiar Soviet persuasive spaces, and this caused important progress to be made. Nixon was far too stubborn and arrogant at this point in his political career to be entrusted with going to Moscow if it was not for the summit. Further, the President was overwhelmingly concerned with other’s opinions of him, especially the Soviets. Disparaging comments and complaints about Brezhnev and his counterparts expose a side of Nixon’s personality that is familiar to the United States. He was egotistical, defensive, and stubborn. Nixon remained adamant to receiving Soviet signatures on SALT, and so eloquently stated, “I’m the last President—frankly I’m the only president, the only man...who had the guts to do what we’re doing. You know it and I know it.”¹⁰⁵

Setting up a communication channel was not the only informal aspect. Compliments, gifts, and praise are key components of the SALT/ABM negotiations. Nixon and Kissinger were

¹⁰⁴ Dobrynin, Sugubo doveritel’no, p.248 as cited in Susanne Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*, translated by John Heath (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 300.

¹⁰⁵ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, Document 126, “Memorandum of Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” April 19, 1972, 433.

adaptable to the Soviets. In a memorandum where the president and the National Security advisor discuss the Soviet visit to the United States, Kissinger told Nixon “They [Brezhnev] want a car...Now their mind, however, is in the direction of a small Cadillac.” Nixon replied, “Yeah, I know. But we’ll give them what they want...I can give him a sports car if he prefers”¹⁰⁶ When Brezhnev visited the US in 1973, he received his Cadillac, and a ride on the presidential yacht, the Sequoia. At Camp David, Nixon gave Brezhnev two gifts. The first was a windbreaker with the presidential seal on it that had his name—he wore it the whole time, including in photos taken by the press.¹⁰⁷ The second gift was a Lincoln Continental with “Special Good Wishes—Greetings” engraved in the upholstery.¹⁰⁸ Brezhnev was ecstatic, he collected luxury cars, and eagerly drove it with Nixon in tow. Western goods, for Brezhnev and other figures, were seen as collectables and status symbols—having innovative technology at one’s reach was a sign of wealth. Nixon cracked a joke with Brezhnev after the drive, saying “I would never have been able to make that turn at the speed at which we were travelling,” after Brezhnev showed Nixon he loved the thrill of fast driving.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972, Document 225, “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” 835-836.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 880.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 880 cited in Susanne Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman*, translated by John Heath (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 307.



President Richard Nixon and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev on the Sequoia, the United States Presidential Yacht on June 19, 1973. Nixon White House Photographs. Courtesy of the National Archives and the Richard Nixon Presidential Library.

Gifts provided by Nixon were part of presidential persuasion and Nixon's specific use of informal diplomacy. These showed respect and prioritization of SALT, the Summits, and the Soviets as people. Moreover, it showed the depth of the President and General Secretary's personal relationship. When Brezhnev put his hand on Nixon's knee on the way to his dacha, the action was rather sincere and heartfelt. The Summits, because of this friendship, were a great success. The signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty was a significant diplomatic breakthrough. The Soviet Union and the United States had not produced a joint treaty before. The combination of SALT and the ABM, along with showcasing the friendship created between Nixon and Brezhnev changed US-Soviet relations.

Conclusion:

Through this paper, it has been demonstrated that while former President Richard Nixon is portrayed as an awkward, tense, and unsure politician, he is starkly the opposite. This

intervention calls attention toward how history and people discuss polarized political leaders, especially Presidents of the United States. While the presidency remains a complex role in the American political system, it is provided with a vital political power: the ability to persuade. Further, Nixon learned how to persuade during his vice presidency. He observed a Kansas Republican as President—noticing his organization of the US bureaucracy and various initiatives. Nixon became friends with another Kansas Republican to spread his presidential agenda and push against antagonistic forces in the Senate.

From Kansas to the Kremlin sought to bridge the gap between the domestic and foreign spheres in historical scholarship through investigating Richard Nixon's specific use of persuasion. Through the framing of four different groups in the Senate, Nixon employed Robert Dole and Loyalist forces to bolster his détente-filled agenda, while also making alliances with other senators. Retaining support in Congress while negotiating with the Soviets was imperative to Nixon finding success. Within the Soviet case study, Nixon's employment and entrusting of Henry Kissinger, the backchannel system, and gift-giving revealed his ability to lean into Breznev's desire for respect.

As a result of personal relationships with Kansas Republicans—Dwight D. Eisenhower and Robert J. Dole—Nixon grew into the politician we are familiar with in historical scholarship. Not to say their influence caused his unorthodoxy, but Nixon did what previous administrations so strongly desired: a reduction of nuclear arms and open relationship with the Soviet Union. The production of two critical bilateral arms documents—the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty was an important moment in United States and Soviet histories.

Richard Nixon—a deft and persuasive diplomat—interpreted the power of presidential persuasion through his backchannel communication system, spaces, employment of figures to garner support, and gift-giving. As Nixon once stated, “Diplomacy is not always an easy art.”¹¹⁰ We must seek to investigate diplomacy, especially when it concerns presidents whose political tactics may be overlooked. These contributions are vastly important to how we think about politics, both domestically and internationally, and bolster continuity of different initiatives taken on by various leaders. While some many know him to be paranoid, odd, and sometimes cringey, history would look different without Richard Nixon and his complex personality.

¹¹⁰ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), 880.

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Glossary

Abbreviations:

ABM: Anti-Ballistic Missiles

NSC: National Security Council

SALT: Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty

NPT: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

US: United States

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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