

Presidential Parley: Personal Diplomacy and the Modern Presidency

By

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INTRODUCTION

AN ERA OF PERSONAL DIPLOMACY

“I placed a high priority on personal diplomacy,” former President George W. Bush wrote in his memoir. “Getting to know a fellow world leader’s personality, character, and concerns made it easier to find common ground and deal with contentious issues.”¹ Bush’s fascination with personal diplomacy manifested itself in his post-presidential painting passion, leading him to craft portraits of over two-dozen world leaders. In 2014, the paintings were featured at his presidential library in an exhibition, “The Art of Leadership: A President’s Personal Diplomacy.” Thus for Bush, the essence of global leadership is personal engagement with world leaders.

Compare that to his successor Barack Obama. In 2011, a reporter for *Politico* wrote, “in terms of the one-on-one relationship building [with foreign leaders] that can be a potent diplomatic lever for any president, the Democrat is practically an introvert compared with his world-class schmoozing predecessor.”² From the Bush perspective, Obama has failed the leadership test, as his personal relationships with foreign leaders—with a few exceptions—are not particularly warm. However, to say that Obama does not engage with his foreign counterparts would be wrong. In his first year in office he welcomed over sixty world leaders to the United States, compared to a little over seventy for Bush. And Obama visited over twenty countries his first year—a record for first year presidential travel—doubling Bush’s eleven.³

But if one accepts the notion that personal diplomacy is key to global leadership, the

¹ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 195.

² Carrie Budoff Brown, “Obama’s no-schmooze diplomacy,” *Politico*, June 8, 2011, <http://www.politico.com/story/2011/06/obamas-no-schmooze-diplomacy-056470>.

³ Figures for number of foreign leader visits and travels of the president can be found at <https://history.state.gov>.

question then becomes, how much did Bush's emphasis on the practice help him? An NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken a little over a month before he left office showed 63% of Americans disapproved of his handling of foreign policy. In contrast, a poll taken in May 2016 showed 48% of Americans disapproved of Obama's handling of foreign policy. Neither presidents' numbers are great, but they show that Obama's perceived lack of personal diplomacy has not necessarily led to a more negative assessment of his foreign policy leadership.⁴ And the focus on the warmth of Obama's relationships with world leaders obscures the fact that while he might not relish engaging with them, he has done it frequently. In doing so, he follows in the footsteps of other modern presidents. Since Franklin Roosevelt, all White House occupants have engaged in personal diplomacy. They have met with foreign leaders at home and abroad, used surrogates, correspondence, talked on the telephone, and in more recent times used videoconferences.⁵

Why did presidents in the second half of the twentieth century engage in personal diplomacy? Today the practice is frequent and commonplace, but the first hundred and fifty years of the nation's history saw little presidential personal diplomacy. In the mid-twentieth century the propriety of personal diplomacy and even legality of it were unclear. The practice marked a sharp departure in presidential conduct and the way the nation carried out its foreign affairs. Prior to FDR, the management of U.S. foreign policy was most often the province of the secretary of state. There were some exceptions, such as Theodore Roosevelt, who played a

⁴ NBC/*Wall Street Journal* Poll, December 4-8, 2008; CBS News/*New York Times*, May 13-17, 2016, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

⁵ The term personal diplomacy often conjures images of world leaders forming personal bonds that can then impact policymaking. It brings to mind a type of intimacy, perhaps even friendship. While this definition is not wrong, I use the term personal diplomacy more broadly. Any interactions that involve the president and another foreign leader, be it face-to-face, through correspondence or some other means, I consider personal diplomacy. Even if the intent was not to gain closeness and familiarity, any time the president is engaged in leader-to-leader contacts it is necessarily personal. There is a reason an administration decides to send a presidential message rather than one from the Department of State. There is a reason why at times a president meets with another world leader rather than the secretary of state. To have the president *personally* involved—even if they were not the ones to draft a letter or come up with the idea to meet another leader—matters. If it did not, then presidents would rarely engage with other world leaders. Thus, regardless of the warmth or intimacy involved, any time the person of the president is involved with other heads of government and state—even if in name only—I label it personal diplomacy.

personal role in ending the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Woodrow Wilson marked an even greater departure from his nineteenth-century predecessors, traveling to Paris after World War I to negotiate a final settlement with other world leaders. It was not until FDR, however, that presidents took increasing control over not only the creation of foreign policy, but also its execution. And personal diplomacy became central to that endeavor.

In the twentieth century technological advances in communication and transportation made frequent personal diplomacy possible. These developments facilitated the practice. Alone, however, they were insufficient to make interactions between world leaders commonplace. Reasons were needed. Whereas previous scholars have emphasized these changes in technology or the personality of presidents and their natural inclinations toward personal diplomacy, this dissertation explores a set of factors that drove modern presidents toward the practice. Regardless of their personalities or desire to engage with foreign leaders, all presidents in the second half of the twentieth century used leader-to-leader diplomacy. The practice was a tool that presidents came to believe advanced a myriad of objectives: it could provide a boost to U.S. foreign policy, serve the national interest, improve their domestic political standing, and burnish their legacy.

What specifically, then, drove White House occupants toward personal diplomacy? This development was not linear. The backlash generated by the move toward personal diplomacy was at times fierce, and throughout the second half of the twentieth century strident critics of the practice existed. But as the postwar period progressed, leader-to-leader diplomacy became ingrained in the American presidency and its conduct of foreign affairs. This dissertation posits that a set of forces operated on the modern presidency that led holders of the office to act in a

similar fashion. It was personal diplomacy, but it was not personal. Rather, a set of four factors was central in driving presidents toward diplomacy at the highest-level.

The first is the challenge of the international environment. The United States emerged from WWII a superpower. But as one war ended another began, as the nation quickly became entangled in a decades long struggle with the Soviet Union. Throughout the period, world crises were frequent and most often connected to the Cold War, or quickly became ensnared by it. As leader of the Western bloc, presidents had to personally respond, either by mediating a dispute between rival nations, consulting with allies, or negotiating with an adversary. Even without the U.S.-Soviet struggle, global emergencies would have frequently involved American presidents, even if the United States was not originally party to events. As the dominant power, other countries looked to the White House for leadership, as it was often the only entity with the political, military, and economic clout to effectively intervene. Sometimes presidential personal diplomacy was successful, other times not. But the key is that presidents often felt obliged to become involved.

The second factor is domestic political incentives. Melvin Small, one of the leaders in examining the relationship between public opinion, domestic politics, and foreign affairs, argued, “domestic components lurk behind virtually every American international interaction.”⁶ While perhaps an overstatement, the notion that domestic concerns influence presidential action abroad

⁶ Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xix. On the nexus between foreign policy and domestic politics, see also Thomas Alan Schwartz, “‘Henry, . . . Winning an Election Is Terribly Important’: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 2009): 173-190 and “Henry Kissinger: Realism, Domestic Politics, and the Struggle Against Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 1 (March 2011): 121-141; Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); William Quandt, “The Electoral Cycle and the Conduct of Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 5 (1986): 825-837; Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Helen V. Milner and Dustin Tingley, *Sailing the Water’s Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

is accurate. Presidents, of course, would rarely admit that domestic politics affected a foreign policy decision. That would seem crass, self-serving, and opportunistic. But presidents are politicians, and as such they seek every opportunity to enhance their political clout, standing among the public, reelection prospects, and legacy.

In the second half of the twentieth century, personal diplomacy assisted in these endeavors. For much of the post-WWII era, presidential meetings with foreign leaders received widespread coverage. The pomp and ceremony that often accompanied such meetings allowed presidents to look statesmanlike, a world leader par excellence. And leader-to-leader contacts simultaneously provided presidents the opportunity to portray themselves as apostles of peace and buttressed their image as Commander in Chief. During the Cold War, when the world lived in the shadow of nuclear conflict, the American president was often seen as the person who controlled the world's fate. Personal diplomacy allowed presidents to be seen as sagacious wielders of that power. They may have had their finger on the proverbial nuclear button, but engaging other world leaders in the cause of peace showed them wise stewards of that responsibility, thus reinforcing their role as wartime leader. And personal diplomacy could send other signals to the public as well. It could serve as a visual manifestation of a president's foreign policy. For a public often uninformed on the intricacies of foreign affairs, interactions between leaders sent messages about the state of relations between the United States and particular countries. Who the president met with—or did not meet with—and the atmosphere of the meeting was sometimes the extent of what the public knew.⁷

⁷ This factor is centrally concerned with the idea of diplomacy as theater or a spectacle and its influence on the public, as well as the role of symbolism. All of which could strengthen a president's domestic political position. For diplomacy as theater, see Raymond Cohen, *Theatre of Power: The Art of Diplomatic Signalling* (London: Longman, 1987); Andreas W. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For politics as spectacle, see Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Bruce Miroff, "The Presidential Spectacle," in *The Presidency and the Political System*, 7th ed, Michael Nelson, ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2003), 278-304; Arthur Miller, *On Politics and the Art of Acting* (New York: Viking,

Third is the desire of foreign leaders for presidential time. As the presidency became the center of the American political universe, foreign leaders increasingly sought out the holder of that office. They saw the presidency as the best means to receive American assistance, most often in the form of military and economic aid. Thus, foreign leaders increasingly placed demands on presidential time. They sought invitations to visit the United States, urged presidents to visit their countries, and initiated correspondence. Foreign leaders also pursued presidents for more personal reasons. As the head of a superpower and widely seen as holding the most powerful office in the world, the prestige of meeting with an American president was often a political boon for a foreign leader and elevated his or her status back home. And for adversaries, particularly the Soviet Union during the Cold War, summit meetings with the president gave the impression of equality and respect.

The final factor is presidential desire for control. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the demands and expectations placed on the presidency were often greater than the ability of presidents to meet them. As the central political figure both domestically and internationally, the presidency came under increased pressure and scrutiny. With little room for error, presidents searched for every conceivable means to implement their policies and accomplish their goals.⁸ In the realm of foreign relations, this often took the form of direct engagement with foreign leaders. Personal diplomacy allowed a president more control over his

2001); Thomas E. Cronin, "'All the World's a Stage...': Acting and the Art of Political Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (2008): 459-468. For presidential symbolism, see Wilfred E. Binkley, "The President as a National Symbol," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 283 (September 1952): 86-93; Barbara Hinckley, *The Symbolic Presidency: How Presidents Portray Themselves* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

⁸ For works on presidents' desire and need for power/control and methods used to achieve it, see Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005); William G. Howell, *Thinking About the Presidency: The Primacy of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Terry Moe and William Howell, "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (December 1999): 850-873; Andrew Rudalevige, *Managing the President's Program: Presidential Leadership and Legislative Policy Formulation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); David E. Lewis, *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

administration's foreign policy. In theory, the Department of State is the executive branch's official instrument of diplomacy and foreign policy. Yet every modern president, during at least one moment in their administration, eventually ends up frustrated by the State Department. Much of this has to do with the general nature of large bureaucracies, and presidents' troubles with the State Department are similar to their complaints about other executive branch departments. McGeorge Bundy, National Security Adviser to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, once remarked that the executive branch "more nearly resembles a collection of badly separated principalities than a single instrument of executive action."⁹ Thus, accomplishing anything in the executive branch can be difficult, and in order to avoid distortion of their views, leaks, or bureaucratic stagnation, presidents often turned to personal diplomacy to better communicate with foreign governments and assert control.

Additionally, this dissertation posits that in their interactions with foreign leaders, modern presidents most frequently came to play the role of a counselor. Psychological elements were central to almost every leader-to-leader encounter. The crises and pressures of international politics in the second half of the twentieth century—not to mention the specter of nuclear war ever present during the Cold War—caused fears and insecurities throughout the world. Presidents and their advisers saw the need to address these concerns. Whether it was security worries or anxiety over political fortunes back home, presidents sought to ease the minds of their foreign counterparts. In the process they became a sort of counselor. Though this was not a role foreign leaders necessarily saw the president playing. Rather this was a function that the White House saw itself performing.¹⁰

⁹ McGeorge Bundy, *The Strength of Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 37.

¹⁰ For works dealing with emotions and psychology in politics and international affairs, see Fred Greenstein, *Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ:

After WWII, the United States essentially became a status quo power. It sought global stability, thus tending to other leaders psychological needs was a way to settle them and forestall actions that might cause volatility in the international sphere. And this role of therapist was connected to the larger issue of credibility. Though intangible, credibility was central to U.S. world leadership. Allies and adversaries had to believe the United States would act when necessary to protect its interests. There was a psychological component to this. As Robert McMahon argued, in “an inherently dangerous and unstable world” American presidents believed that “peace and order depend[ed] to a great extent on Washington’s ability to convince adversaries and allies alike of its firmness, determination, and dependability.”¹¹ Interaction with world leaders played a central role in sending these signals. And projecting credibility extended not just to other worlds leaders but to the American people as well. A president’s credibility abroad influenced his credibility at home.

As personalities and emotions interacted at the highest-level, it occurred within the institution of the presidency. When presidents acted as counselor, it was not necessarily because they felt affinity for their interlocutor. Some presidents did form genuine friendships with other world leaders and wanted to help them as much as possible. But the breadth and depth of a president’s role as counselor meant he would deal with leaders he did not feel personally close to. Rather, he tried to soothe and bolster morale because, as the individual responsible for the

Princeton University Press, 1976); Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies in Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, rev. ed (Boston: Wadsworth, 1982); Margaret Hermann, “Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders,” *International Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (March 1980): 7-46; Janice Gross Stein, “Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperceptions of Threat,” *Political Psychology* 9, no. 2 (June 1988): 245-271 and “Psychological Explanations of International Conflict,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 292-308; Marcus Holmes, “The Force of Face-to-Face Diplomacy: Neurons and the Problems of Intentions,” *International Organization* 67, no. 4 (October 2013): 829-861; Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliance: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Robert J. McMahon, “Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (October 1991): 455.

nation's foreign affairs, this was often seen as the best way to protect and further American foreign policy aims. The counselor role, and the personal diplomacy it entailed, was strategic. And when successful it had more to do with institutional aspects than personal qualities. Being a counselor was not about who the president was personally, but rather about the position he held as president.

Throughout the dissertation these four factors and the role of counselor are further elucidated and their influence on presidential behavior explored. Combined they provide a portrait of an institution resorting to personal diplomacy for a myriad of reasons to accomplish multiple objectives. And they demonstrate how regardless of presidential personality, postwar holders of the office behaved similarly when it came to personal diplomacy. Clark Clifford, an adviser to multiple presidents, wrote that the presidency is “like a chameleon. To a startling degree it reflects the character and personality of the President.”¹² But in deciding to engage with world leaders, modern presidents were remarkably of one color.

Personal Diplomacy and the Modern Presidency: A Brief Overview of the Scholarship

Personal diplomacy between world leaders is not new. Examples exist from ancient times of emperors and monarchs sending messages and meeting face-to-face. But as nation states developed and with them foreign ministries, diplomacy became more bureaucratized and less the personal province of a nation's ruler. But even as professional diplomats became the key figures in the conduct of diplomacy, leaders still found room for personal diplomacy—except in nineteenth century America, where presidents' correspondence with foreign leaders was minimal

¹² Clark Clifford, “The Presidency As I Have Seen It,” in *The Living Presidency*, Emmet John Hughes, ed. (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1973), 315.

and face-to-face interaction almost non-existent.¹³ Woodrow Wilson would depart from this model in the aftermath of WWI. But his diplomatic handiwork was rejected, and many viewed presidential personal diplomacy with suspicion. Yet, Franklin Roosevelt would go even farther during WWII, and though his actions would also come under attack, he ushered in an era of personal diplomacy.

The change represented by FDR (and others) got the attention of scholars. After WWII, much was written about the increasing face-to-face encounters between world leaders, and the word “summit” became fashionable. Personal diplomacy represented a prominent feature in the transition from “old” or “traditional” diplomacy to what scholars called “new” diplomacy. Whereas in an earlier time trained diplomats conducted most of a nation’s foreign affairs, world leaders now increasingly met to negotiate and practice the art of diplomacy themselves. This change drew much attention, but as the “new” diplomacy itself became old, scholarly interest waned.¹⁴ Today, the evolution of diplomacy is still written about, though mainly by social scientists in diplomacy textbooks.¹⁵

One aspect of the “new” diplomacy that has received particular attention is summitry, though this too is an area where historians are frequently absent.¹⁶ When we turn our attention to

¹³ David Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings That Shaped the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 11-24.

¹⁴ For example of early works, see Andre Geraud, “Diplomacy, Old and New,” *Foreign Affairs* (January 1945): 256-270; E. L. Woodward, “The Old and New Diplomacy,” *Yale Review* (March 1947): 405-422; Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of the Diplomatic Method* (London: Cassell, 1954); Richard Worsnop, “Heads-of-State Diplomacy,” *Editorial Research Reports* 2 (December 5, 1962): 873-892; Stephen D. Kertsez, *The Quest for Peace Through Diplomacy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 51-61.

¹⁵ Sasson Sofer, “Old and New Diplomacy: A Debate Revisited,” *Review of International Studies* 14, no. 3 (July 1988): 195-211; Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 61-228.

¹⁶ One of the most recent historical works on summitry is Reynolds, *Summits*. Other historical works include Charles L. Mee, Jr., *Playing God: Seven Fateful Moments When Great Men Met to Change the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); Keith Eubank, *The Summit Conferences, 1919-1960* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); David Stone, *War Summits: The Meetings that Shaped World War II and the Postwar World* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005). Studies of summitry by political scientists include Johan Galtung, “Summit Meetings and International Relations,” *Journal of Peace Research* 1, no. 1 (March 1964): 36-54; David H.

personal diplomacy in the context of the American presidency, however, historical works are much more abundant. Most scholarship has centered on single administrations, focusing either on the personal characteristics of an individual president, a specific region, or a particular event.¹⁷ It has also gravitated toward a president's relationship with a particular foreign leader, such as the British prime minister.¹⁸

Studies such as these, while valuable for individual episodes, do not provide a larger framework to think about personal diplomacy as a practice that transcends individual administrations. There are a few studies, however, that do explore personal diplomacy broadly

Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 5th ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015), 184-197.

¹⁷ For example, FDR's WWII diplomacy has received much scholarly attention. A sample of these works include, Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Robert Nisbet, *Roosevelt and Stalin: The Failed Courtship* (New York: Regnery Gateway, 1988); Robin Edmonds, *The Big Three: Churchill, Roosevelt & Stalin in Peace and War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Keith Sainsbury, *Churchill and Roosevelt at War: The War They Fought and the Peace They Hoped to Make* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Warren Kimball, *Forged in War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow, 1997). Jimmy Carter's effort at Middle East peace and Ronald Reagan's personal diplomacy at the end of the Cold War are other scholarly favorites. See Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy; Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin, and Sadat at Camp David* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Ken Adelman, *Reagan at Reykjavik: Forty-Eight Hours That Ended the Cold War* (New York: Broadside Books, 2014). Other works focusing on personal preferences or particular moments include Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2003); Günter Bischof and Saki Dockril, eds., *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner, and Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *The Vienna Summit and Its Importance in International History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Margaret Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2007).

¹⁸ FDR and Winston Churchill's relationship has been a favorite of scholars. See the works cited above. Another president-prime minister relationship that has received attention is that of Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. For example, see Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher: The Inside Story of the Friendship and Political Partnership that Changed World Events from the Falkland War to Perestroika* (New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1991); Nicholas Wapshott, *Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: A Political Marriage* (New York: Sentinel, 2007); Richard Aldous, *Reagan and Thatcher: The Difficult Relationship* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012). Other works in this genre include Bruce E. Geelhoed and Anthony Edmonds, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and Allied Unity, 1957-61* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Jonathan Colman, *A 'Special Relationship'?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo-American Relations "At the Summit," 1964-1968* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2004); Christopher Sandford, *Harold and Jack: The Remarkable Friendship of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President Kennedy* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2014).

across time, but political scientists, rather than historians, have written them, and they are not usually based on archival research.

The most prolific scholar of presidential personal diplomacy is Elmer Plischke.¹⁹ He was one of the first to study the ways in which presidents acted as their own diplomatist, and also one of the last to explore the subject in-depth. Plischke's most recent work is now over twenty years old, and since, few have systematically examined personal diplomacy in the presidency.²⁰ In multiple works he looked at how presidents conducted their foreign policy, the methods they used, and the results of their endeavors. He provided great detail about individual meetings between presidents and their foreign counterparts, listed a myriad of activities that he considered part of personal diplomacy, and analyzed the practice's advantages and risks. Yet, Plischke provided little information about why presidents resorted to the practice in the first place. While he commented that in the years after WWII presidential engagement with other leaders had increased, he provided minimal analysis as to the factors involved in causing this change, devoting only four pages (of a five hundred page book) to the matter.²¹ In contrast, this

¹⁹ Plischke's most complete and thorough meditation on presidential personal diplomacy is *Diplomat in Chief: The President at the Summit* (New York: Praeger, 1986). His other works on the subject include *Summit Diplomacy: Personal Diplomacy of the President of the United States* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland Press, 1958); "Eisenhower's 'Correspondence Diplomacy' with the Kremlin—Case Study in Summit Diplomats," *The Journal of Politics* 30, no. 1 (February 1968): 137-159; "International Conferencing and the Summit: Macro-Analysis of Presidential Participation," *ORBIS* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 673-713; "The President's Right to Go Abroad," *ORBIS* 15 (Fall 1971): 755-783; "Summit Diplomacy: Its Uses and Limitations," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 48, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 321-344; "The New Diplomacy: A Changing Process," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 321-345; "Rating Presidents as Diplomats in Chief," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 725-742.

²⁰ An example of a recent work, which explores the factors involved in the timing of foreign travel by presidents and secretary of states, is James H. Lebovic and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "The Diplomatic Core: The Determinants of High-Level U.S. Diplomatic Visits, 1946-2010," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 107-123.

²¹ Plischke listed six developments that changed diplomacy in the twentieth century: 1) growth in the family of nations; 2) the expansion of issues discussed between governments; 3) technological improvements in transportation and communication; 4) changes in the objectives of the diplomatic process; 5) the democratization of many nations; and 6) the creation of permanent multilateral diplomatic institutions. See Plischke, *Diplomat in Chief*, 9-10.

dissertation provides a thorough, archival-based examination of the causes that led presidents to diplomacy at the highest-level.

Additionally, Plischke and others have failed to recognize and comment on the way in which personal diplomacy not only altered the conduct of American foreign policy, but also became embedded in the institution of the presidency. According to presidential scholar Fred Greenstein, with Franklin Roosevelt “the presidency began to undergo not a shift but rather a metamorphosis.”²² Unlike their predecessors, modern presidents were increasingly active in the legislative arena, prone to unilateral action (especially in foreign affairs), dealt with rising public expectations, increasingly sensitive to public opinion, and had at their disposal a vast executive branch bureaucracy. This dissertation argues that presidential personal diplomacy should be conceptualized in terms of the modern presidency. The use of leader-to-leader contacts fits into this larger pattern, where presidents have been more assertive, active, and using any tool possible to meet the rising expectations of the office. And its growth and use corresponds with the rise of presidential power in the second half of the twentieth century.

With the Reorganization Act of 1939 the foundations for a vast presidential bureaucracy were laid. It created the Executive Office of the President (EOP), which came to house a multitude of offices designed to help presidents govern. In 1947, the National Security Act created the National Security Council (part of the EOP), providing presidents with an additional lever to manage and eventually control foreign policy. As the executive branch grew and accumulated power, expectations for the office rose. And with the onset of the Cold War, the American public looked to the White House even more. For critics, this aggrandizement led to an “imperial presidency.” As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote, the institution “came to conceive of itself

²² Fred I. Greenstein, “Change and Continuity in the Modern Presidency,” in *The New American Political System*, Anthony King, ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978), 45.

as the appointed savior of a world whose interests and dangers demanded rapid incessant deployment of men, arms, and decisions, new power, reverence and awe flowed into the White House.”²³

Personal diplomacy was part of this story. Presidents’ ability to deploy arms and the power and reverence of the office were the most significant resources a president brought to their engagement with foreign leaders. And those resources help explain why foreign leaders sought out American presidents. Also, on a basic level, the growth of institutional resources made personal diplomacy function. The resources needed to handle voluminous correspondence with world leaders, to provide analysis, to prepare briefing material for face-to-face meetings, and the handling of logistics for presidential trips abroad were all made possible by the growth of the office. At the same time, the rise of personal diplomacy contributed to this very growth, as its increasing use required more resources. Thus, the expansion of the institution and increased use of personal diplomacy were self-reinforcing.

But all these resources and power had a downside, as the expectations and demands of the office outstripped the ability of the president to meet them. Holders of the office, then, sought a variety of ways to meet the challenges they faced. In foreign affairs, personal diplomacy was one such method. The practice was both an outgrowth and contributor to the growth of the institution, yet at the same time was used by presidents to help overcome the challenges and burdens of their burgeoning office.

Views on presidential resources and how holders of the office can best fulfill their duties have changed throughout the postwar period. In the mid-twentieth century, scholars such as Edward Corwin and Clinton Rossiter wrote important works examining presidential authority by

²³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, with new epilogue (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989 [1973]), 206.

focusing on constitutional sources.²⁴ While emphasizing limits on the institution and the ability of other power centers like Congress and the Courts to restrain the office, both saw the presidency as a powerful institution with a wide range of possibilities. Rossiter described presidents as “a kind of magnificent lion who can roam widely and do great deeds...he will feel few checks upon his power if he uses that power as he should.”²⁵ In 1960, however, when Richard Neustadt asked what the foundations of presidential power were, rather than see constitutional sources he argued that presidential power was personal. According to him, the presidency is a weak institution. Holders of the office have little formal power and cannot possibly meet the demands placed on them. Thus to accomplish their goals, presidents had to use their personal skills of persuasion and bargaining. “Presidential power is the power to persuade,” and “the power to persuade is the power to bargain,” he argued.²⁶

While Neustadt’s behavioral approach had an enormous influence on the field of presidential studies, critics arose. Those with an interest in institutions challenged the focus on personal qualities and argued that though the president is a single individual, he is also an institutional actor with “a role well specified by law and expectations...Some portion of presidential behavior, then, and perhaps a very large portion, is quite impersonal. All presidents, whatever their personalities or styles or backgrounds, should tend to behave similarly in basic

²⁴ Edward Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers, 1787-1957*, 4th ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1957); Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1956).

²⁵ Rossiter, *The American Presidency*, 59.

²⁶ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990 [1960]), 11, 32. For other examples of works utilizing a behavioral approach, see Erwin C. Hargrove, *Presidential Leadership: Personality and Political Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992); Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Barak Obama*, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2009). Rather than persuasion, others have argued that presidents “go public.” See Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1993). Still others see presidential power as contingent on outside forces and the historical context a president is in. See Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

respects.”²⁷ This is the approach of this study. Personal diplomacy became one of the roles the president, as an institutional actor, came to perform, regardless of his personal characteristics.

As this brief sketch of scholarship makes clear, this dissertation engages the fields of history and political science. It is a historical examination of the growth and use of personal diplomacy in the conduct of U.S. foreign relations. At the same time, it argues that the practice became part of the institution of the presidency and profoundly changed that institution. By examining the use of personal diplomacy across administrations, this study provides a clearer view of how the United States engaged with the world in the second half of the twentieth century, offering a fuller, richer understanding of America’s role in the world and of the exercise of presidential power.

Project Overview

This dissertation has seven chapters. Chapter One examines Franklin Roosevelt and his role in establishing a pattern of personal diplomacy. Like many aspects of the modern presidency, FDR’s conduct and behavior influenced his predecessors. As William Leuchtenburg has argued, since 1945 all presidents have been in his “shadow.” While most discussions of FDR’s personal diplomacy focus on the war years and his interaction with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, the chapter shows his extensive use of personal diplomacy both before and during the war with leaders all over the world. Throughout, the four factors influencing presidential personal diplomacy, as well as the role of counselor, are evident.

Chapter Two covers the administrations of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. It

²⁷ Terry Moe, “Presidents, Institutions, and Theory,” in *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*, George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman, eds. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993). See also Terry Moe and William Howell, “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (December 1999): 850-873.

shows the weakening of personal diplomacy during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and its eventual resurgence by the 1960s. In the immediate years following FDR's death, his wartime dealings—particularly at the Yalta Conference in 1945—caused the practice to fall into disrepute and become a political liability. Thus Truman and Eisenhower were hesitant to engage in FDR style personal diplomacy. The demands of managing U.S. foreign relations, however, led both men to utilize the practice. While Truman did so to a lesser degree, by the midpoint in Eisenhower's second term the practice had been revived. Yet, as Eisenhower prepared to leave office personal diplomacy again had a pall cast over it as a result of the failed Big Four summit in Paris. Nevertheless, he re-legitimized the practice, and there would be no retreat from it like there was after FDR's death. Eisenhower's successor John F. Kennedy plunged into personal diplomacy with vigor.

The remaining chapters explore the four factors and the role of counselor in-depth. Each focuses on a single administration to examine how a particular factor influenced the presidency. Though the emphasis of each of the remaining chapters is on a single factor, the other elements discussed are evident in each chapter as well. Chapter Three uses the Kennedy Administration to illustrate how the presidency played the role of therapist. This is demonstrated using JFK's relations with three leaders: West Germany's Konrad Adenauer, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the Shah of Iran. These three leaders provide a wide scope in which to examine the role of counselor, as they represent a Western ally, neutral nation, and non-Western ally. In each instance Kennedy acted similarly, attempting to tend to psychological needs by reassuring all three leaders of American support and goodwill.

Chapter Four explores the challenges of the international arena and global crises. Using Lyndon Johnson, it looks at his attempts at personal diplomacy to mediate flare-ups in Cyprus

and Yemen, as well as his engagement with Soviet leader Alexei Kosygin. Johnson provides an example of a president who was not eager to engage in personal diplomacy and often had to be coaxed into it by his advisers. He still did it, however, because the imperatives of the global system made it seem necessary and the best way to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. At the same time, Vietnam overshadowed much of what LBJ tried to do, adversely affecting his personal diplomacy. As much as crises led presidents to the practice, turmoil in the world could also render their attempts ineffective.

Chapter Five focuses on domestic political incentives. Using Richard Nixon, it shows how the use of personal diplomacy could be leveraged for political gain. The chapter centers on Nixon's attempts to use high-profile summits with China and the Soviet Union to bolster his reelection bid in 1972. Throughout, his attempts to maximize media coverage and portray himself as the "peace" candidate are emphasized. The limits of personal diplomacy are also shown, as Nixon's use of summitry with the Soviets in 1973 and 1974 failed to save him during Watergate.

Chapter Six examines the way foreign leaders sought presidential time by exploring how a succession of Japanese prime ministers and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat maneuvered to be close to Jimmy Carter. While Carter would have engaged these leaders of his own volition, the scope and timing of these interactions was often not up to the president. In the late 1970s, as Japan's growing economic might made it an increasingly important international player, Japanese prime ministers consistently angled for presidential time—both privately and publically. This often frustrated Carter, who bristled at their constant requests. In contrast, Sadat's push to form a relationship with the president was welcomed. A Middle East settlement was a main objective of the Carter Administration, and the Egyptian leader was the central figure

advocating peace, thus the president was eager to engage. But Sadat's maneuvers steered Carter toward one of the most extraordinary episodes of presidential personal diplomacy ever—a thirteen-day summit at Camp David—something the president could never have imagined at the start of his term.

Chapter Seven shows a president using personal diplomacy to gain greater control over his foreign policy initiatives. It focuses on Ronald Reagan and his engagement with the Soviet Union. To avoid bureaucratic stagnation and maneuver around hardliners in his administration, Reagan attempted to engage directly with a succession of Soviet leaders. Throughout his first term his endeavors were unsuccessful, as he confronted an aging Soviet leadership unwilling to make concessions. It was not until Mikhail Gorbachev came on the scene that his personal diplomacy had any positive results.

In exploring presidential personal diplomacy over a fifty-year period not every aspect could be covered. Many examples could have been used, but those chosen are particularly salient and best illustrate the various aspects of the practice that this dissertation covers. The same reasoning applied when deciding which president to focus on for each factor. One may ask, for example, why was Richard Nixon chosen to demonstrate domestic political incentives? Why Ronald Reagan to show the desire for control? Indeed, I could have used different presidents for each of the factors. Nixon and Reagan could have been easily swapped, for example. But I chose the ones that best illuminated the particular factor under discussion. Throughout each chapter, however, multiple elements are clearly evident, thus helping to show how presidents across time were influenced by each of the factors.²⁸

²⁸ Stephen Skowronek, addressing selection criteria in an influential work of his on the presidency, encapsulates my thinking: "My object has not been to exhaust the examples that might illuminate any of these categories, but to select the examples which seem to me best to highlight the characteristic tensions and dynamics in each and to prompt readers to see similar dynamics at work in kindred cases." See Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make*:

It should also be noted that there is a hierarchy of personal diplomacy. Certain acts have more value and salience than others. For example, meeting face-to-face carries more weight than a letter. The difference between the various types of personal diplomacy and the desirability and significance of each appear throughout the dissertation. But rather than an extended discussion of the distinctions and various features between trips abroad, invitations to visit the United States, correspondence, and surrogates, the focus here is to demonstrate the growing and wide-ranging use of personal diplomacy in the presidency, regardless of the forms it took.

Personal diplomacy in the second half of the twentieth century was a global phenomenon. Leaders of countries from all over the world engaged in the practice. This dissertation tells one part of that story, though a particularly important part given the United States' role in international affairs after World War II. Over the course of the postwar period the practice became a feature of the presidency, a key aspect of a president's job. And it became a prominent tool used to promote America's global interests, as well as presidents' political interests.

But how should we evaluate these developments? What did presidential personal diplomacy mean for U.S. foreign relations? What techniques and methods did presidents use in their engagement with foreign leaders? How has personal diplomacy affected international politics? Perhaps more fundamentally, has the practice been a positive development? Is U.S. foreign policy well served by personal diplomacy? Has it been good for the institution of the presidency? For American democracy?

Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997), 473, n. 5.

CHAPTER 1

“NOW YOU AND I CAN TALK TO EACH OTHER AS OLD FRIENDS”: FDR’S WIDE-RANGING PERSONAL DIPLOMACY

The man of steel seemed nervous. As Soviet leader Joseph Stalin waited to meet American president Franklin Roosevelt for the first time in 1943 he made sure every detail was perfect. His clothes were neatly pressed, his boots polished, inserts in his shoes to appear taller, and the seating arrangements decided in advance. Stalin wanted to hide his pockmarked face, thus did not want to sit too close to the light. His interpreter had never seen him act this way. When the meeting finally occurred both leaders turned on the charm. They appeared to get along well and furthered their bond over dinner by riling up British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. When they met again a year and half later they greeted each other as old friends.¹

Roosevelt hoped this relationship would prove beneficial not only during the war but also after. In light of future developments, however, his embrace of Stalin may seem naïve and nearsighted.² But despite criticism, FDR’s personal diplomacy mattered. Tehran and Yalta have become immortalized as sites where three larger than life figures met to discuss military strategy and shape the postwar world. The images of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin side by side at those conferences are iconic. For many these meetings, along with others Roosevelt had at Casablanca and Cairo, are prime examples of his penchant for personal diplomacy. As one

¹ Valentin Berezhkov, “Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries: Foreign Perceptions of an American President*, Cornelis A. van Minnen and John F. Sears, eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 45-47.

² This was a view that many of FDR’s contemporaries shared. For example, see William C. Bullitt, “How We Won the War and Lost the Peace,” *Life* 25 (August 30 and September 6, 1948): 83-97, 86-103; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948-1953); Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Universal Library, 1950). The perennial question is, would the postwar period have been different if FDR had lived? Could his personal relationship with Stalin have prevented, or at least tempered, the Cold War? For a recent study that answers in the affirmative, see Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliance: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

diplomatic historian has described, FDR “took special pleasure in his direct contact with world leaders such as the sinister and Sphinx-like Joseph Stalin and the bulldog Churchill.”³ While accurate, the statement overlooks a variety of forces that also led FDR to such engagement. He did not interact with world leaders simply because he enjoyed it. Rather he used personal diplomacy because he believed it was a tool that furthered American interests.

Much attention is given to Roosevelt’s engagement with Churchill and Stalin. But the focus on wartime diplomacy with those two men has obscured FDR’s contact with other world leaders. The totality of his personal diplomacy has been overlooked.⁴ It is true that his wartime encounters were more consequential and had a more desperate quality than his prewar contacts with foreign leaders. But when the pre and postwar periods are viewed together we see the wide-scope of FDR’s personal diplomacy. The importance of recovering his leader-to-leader contacts goes beyond simply deepening our understanding of how he conducted foreign affairs. Rather, FDR’s extensive engagement with heads of state and government had implications for the institution of the presidency. He established a pattern of behavior that postwar presidents would imitate, and in the process the use of personal diplomacy became a feature of the modern presidency.⁵

³ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 545.

⁴ Rather than cover the same terrain as so many others, this chapter will explore FDR’s connections to other world leaders to show that his use of personal diplomacy was not confined to just the British and Soviet leaders. Scholarship on the wartime conferences and Roosevelt’s relations with Churchill and Stalin is voluminous. Some examples include Herbert Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Joseph P. Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill, 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); Robert Nisbet, *Roosevelt and Stalin: The Failed Courtship* (New York: Regnery Gateway, 1988); Robin Edmonds, *The Big Three: Churchill, Roosevelt & Stalin in Peace and War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Keith Sainsbury, *Churchill and Roosevelt at War: The War They Fought and the Peace They Hoped to Make* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Warren Kimball, *Forged in War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow, 1997).

⁵ William Leuchtenberg has argued that presidents after 1945 have been in FDR’s “shadow.” Whether it is in the policy they pursue, the way they present themselves, or the coalitions they form, comparisons to Roosevelt have been unavoidable. As Leuchtenberg writes, FDR “created the expectation that the chief executive would be a primary shaper of his times—an expectation with which each of his successors has had to deal. He bequeathed them not only

Diplomacy at the highest-level, while not completely new to Roosevelt, became a prominent feature of American foreign policy during his time in office. His delight in engaging with world leaders is part of the story, but there were larger developments that precipitated this move and made leader-to-leader contacts an integral part of the presidency. As discussed in the introduction, a volatile international environment, domestic political incentives, the push by foreign leaders, and a desire for control drove presidents toward the practice. These factors did not develop all at once and in equal proportion during the Roosevelt years, but they took on greater significance during his Administration and would continue to do so in the postwar period. And in the process, presidents also came to take on the role of counselor for foreign leaders.

This chapter explores Franklin Roosevelt's wide-ranging use of personal diplomacy both before and after the outbreak of war. The four factors and their influence on Roosevelt are evident throughout. In various regions of the world with different leaders, certain factors took on more prominence and importance than others. Most often, however, there was a confluence of factors. Overall, the chapter demonstrates how Roosevelt ushered in not only the modern presidency, but also the extensive use of personal diplomacy.

Roosevelt in the World

When Roosevelt came to the presidency in 1933 foreign policy was not a priority. In the midst of the Great Depression, domestic economic concerns took precedence. He made this clear in his inaugural address, stating that the most pressing problems were “a host of unemployed citizens [who] face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little

the legacy of the New Deal but that of a global foreign policy...The age of Roosevelt set the agenda for much of the postwar era.” Though all wrestled with this legacy, with some embracing it and others pushing back, all postwar presidents, even Republicans, somehow sought identification with Roosevelt. See, Leuchtenberg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to George W. Bush*, 3d. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), ix.

return.” Thus, the “greatest primary task is to put people to work.”⁶ This did not mean, however, that he had no thoughts on foreign affairs. In the 1920s he was a strong internationalist and supporter of the League of Nations. Upon accepting the Democratic nomination for vice president in 1920 he stated, ““We must see that it is impossible to avoid, except by monastic seclusion, those honorable and intimate foreign relations which the fearful-hearted shudderingly [sic] miscall by that devil’s catchword ‘international complications.’”⁷

Roosevelt understood that the United States could not withdraw completely from the world. It needed to be involved in some manner. He also believed that a president needed to have public support for his foreign policy.⁸ Those two views were at odds throughout the 1930s. While FDR may have wanted the United States to take a more active role in world affairs, he knew the public had little desire for such a course. He was also concerned that battles over foreign policy would alienate members of Congress whose votes he needed to pass his economic program. As Roosevelt biographer James Macgregor Burns stated, during his first term he was “more pussyfooting politician than political leader. He seemed to float almost helplessly on the flood tide of isolationism, rather than seek to change both the popular attitudes and the apathy that buttressed the isolationists’ strength.”⁹

As FDR struggled to improve the economy and battled Americans’ desire to turn inward,

⁶ “Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1933, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (hereafter *PP*), Volume 2: *The Year of Crisis, 1933* (New York: Random House, 1938), 11, 13. Roosevelt’s sole mention of foreign affairs during his first inaugural was the notion of a “good neighbor.”

⁷ “Roosevelt Calls For A Real Peace With The League,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1920. Though his main focus was domestic issues, Roosevelt came into office with a great interest in foreign affairs. Just four years before his election he wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* that illustrated his knowledge and awareness of international developments. As one scholar has written, “Aside from his cousin Theodore, Franklin D. Roosevelt was the most cosmopolitan American to enter the White House since John Quincy Adams.” See Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1979]), 3.

⁸ For FDR’s foreign policy outlook and use of public opinion, see Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*; Richard W. Steele, “The Pulse of the People: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Gauging of American Public Opinion,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 4 (October 1974): 195-216.

⁹ James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1956), 262.

he was left with little room to maneuver in the international arena. At the World Economic Conference of 1933 in London, Roosevelt chose economic nationalism over global cooperation, dooming the last real international attempt to deal collectively with the worldwide financial crisis. His rejection of the conference's proposals was a "bombshell."¹⁰ Prior to the gathering he had given indications that the United States would work with other countries and be amenable to the conference's proposals. In the days leading up to the London talks, the *New York Times* noted optimistically that the country was coming out of its isolationist shell.¹¹ When this proved false, conference attendees fumed, coming close to formally denouncing the United States. In a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald would not even call Roosevelt by his name, referring to him instead as "that person."¹² This sabotaging of the World Economic Conference, followed two years later by the first Neutrality Act and accompanied throughout the 1930s by an apparent ambivalence to aggression by fascist dictators in Europe and a militant Japan, led to the perception of a weak America. As one reporter described it, "never within memory...has American prestige and American influence been at a lower ebb...In international affairs there can be noted an increasing tendency to forget at times that the United States exists at all."¹³

But to characterize Roosevelt's foreign policy in the 1930s as simple isolationism and weakness would be a mistake. Members of Congress and public opinion truly confined his options. Roosevelt could have been a bold, daring leader in the international arena, but there

¹⁰ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 200-203; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 155-157. For the text of the bombshell message, see "A Wireless to the London Conference Insisting upon Larger Objectives Than Mere Currency Stabilization," July 3, 1933, *PP*, Vol. 2: 1933, 264-265.

¹¹ Raymond B. Fosdick, "America Quits Her Shell of Isolation: She Takes Her Place Among the Nations When Cooperation Is Most Needed," *New York Times*, June 4, 1933.

¹² Leuchtenburg, *Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 202.

¹³ Frederick T. Birchall, "America's Influence Wanes in Europe: Our Policy of Isolation Is Reflected in the Manner in Which Our Diplomatic Admonitions Have Been Received," *New York Times*, July 28, 1935.

would have been consequences. As long as the American economy remained dismal, an intrepid foreign policy would have alienated large segments of the population. Isolationist elements in Congress would have been incensed and threatened the economic recovery that Roosevelt needed in order to make the public more receptive to international engagement.¹⁴ In sum, if FDR had pursued an internationalist foreign policy during his first term it is quite possible he would have been a one-term president. He could not pursue the New Deal at home and internationalism abroad.

But too often FDR's foreign policy throughout his twelve years in office is simplified to this: throughout most of the 1930s he was aimless, only changing his ways toward the end of the decade as he saw the world headed toward war, and then only after Pearl Harbor did he provide imaginative and courageous global leadership. While partly accurate, this narrative obscures what FDR did do during the Depression. Contrary to popular perception, Roosevelt's use of personal diplomacy preceded his wartime correspondence and summitry. From the beginning of his Administration he actively engaged with foreign leaders.

"The President Has Remarked That the Prime Minister is an 'Old Friend,' Who Would Vastly Prefer to Deal Personally With Him": Roosevelt, Europe, and Canada

In February 1933, a little less than a month before Roosevelt was sworn into office, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald wrote the president-elect. "I am making bold to write you this letter explaining some of our difficulties here, so that you may understand them at first

¹⁴ The battle to join the World Court in 1934-1935 was an example of Congressional hostility toward any type of international engagement. Supported by previous administrations and having strong backing in Congress, most expected the Senate to approve U.S. membership. However, the Roosevelt Administration could not overcome fierce isolationists. Spearheaded by Senators Hiram Johnson and William Borah, anti-World Court forces led a successful campaign that gave Roosevelt only his second Congressional defeat since his election. See "White House Today to Ask Court Entry: Special Message to Be Sent to Senate by the President," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1935; "Borah Lambasts World Court As A Snare For U.S.: Says It's Political. Not Judicial," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 22, 1935; "Senate Beats World Court, 52-36, 7 Less than 2/3 Vote; Defeat For The President," *New York Times*, January 30, 1935.

hand. It is in no sense official. I repeat that this is purely a personal communication which I have been emboldened to make,” the prime minister said. “You will therefore please not use this letter in the official communications which must pass between our respective Governments.”¹⁵ Thus began FDR’s extensive communication with foreign leaders.

In the prime minister’s letter it is clear that personal communication of this sort between world leaders was out of the ordinary and not usual practice in the 1930s. And though it was MacDonald who initiated the correspondence, Roosevelt was “delighted” with the letter and quite comfortable with the backchannel communication. He told MacDonald he hoped the informal contact would continue and made clear his desire to meet soon. He believed that such a meeting would be beneficial for Anglo-American relations and that the two men “would not find it difficult to establish a personal relationship of absolute confidence...which I believe may be of the utmost importance for the future relations of our countries.”¹⁶

Roosevelt would meet MacDonald a few months later. In April, the prime minister spent a week in the United States discussing economic issues related to the upcoming gathering in London. Considering the World Economic Conference ended in failure, the long-term benefits of these talks are questionable. But that does not mean the talks were of no value, at least for FDR, who benefited politically. Press interest in the prime minister’s visit was high and the coverage laudatory. The president was portrayed as a wise sage whom MacDonald came to learn from. As one paper wrote, Roosevelt’s “aid and counsel for attacking troublesome European and world problems with the swift and decisive action he has applied to American affairs, will be sought by

¹⁵ Letter, Ramsay MacDonald to Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 10, 1933, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, MacDonald, J. Ramsay: 1933-1937; Box 38: Great Britain: King & Queen, June 1938-1939 thru Great Britain: Winant, John G.; President’s Secretary’s File (hereafter PSF)-Diplomatic Correspondence; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library (hereafter FDRL).

¹⁶ Letter, Roosevelt to MacDonald, February (n.d) 1933, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, MacDonald, J. Ramsay: 1933-1937; Box 38: Great Britain: King & Queen, June 1938-1939 thru Great Britain: Winant, John G.; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

[the] Prime Minister.”¹⁷ This early venture in personal diplomacy also allowed the president to contrast himself favorably with his predecessor. “Repeatedly, since he was elected,” the *New York Times* noted, “the President has remarked that the Prime Minister is an ‘old friend,’ who would vastly prefer to deal personally with him and was entirely willing to wait for effective negotiations until the Hoover administration expired.”¹⁸

After meeting with MacDonald a joint statement was released praising the talks. “In these talks [we] found a reassurance of unity of purpose and method,” the two men proclaimed.¹⁹ As the London Economic Conference almost two months later made evident, however, this “unity of purpose and method” proved fleeting. The limits of personal diplomacy were further made clear about a month before the conference when Roosevelt sent a message to over fifty heads of state appealing for peace and resolution of the economic ills confronting the world. “I was impelled to this action,” he told Congress, “because it has become increasingly evident that the assurance of world political and economic peace and stability is threatened by selfish and short-sighted policies, actions and threats of actions.”²⁰ This message garnered wide acclaim in the press, which portrayed FDR as a great statesman. He received twenty-one replies to his appeal, but the impact of his words was negligible.²¹ Nothing in the international system was altered.

Though nothing tangible necessarily came from Roosevelt’s early use of leader-to-leader

¹⁷ Associated Press, “Seeks President’s Advice and Aid in Attacking World Problems,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 1933.

¹⁸ Arthur Krock, “MacDonald To Visit Roosevelt Shortly On World Issues,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1933.

¹⁹ “A Fifth Joint Statement by the President and Prime Minister MacDonald Announcing Accord of Purpose and Method,” April 26, 1933, *PP*, Vol. 2: 1933, 148.

²⁰ “The Congress Is Informed of the President’s Appeal to the Nations of the World,” May 16, 1933, *Ibid.*, 192. For the message Roosevelt sent to world leaders, see “An Appeal to the Nations of the World for Peace by Disarmament and for the End of Economic Chaos,” May 16, 1933, *Ibid.*, 185-191.

²¹ For the replies, see “The Nations Answer,” May 17, 1933, *Ibid.*, 193-201. The irony, of course, is that shortly after this appeal FDR himself would act in a “selfish” manner when he broke up the London Economic Conference. And though the impact of Roosevelt’s message was minimal, the positive press was extensive. MacDonald, who would soon loath FDR, had effusive praise: “The declaration this afternoon, I am perfectly certain, will be regarded in time to come as one of those great monuments, one of those great landmarks, which will show how human progress has been made through the years of time.” See Associated Press, “Warning to Critics and Hitler,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1933.

contacts, it demonstrates how he used personal diplomacy from the beginning of his Administration and the various factors involved. Roosevelt met with a foreign leader eager for contact. The visit of MacDonald and FDR's appeal to world leaders generated significant press coverage that portrayed Roosevelt positively, thus burnishing his domestic political image. And these early contacts showed a president who liked to centralize matters. FDR's communication with MacDonald was outside official diplomatic channels and his invitation to other world leaders was done without input from Congress.²² They also show the changing role of the United States in world affairs. Many newspapers at the time described how Europeans viewed the nation with admiration and believed the only way to deal with the world's maladies was consultation with, and guidance from the United States. Roosevelt's appeal also illustrates America's self-image, as a leading nation above the petty squabbles of other countries.

These dynamics were at play in FDR's other contacts as well. During WWII he engaged with numerous European leaders. The heads of Poland, Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Iceland all visited the White House during the conflict, and Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, King Peter of Yugoslavia, King Leopold of Belgium, and King George of Britain frequently corresponded with the president.²³ FDR also engaged with Churchill's predecessor Neville Chamberlain, a fact often overlooked. From the beginning of the prime minister's tenure in 1937, Roosevelt and Chamberlain wanted to meet face-to-face. As the situation in Europe

²² As one journalist noted, "Congress is out of the international picture." See Arthur Krock, "Herriot Visit Suggested: Delegates From Italy, Germany and Japan to Be Welcome Later," *New York Times*, April 7, 1933.

²³ Roosevelt considered all three kings "friends." And he became quiet close to Wilhelmina's family, with her eldest daughter referring to him as "Uncle Franklin" and naming him godfather of her third daughter. To Leopold and Wilhelmina, the president offered shelter to their children once WWII began. King George also offers a prime example of the symbolic power of leader-to-leader diplomacy. The first British monarch to visit the United States, George's visit in 1939—on the eve of war in Europe—allowed the two nations to show solidarity without being overly political. For the relationship with Wilhelmina, see Albert E. Kersten, "Wilhelmina and Franklin D. Roosevelt," in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 85-96; For the visit of King George, see Benjamin D. Rhodes, "The British Royal Visit of 1939 and the 'Psychological Approach' to the United States," *Diplomatic History* 2, no. 2 (1978): 197-211; David Reynolds, "FDR's Foreign Policy and the British Royal Visit to the USA, 1939," *Historian* 45 (1983): 461-472; Peter Bell, "The Foreign Office and the 1939 Royal Visit to America: Courting the USA in an Era of Isolationism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 4 (October 2002): 599-616.

deteriorated in the late 1930s, the president increasingly sought to comfort the prime minister, especially after war broke out. He not only offered kind words, but also encouraged Chamberlain to write to him outside official diplomatic channels.²⁴

Roosevelt also sought to engage the leaders of the Axis powers. Before war erupted, and even after the United States entered the conflict, he communicated directly with both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini to try to ease tensions and avoid conflict.²⁵ As early as 1933, his first year in office, he wrote Mussolini, “I only wish that I might have the opportunity to see you myself, to give you my greetings and to talk over many things in which you and I have a common interest.”²⁶ By the time of Roosevelt’s reelection three years later their correspondence had trailed off, a development the Italian leader “regretted,” but he was hopeful going forward that their relationship would “not undergo any further interruption.”²⁷

These early contacts were not based on affection, but rather a realization that they might benefit American interests, and though nothing concrete came from their communication, it did establish a certain amount of goodwill and held the potential for possible cooperation. Thus, even as Italy became increasingly aggressive throughout the 1930s, Roosevelt never sharply

²⁴ For example, a little over a week after Germany invaded Poland, Roosevelt wrote to Chamberlain, “I need not tell you that you have been much in my thoughts during these difficult days and further that I hope you will at all times feel free to write to me personally and outside diplomatic procedure about any problems that arise.” See Letter, Roosevelt to Chamberlain, September 11, 1939, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Great Britain: 1937-1938; Box 32: Germany October 1944-45-Great Britain 1939; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

²⁵ According to prominent Roosevelt biographer James MacGregor Burns, FDR engaged with abhorrent dictators like Hitler and Mussolini because he believed in mankind and himself: “There was something pathetic and yet almost sublime in the way that Roosevelt sent message after message to Hitler and other dictators; Partly, of course, it was for the record; but even more it was an expression of Roosevelt’s faith in the ultimate goodness and reasonableness of all men. His eternal desire to talk directly to his enemies...reflected his confidence in his own persuasiveness and, even more, in the essential ethical rightness of his own position.” See Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, 476.

²⁶ Letter, Roosevelt to Benito Mussolini, May 14, 1933, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Italy 1933-38; Box 41: Italy 1933-1938-Mussolini-Hitler; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

²⁷ Letter, Mussolini to Roosevelt, November 19, 1936, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Italy 1933-38; Box 41: Italy 1933-1938-Mussolini-Hitler; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

condemned Mussolini or cut ties. Rather, according to one Italian historian, “Until the eve of Italy’s entry into the war, Roosevelt tried to build a personal relationship with Mussolini as a way to distance the Italian dictator from Germany.”²⁸ Indeed, months before WWII broke out, Roosevelt met with the Italian ambassador and said “he regretted that he himself had not had the opportunity of personally meeting and of talking with Mussolini because he believed that such an opportunity for discussion between the two might be useful and because he believed that they would find that they ‘spoke the same language.’”²⁹ Even after war broke out, Roosevelt sent a letter through his personal envoy Sumner Welles. He reported that Mussolini was very pleased with the president’s message, particularly mention of wanting to meet. The dictator said he had had the same desire for a long time.³⁰

Similarly, though to a different degree, Roosevelt communicated with Hitler to try to prevent war.³¹ In September 1938, as conflict seemed eminent between Germany and Czechoslovakia, Roosevelt appealed to the German leader to continue negotiations.³² Bloodshed was delayed, as a month later Hitler met with Mussolini, Chamberlain, and French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier. The result of the gathering was the infamous Munich Pact, which averted war by sacrificing Czechoslovakia. Though now seen as a dark chapter in world

²⁸ Maurizio Vaudagna, “Mussolini and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 158. According to Vaudagna, in 1933 and 1934 “a feeling of sympathy and confidence developed” between the two men. This served as the basis for FDR’s attempts to try to detach Mussolini from Hitler.

²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Franklin Roosevelt, Don Ascanio dei Principie Colonna, and Sumner Welles, March 22, 1939, *Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1939, Volume II: General, The British Commonwealth and Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 1956), 622. The president also mentioned that the Italian leader should “bear in mind the fact that Europe could not contain two overlords at the same time and that if Hitler persisted...he would undoubtedly throw over Mussolini at any moment that seemed to him expedient.”

³⁰ Telegram, Sumner Welles to Roosevelt and Hull, February 27, 1940, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Italy; Box 3: Germany: May 1941-1944 thru Marshall, George C.: 1941-4/14/42; PSF-Safe File; FDRL.

³¹ For Hitler’s view of FDR and America, see Detlef Junker, “Hitler’s Perception of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the United States of America,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 145-156.

³² For Roosevelt’s initial appeal for peace on September 26 (which he also sent to Britain, France, and Czechoslovakia), Hitler’s reply of September 27, and Roosevelt’s second peace appeal on September 27, see *PP, 1938: The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 531-537.

diplomacy, initially the agreement was praised, and according to American diplomat Joseph Davies—the ambassador to Belgium at the time—“The President’s energetic timely action immediately preceding the Munich Conference is accepted among those here who are well informed as having been the deciding factor in the Fuhrer’s decision for peace at that time.”³³ While Hitler refrained from using military force in 1938, the following year would be different, but not before Roosevelt again tried to persuade him otherwise. In an April message FDR pleaded for peaceful discussions, volunteering to serve as mediator. Additionally, he implored Hitler to pledge not to attack a list of over thirty countries. Roosevelt ended with an emotional plea: “I think you will not misunderstand the spirit of frankness in which I send you this message. Heads of great Governments in this hour are literally responsible for the fate of humanity in the coming years. They cannot fail to hear the prayers of their peoples to be protected from the foreseeable chaos of war. History will hold them accountable for the lives and the happiness of all—even unto the least.”³⁴

Unlike the message sent in September 1938, this message received no direct reply.³⁵ But Hitler responded two weeks later in a virulent public speech before the Reichstag where he mockingly rejected Roosevelt’s proposal point by point. The rebuff came as no surprise, and many were critical of the president’s action. Italy viewed Roosevelt’s message as “the most incredible document in the whole history of diplomacy.” This was not a compliment. Italians considered it a diplomatic “faux pas,” and if it “were not attributable to Mr. Roosevelt’s

³³ Telegram, Joseph Davies to Roosevelt and Hull, March 21, 1939, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Correspondence, Belgium: 1938-41; Box 24: PSF Diplomatic, Belgium: 1938-41 thru Bullitt, William C.: 1941-43; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

³⁴ “A Message to Chancellor Adolf Hitler and Premier Benito Mussolini,” April 14, 1939, *PP, 1939: War—And Neutrality* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941), 204-205

³⁵ In the days immediately following Roosevelt’s message the view in Nazi circles was that “it was hardly to be expected that...Hitler will reply to President Roosevelt’s note. The Fuehrer has no time to study such a long winded document.” See Sigrid Schultz, “Hitler To Scorn Roosevelt: Nazis Declare Fuehrer is Too Busy To Reply,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1939.

inexperience in foreign affairs his message would be positively insulting.”³⁶ Even elements in friendly nations were critical. One British paper reported that some nations were “puzzled” by Roosevelt’s message because they “were unable to see any sound policy in the tactics of abusing the heads of other governments and then proposing to act as intermediary between them and their opponents.”³⁷ Others in Europe, however, greeted his message with praise. It “acted like a tonic upon public opinion,” one newspaper noted, while Davies reported, “the spontaneous expressions of gratitude to you in connection with your note...which have come to me from all classes of people, are extraordinary in their warmth and depth of feeling.”³⁸

Domestically, Roosevelt’s plea for peace also received mixed approval. Critics in Congress derided it as simply the president “seeking publicity” and stated it would lead the United States into war. Especially disparaging was the conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune*, which compared Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson: “Mr. Wilson played the same kind of game and wrote better notes. They cost us 50,000 American lives and 20 billion dollars of debt.” The paper argued that on the surface such a plea for peace seemed moral and harmless. But it would only lead to war, something it claimed the president wanted, not only to continue Wilson’s “messianic mission,” but also to satisfy his desire for “dictatorial powers” that war could bring.³⁹ Not all

³⁶ Camille M. Cianfarra, “Roosevelt’s Plea Resented In Italy,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1939. The article went on to report, “The idea of asking two responsible governments, it is argued, whether they intend to attack their neighbors is like asking a gentleman whether he intends to crack the safe in the apartment next door.”

³⁷ David Darrah, “Britons Wonder If U.S. Note Will Prove Appeasing: Cite Previous Roosevelt Attacks on Dictators,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1939.

³⁸ “Roosevelt’s Plea Held Bound to Fail: But Message Has Acted Like a Tonic on European Powers Opposing Aggression,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1939; Letter, Davies to Roosevelt, May 11, 1939, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Belgium: 1938-41; Box 24: PSF Diplomatic, Belgium: 1938-41 thru Bullitt, William C.: 1941-43; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL. European nations were not the only ones to praise Roosevelt’s initiative. Within days of his message he received notes of acclaim and support from fifteen Western Hemisphere nations. See Memorandum, Department of State to the President, “Symposium of Replies Received By 12 Noon April 16, 1939,” Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Italy: Mussolini-Hitler; Box 41: Italy 1933-1938-Mussolini-Hitler; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

³⁹ “Capitol Hill Comment on Roosevelt Plea for Peace: Legislators Hope President Will Forestall War,” *Washington Post*, April 16, 1939; Willard Edwards, “Leaders Assail President Peace Plea as Step Toward War: Congressmen

were so critical. Many in Congress were supportive, and a Gallup poll found that Roosevelt's message aligned with the majority of American thought. Seventy-three percent supported a peace conference comprised of the world's leaders.⁴⁰

In August, Roosevelt again tried to engage Hitler. He sent the Fuehrer two messages seeking peace.⁴¹ A week later Hitler invaded Poland. Yet, months later through an informal emissary, the president was still making overtures to the German leader. "I started out the discussion by presenting to the Chancellor your personal respects and greetings to which he responded warmly," the emissary reported. "I then told the Chancellor that the President had felt that by keeping the discussion on an informal basis that heads of governments could better understand each other and what they wanted to get at. The President wanted to be informed as to what the leaders in various countries in Europe really and actually had in their minds. In this way preliminaries could be developed for the formalities that must be arranged."⁴²

While expected that FDR would disagree and have poor personal relations with adversarial leaders, it could also happen with allies. France's Charles de Gaulle is a prime

Oppose Taking Up Allies' Fight," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 16, 1939; "Toward War," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 17, 1939.

⁴⁰ "Capitol Hill Comment on Roosevelt Plea for Peace: Legislators Hope President Will Forestall War," *Washington Post*, April 16, 1939; "Appeal To Hitler Backed In Survey: Roosevelt Message Found to Express the Feelings of Majority of Americans," *New York Times*, April 23, 1939. In many ways, Roosevelt's message was as much for Hitler and Mussolini as it was for domestic consumption. The message allowed FDR to not only appear as the peacemaker, but also to show how belligerent the two fascist leaders were, thus slowly preparing the American public for war. See Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 384.

⁴¹ For the two messages, see "The President Again Seeks the Way to Peace in the New Crisis Over Poland," August 24, 1939 and "A Further Attempt for Peace in the Polish Crisis," August 25, 1939, *PP*, 1939, 444-445, 449-450.

⁴² James D. Mooney to Roosevelt, March 17, 1940, Folder: President's Secretary's File, Safe File, Germany: Sept. 1939-Mar. 1941; Box 2: PSF Safe, Australia thru Germany: Sept. 1939-Mar. 1941; PSF-Safe File; FDRL. Clearly Roosevelt's attempts to persuade and reason with Hitler failed. The personal touch did not work, and if anything antagonized the German leader. In his speech declaring war against the United States, Hitler took time to personally attack FDR. "I will pass over the insulting attacks made by this so-called President against me. That he calls me a gangster is uninteresting," The Fuehrer said. "I cannot be insulted by Roosevelt for I consider him mad, just as Wilson was... First he incited war then falsifies the cause, then odiously wraps himself in a cloak of Christian hypocrisy." See "Hitler's Declaration of War Against the United States," in *Historical Dictionary of the 1940s*, James G. Ryan and Leonard Schlup, eds. (London: Routledge, 2006), 470.

example.⁴³ As leader of the Free French Forces during WWII, his international stature rose as the war progressed. By the time the fighting was over, everyone recognized that de Gaulle would be a force in French politics. Roosevelt and others in the American government, however, were not keen on the Frenchman. They saw him as arrogant, anti-American, a demagogue with an authoritarian streak, and an overall pain. For de Gaulle's part, he was always displeased that the United States did not break ties with Vichy France sooner and that he had not been included more in political and military planning. He also believed that the United States wanted to keep France weak after the war, and initial U.S. support for his main rival was something he never forgot.⁴⁴

Whatever issues Roosevelt had with the de Gaulle, however, he had to engage with him. In June 1944, the head of the Office of War Information wrote Roosevelt saying, "The De Gaulle situation seems to us in this Office the most currently dangerous point in American foreign policy—dangerous because of reactions at home as well as abroad." The problem was that de Gaulle successfully portrayed any U.S. issues with his leadership as a personal matter, one of "De Gaulle and France versus Roosevelt." This view was not only disseminated in France, but also in the United States, "with the President pictured as a stubborn man waging a feud against De Gaulle because of personal dislike." The Office of War Information recommended that Roosevelt go on the offensive and urged a propaganda plan. The president needed to change public perceptions and show he was "a man exercising the greatest possible patience with

⁴³ For more on Roosevelt and de Gaulle's relationship, see Claude Fohlen, "De Gaulle and Franklin D. Roosevelt" in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 33-44; Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle: Allies in Conflict, A Personal Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ In 1943, Roosevelt tried to convince Churchill that the Allies should dump de Gaulle. He told the prime minister that he was "fed up" with the Frenchman and that he was "absolutely convinced that he [de Gaulle] has been and is injuring our war effort...that he is a very dangerous threat to us...and that he would double-cross both of us at the first opportunity." See Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, 406. Though also not personally fond of de Gaulle, Churchill would not take that step. More so than FDR, he realized how popular the general was among the French, and on a variety of issues like colonial possessions, the two men held similar views. For Churchill and de Gaulle's relationship, see Francois Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle* (London: Collins, 1981).

General De Gaulle because of his service as a rallying point of resistance.”⁴⁵

Even though de Gaulle was a headache, the Roosevelt Administration had to work with him. This was necessary on two levels. First, he was genuinely popular. From a public relations standpoint Roosevelt had no choice. France was also an ally, and the projection of unity—especially in the context of war—was imperative. Second, a cantankerous relationship with de Gaulle could have real world consequences. It was in U.S. interest to have stability in France, and as Ambassador Jefferson Caffery told Roosevelt, “While perfectly willing to call deGaulle [sic] all the names in the devil’s calendar, I would like to say that it is essential for us, with so many troops at the front, to have order maintained in France.”⁴⁶ By 1945, de Gaulle was seen as the person best able to deliver.

One final aspect of Roosevelt’s personal diplomacy with Western leaders that should be noted is his relationship with Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Throughout the course of his presidency, FDR met with King over thirteen times and they carried on a vast correspondence full of warmth and friendship. Like most presidential relationships, however, their first contact was for political reasons. In November 1935, shortly after winning election in August, King visited the White House to try and finalize a trade agreement (which was one of his campaign promises) that had been in negotiation for sometime but had recently stalled. The visit

⁴⁵ Memorandum, Elmer Davis to Roosevelt, June 22, 1944, Folder President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, France: De Gaulle, Charles: 1944-45; Box 31: France: Bullitt: Sept.-Dec.1939 thru Germany: Jun.-Sept.1944; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL. In his battle with Roosevelt, de Gaulle did not always have public opinion on his side. In February 1945, the president stopped in Algiers as part of his trip to the Yalta Conference. He invited de Gaulle to meet, but the French general declined. He was criticized for it, and the U.S. ambassador to France reported to FDR, “how much the French people are worried about it was shown in the fact that as soon as I got back here the press began playing up a story that you are to come here in the spring.” See Letter, Jefferson Caffery to Roosevelt, February 26, 1945, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, France: Aug 1944-45; Box 30: France: Aug. 1944-45 thru France: Bullitt, William C.: July-Aug. 1939; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁴⁶ Letter, Caffery to Roosevelt, February 26, 1945, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, France: Aug 1944-45; Box 30: France: Aug. 1944-45 thru France: Bullitt, William C.: July-Aug. 1939; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

was a success and soon after an agreement was reached.⁴⁷ The meeting proved to both men that they could work together, and as one Canadian historian describes, this period was the “turning point” in Canadian-American relations.⁴⁸

Roosevelt and King met again the following year in Canada. Substantive issues were on the agenda, but symbolism was also important, as the visit was a gesture of American friendship.⁴⁹ In February 1937, Roosevelt sent King a handwritten letter inviting him again to the White House. The president told the press that he and the prime minister would discuss “everything.”⁵⁰ Though both leaders remained rather vague about the exact contents of their discussions, the *Washington Post* noted, “One thing is certain... Whatever these problems were,

⁴⁷ Though only a modest trade agreement, FDR was still concerned about how this venture into foreign affairs might be perceived at home. Occurring during his first term when his interest was still primarily domestic and some saw any foray into the international realm as suspect, Roosevelt worried that the agreement would hurt his reelection chances in 1936. As he wrote to King, “we both took our political lives in our hands” by signing the trade pact. Quoted in Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, 263.

⁴⁸ C.P. Stacey, “The Turning Point: Canadian-American Relations During the Roosevelt-King Era,” *Canada* 1 (1972): 1-10. As Stacey argues, the relationship that Roosevelt and King established prior to WWII proved an asset when hostilities began. Interestingly, King had a quite negative opinion of Roosevelt in the years before they met. While he would later sing his praises, in 1933-1934 King wrote in his diary that FDR was a “dictator” and that he “greatly disliked” him. He also wrote that the president’s policies were “absolutely wrong, amateurish, half-baked and downright mistaken.” Quoted in Marc T. Boucher, “The Politics of Economic Depression: Canadian-American Relations in the Mid-1930s,” *International Journal* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1985/1986): 9, 10. According to another Canadian historian, King had an “obsequious relationship” with FDR. Though perhaps somewhat true, King’s use of flattery and submissiveness were, if anything, done strategically. During the late 1930s, though Canada still had strong ties with Britain and Europe, it drew closer to the United States, mainly over hemispheric security. As Britain became weaker both economically and militarily, the United States was the best bet. Indeed, even in the prewar period, the British realized that Canada was in the American sphere. Thus though King might have felt the need to ingratiate himself with FDR, he did not do it absentmindedly. See Denis Smith, *Diplomacy of Fear: Canada and the Cold War, 1941-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 13; Norman Hillmer, “Defence and Ideology: The Anglo-Canadian Military ‘Alliance’ in the 1930s,” *International Journal* 33, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 588-612; Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 111-112.

⁴⁹ John MacCormac, “America’s Eyes Upon Canada: The President’s Visit to the Dominion Is a Symbol of Friendship Between Neighbors Not Wholly Alike but Increasingly Sympathetic,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1936. Roosevelt was a master of stagecraft both domestically and internationally. Meeting foreign leaders gave FDR the actor a bigger stage, and he mastered it beautifully. He knew the importance of appearances and how they were just as, if not more, important than reality. And he managed photo-ops and the press skillfully. As journalist Marquis Childs observed, FDR had “the quality of the actor, the man who could be photographed and who could speak always with just the perfect camera angle. Partly this was the politician, but it was partly a great actor.” Quoted in Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2004), 27.

⁵⁰ “Mackenzie King, Roosevelt Talk on Varied Topics,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6, 1937.

they were discussed in the very friendliest spirit.”⁵¹ Indeed, after their meeting King wrote Roosevelt, “I cannot begin to say how much I enjoyed my visit to the White House. The talks we had together...will live in my memory always. I am sure they will prove to be of great value.”⁵² During the rest of Roosevelt’s Administration, King came to the United States to visit every year but one. The two men also met four times in Canada. Throughout that time a close relationship developed, one that obviously focused on significant world problems, but also one that seemed to be a genuine friendship. If Roosevelt and Churchill could be said to have had a warm relationship that transcended politics and moved into the realm of the personal, then so could FDR and King.⁵³

“The One Bright Spot in the Troubled World Today”: A Good Neighbor in Latin America

If there was one area of prewar foreign policy where Roosevelt had a coherent plan, it was relations with Latin America. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy was one of his only clear foreign policy successes during his first two terms.⁵⁴ As the U.S. ambassador to Mexico said upon retiring in 1941, the Good Neighbor Policy was “the one bright spot in the troubled

⁵¹ “Premier King’s Visit,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 1937.

⁵² Letter, King to Roosevelt, March 8, 1937, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Canada: 1936-37; Box 25: Burma thru Chile: Mar.-June 1941; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁵³ Throughout their relationship, their correspondence was often characterized by affection and concern for each other, with King’s messages being particularly emotional and sentimental. For example, a month before FDR’s death King wrote, “I can only add that this latest visit to the White House seemed to bring home in a very real way how large a part of the memories I shall ever most cherish have had their associations with my visits to the White House, or Hyde Park, or to Warm Springs, and how large a part of my interest and thought is wrapped up in all that pertains to your life and work and the friendship so intimately shared with you over so many years.” See, Letter, King to Roosevelt, March 15, 1945, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Canada: 1944-45; Box 25: Burma thru Chile: Mar.-June 1941; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁵⁴ In his inaugural address in 1933, Roosevelt described his vision of a “good neighbor.” “In the field of world policy,” he proclaimed, “I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.” See “Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1933, *PP, Vol. 2: 1933*, 14. This was to be a change from prior U.S. engagement with Latin America. The good neighbor was going to replace diplomacy of the dollar and gunboat variety. Even before taking office, Latin America was an area where Roosevelt was interested. In his 1928 *Foreign Affairs* article, over half of it was devoted to the region. See Franklin Roosevelt, “Our Foreign Policy: A Democratic View,” *Foreign Affairs* 6 (July 1928): 573-586.

world.”⁵⁵ Some argue that it was not so much an active strategy as much as it was a detachment from the region, but that simplifies Roosevelt’s desire to adjust relations with that part of the world.⁵⁶ While European affairs were important during the 1930s, the build up to war overshadows how much attention was also placed on the Western Hemisphere in that decade. Because of its proximity, engagement with Latin America was often seen as more legitimate than involvement in Europe prior to WWII. In charting this new course with America’s southern neighbors, Roosevelt used personal diplomacy to great effect. During his first term, of the eight foreign leaders that came to visit half were from Latin America, and in that same period he also visited six Latin American countries.

Roosevelt’s first meeting with a Latin American leader came six months after his talks with British Prime Minister MacDonald. In October 1933, Panamanian President Harmodio Arias came to Washington to discuss matters relating to America’s presence in the Canal Zone. He was an official guest, staying at the White House and having a state dinner held in his honor.⁵⁷ When Arias left for Washington, the Panamanian press described his trip as “the most important since the birth of the republic.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the archbishop of Panama issued a decree urging the nation’s Catholics to pray daily for Arias’ success.⁵⁹ Whether it was the Faithfull’s prayers at work or something else, Arias’ visit was deemed a triumph. Upon completion of their

⁵⁵ “Mexican President Greets Roosevelt: Daniels Brings His personal Message and Voice Hope for an Oil Settlement,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1941.

⁵⁶ As Roosevelt conceived of it, the Good Neighbor Policy was not passive. Rather, the goal was “to remove from their [Latin American] minds all fear of American aggression-territorial or financial...to take them into a kind of hemispheric partnership in which no Republic would obtain undue advantage.” See Bryce Woods, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 131. For more on the Good Neighbor Policy, see Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1979); Henry Raymond, “Latin America and Franklin Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 111-125.

⁵⁷ “Arias, Panama Ruler, Is Guest In White House: Arrival to Discuss Vital Problems Marked by Much Ceremony,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 1933.

⁵⁸ “Panaman President Off For Washington: Papers Say Arias Hopes to Obtain Concessions From Roosevelt by Explaining Conditions,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1933.

⁵⁹ “People of Panama Pray For Arias’s Success Here,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1933.

“most friendly and cordial” talks, the two presidents agreed to general principles to guide the American-Panamanian relationship.⁶⁰ These were well received by Arias’ fellow citizens, and he returned to a hero’s welcome. Tens of thousands of Panamanians filled the streets, cheering and waving flags to greet to him. In addressing the crowd of supporters, he praised the American president, calling him a “good neighbor.”⁶¹

Less than a year later Haitian President Stenio Vincent visited Roosevelt to discuss the nation’s finances and the American Marines stationed on the island. Prior to his arrival, U.S. officials believed he would leave America content, much like Arias did.⁶² These predictions proved correct, as the Haitian president and Roosevelt reached an understanding. Vincent got assurance that Haiti would control its own finances without U.S. interference, and FDR agreed to withdraw the Marines by the end of the year and improve trade relations.⁶³ A few months later FDR solidified the goodwill on a brief visit to Haiti in July 1934. Traveling aboard the *U.S.S. Houston* to Hawaii for vacation, the president stopped at the island nation to bolster the agreement on Marine withdrawal. Vincent received him warmly and thousands of Haitians lined the street to greet the American president. In speeches by both men—part of FDR’s was delivered in French—friendship between the two nations was emphasized.⁶⁴ Four days later on his 10,000 plus mile vacation, Roosevelt stopped in Colombia—still not over the U.S. role in

⁶⁰ “Joint Statement Issued by the President and President Arias on Panamanian-American Relations,” October 17, 1933, *PP, Vol. 2: 1933*, 407.

⁶¹ Gerald Martin, “Panama Cheers Aid From U.S., and Then Gasps: Canal Zone Business Rivalry Ended,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 31, 1933; “Panama Welcomes Arias: Returning President Praises Roosevelt as ‘Good Neighbor,’” *New York Times*, October 31, 1933.

⁶² Kendall Foss, “Haitian Chief Arrives Here Amid Fanfare: Confers With President Today Seeking Financial Control Revisions,” *Washington Post*, April 17, 1934. Roosevelt had baggage when it came to Haiti. As the Democratic vice-president candidate in 1920 he claimed to have written the Haitian constitution. As Assistant Secretary of the Navy he boasted, “I have had something to do with the running of a couple of little republics. Facts are that I wrote Haiti’s constitution myself, and, if I do say it, I think it a pretty good constitution.” See “Declare Wilsons ‘Put One Over’ on Lloyd George,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1920.

⁶³ “Vincent Goes Home After Favorable U.S. Visit: Executive of Haiti Receives Promises From Roosevelt,” *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1934.

⁶⁴ “Roosevelt Visits Haiti: President’s Hope of Mutual Good Will Cheered by Natives,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 1934; “Roosevelt in Haiti Renews His Pledge To Recall Marines,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1934.

Panama's independence in 1903—where he met with President Enrique Olaya Herrera. The visit was not only important for Colombia, which was “honored” according to its acting foreign secretary, but for the region at large. “It is expected to be a great day, and its importance from a diplomatic standpoint cannot be overestimated,” the *New York Times* explained. “President Roosevelt's action in making this visit of friendship to Colombia will be accepted by all the republics of South and Central America as a cordial gesture, the importance of which cannot but be considered as the greatest ever made by the Executive of the United States in the interest of closer relations and deeper amity between them.”⁶⁵

Indeed, Roosevelt's visit—the first by a sitting U.S. president to South America—was a public relations success. Cheering crowds greeted him as he rode through the streets of Cartagena with the Colombian president, and his brief remarks were widely praised, as were his words on his next stop in Panama where he rededicated the Panama Canal to “all Nations in the needs of peaceful commerce.”⁶⁶ Locals again hailed FDR as he drove to the presidential palace for a state dinner hosted by President Arias. By the end of the trip, Roosevelt and America's image south of the border were both on the rise.

After reelection in November 1936, Roosevelt again headed south in another highly visible act of personal diplomacy. Less than a week after winning a second term he announced that he would attend the Pan-American Peace Conference in Argentina, as well as make stops in Brazil and Uruguay. Roosevelt's impending visit became headline news in Buenos Aires. Even an Argentine paper that had been anti-American was supportive, writing, ““President Roosevelt's visit to our country will be the most eminent distinction the United States ever has extended to

⁶⁵ “Visit Elates Colombia,” *New York Times*, July 4, 1934; “Cartagena Is Modernized: President Will Find One Skyscraper, Latest Steamship Wharves,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1934.

⁶⁶ “President Hailed in Colombia; Pictures ‘Live and Let Live’ Era,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1934; “Rededicates the Canal,” *New York Times*, July 12, 1934.

Argentina.”⁶⁷

For all the fanfare and press coverage, though, Roosevelt’s role at the Pan-American Peace Conference was quite limited. Other than deliver the opening address, his three days in Buenos Aires consisted of meals with Argentine President Agustin Justo and sightseeing. Yet, the symbolism of the visit was extremely important. In many ways it was the culmination of the Good Neighbor Policy. Through word and deed FDR had already gone far in improving relations between the United States and South America. What the Argentina trip did was cement these developments. To many, Roosevelt’s visit symbolized the equality of all in the Western Hemisphere. In his speech before the conference he opened by referring to all the nations of region as a “family.” When he and Justo meet for the first time, he greeted the Argentine president as “mi amigo,” to which Justo responded by hugging Roosevelt before the two men could even complete formal introductions. A similar scene marked their departure, with Roosevelt this time initiating the embrace.⁶⁸ For America’s southern neighbors, after years of feeling inferior, being referred to as family and friend made the Colossus of the North less menacing.

Of all the Latin leaders Roosevelt engaged with, one of the closest relationships formed was with Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho. The two men were not destined to have a strong bond. In 1940, the year Avila Camacho was elected, Mexican-American relations were tepid. His predecessor had expropriated foreign oil and mining properties in 1938, some of which

⁶⁷ John W. Whites, “Argentina Invites Roosevelt to Visit,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1936.

⁶⁸ Harold B. Hinton, “Ovation is City’s Biggest: Multitudes Break Police Lines-Flower Are Rained on President,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1936; Associated Press, “Roosevelt Departs for Home Amid Cheers: Argentine President Accompanies Party to Dock for Farewell Ceremonies,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1936. Justo was not the only South American leader FDR hugged. A similar scene played out with the Uruguayan president, Gabriel Terra. See Harold B. Hinton, “Roosevelt Hailed In Uruguay At End Of His Peace Trip,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1936.

were owned by U.S. companies.⁶⁹ Though Mexico said it would provide compensation, two years later the United States was still unsatisfied. In the 1940 election, Avila Camacho was the candidate of the incumbent's party and supported the policies of the outgoing president.⁷⁰ After a disputed election which some feared might lead to upheaval, Avila Camacho emerged victorious and showed himself to be a moderate. He quickly attempted to alleviate the fears of his political opponents on the right who worried he was a radical leftist. Shortly after the election he announced his intention to visit the United States. "It is my ambition to make relations between the United States and Mexico better than they have ever been," he said. "I hope that the United States and Mexico will be closer, more friendly, more firmly bound than ever before."⁷¹ Though the proposed visit was cancelled, Avila Camacho's words set a tone for improved relations. Soon after his positive proclamation, the Roosevelt Administration reciprocated by announcing that it would send Vice President-elect Henry Wallace to attend Avila Camacho's inauguration. Acting as the president's surrogate, Wallace's visit was symbolically important, seen as the start of a new era in Mexican-American relations.⁷²

⁶⁹ The expropriation of foreign owned oil property was really just the latest development in a thirty-year span of rocky U.S.-Mexico relations. In 1911, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico plotted with locals to overthrow the country's president and in 1914 Marines occupied Veracruz for nine months to prevent a shipment of German arms. Two years later, Woodrow Wilson sent more than ten thousand troops into Mexico to find Pancho Villa. For almost a decade (1913-1917, 1920-1923) the United States did not have diplomatic relations with Mexico. The most pressing issue before the seizure of foreign oil properties was the expropriation of American-owned agricultural land between 1935-1938.

⁷⁰ Robert Kleiman, "Camacho and Almazan Wind Up As Mexico Prepares to Choose President," *Washington Post*, June 30, 1940.

⁷¹ John Gunther, "Camacho To Visit U.S., He Announces: Mexican President-Elect Plans to Study Our Problems and Sound Public Opinion," *New York Times*, October 6, 1940; Timothy G. Turner, "Mexican Revolt Impulses Under Patriotic Restraint: Camacho's Right Swing and Fear Rebellion Would Disturb World Cools Tendency," *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1940; "Moderate Cabinet Pledged in Mexico: Advocates of Collaboration With U.S. Reported Slated for Foreign Ministry," *New York Times*, November 28, 1940.

⁷² As the *New York Times* reported, Wallace's visit was "hailed here [Mexico] with almost complete unanimity as the most significant evidence of the American Administration's continued good-will toward Mexico. The fact that a personage second only to Mr. Roosevelt himself has been chosen is interpreted not only as a very special honor paid to Mexico but also as a proof that the 'good-neighbor policy' will remain in force as the cornerstone of relations between the United States and Latin America generally, and Mexico particularly." This notion of a change in Mexican-American relationship was evident at Avila Camacho's inauguration, where the American delegation led by Wallace received boisterous applause from the Mexican legislature: "There was an immediate burst of

Once in office Avila Camacho sought to move closer to the United States. As one newspaper reported, his “foreign program is based squarely on an out-and-out pro-Washington policy.”⁷³ Because of this and Roosevelt’s general inclinations, the two nations set out to quickly resolve the outstanding issue of compensation for American oil companies.⁷⁴ Soon after came the attack on Pearl Harbor and American entrance into WWII. Immediately, Avila Camacho announced that he stood united with his northern neighbor and sought to coordinate defense of the hemisphere. Five months later Mexico also declared war on the Axis powers, a move which Roosevelt praised in a letter to the Mexican president.⁷⁵

The two men corresponded frequently, and tried to arrange a meeting in 1941. In March, Roosevelt tentatively planned a fishing trip in the Gulf of Mexico and hoped that Avila Camacho could join him. According to Ambassador Josephus Daniels, upon receiving the invitation the Mexican president said, “nothing would please him better, and that he sincerely hoped...he could have the pleasure of welcoming [FDR]...to the waters and shores of his country.”⁷⁶ While the proposed fishing trip never materialized, the two presidents would, with great fanfare, meet two years later.

applause...for several minutes while Senators and Deputies rose to their feet and, turning toward the United States delegation, clapped and cheered with a cordiality that has seldom if ever been shown to representatives of a foreign nation by a Mexican legislative body...It was evident from the behavior of the Mexican Congress that something had materially changed in the official Mexican attitude toward the United States.” See Arnaldo Cortesi, “Mexico May Offer Bases For U.S. Use: Era of Good Feeling Predicted—No Question in Hemisphere of Cession, Welles Says,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1940; Arnaldo Cortesi, “Unity of Americas Is Inaugural Note Of Avila Camacho,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1940.

⁷³ Edwin L. James, “War Move By Mexico To Help United States: Entry Into Conflict Seen Stabilizing Political Position of Camacho and His Pro-Washington Policy,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1942.

⁷⁴ With the situation in Europe deteriorating and American involvement in war seeming more likely, Roosevelt was in part driven by concerns over hemispheric defense and solidarity, and the military desired naval and air bases in Mexico. These could not be achieved without resolving the oil issue.

⁷⁵ Letter, Roosevelt to Manuel Avila Camacho, May 30, 1942, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1941-42; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁷⁶ Letter, Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, February 4, 1941, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1941-42; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

Earlier in 1943, Avila Camacho sent a message to Roosevelt through the American ambassador, now George Messersmith, saying he greatly hoped FDR would visit Mexico. A visit would not only be personally gratifying, but symbolically important and would strengthen the ties between the two countries the Mexican president said. “A visit would give him [Avila Camacho] great personal satisfaction and would have a great effect in Mexico. He wished me to say to the President that a great psychological change had taken place among the Mexican people, whose sentiments towards the United States had very rapidly and very radically changed,” Messersmith reported. “The [Mexican] President said that such a visit would consolidate in a most marked way the changed relationship between Mexico and the United States...[and] such a visit would be more marked, not only in the two countries but throughout the world.”⁷⁷

A few months later secret planning began for Roosevelt to visit. As both countries made preparations, Messersmith frequently brought up three points in his reports. First, Avila Camacho was thrilled and excited that Roosevelt was coming to Mexico. Second, he continuously reported how the Mexican president wanted the greatest public impact. From having FDR wave to crowds from a balcony, to a radio broadcast, to having addresses by Roosevelt and himself, the Mexican president was keen on getting the most mileage out of the visit as possible. Lastly, he repeatedly mentioned how significant the trip was for U.S.-Mexico relations. One word that showed up multiple times denoting its importance was “transcendental.”⁷⁸ To officials in both Mexico and the United States, this meeting was to be a

⁷⁷ Memorandum, George Messersmith, January 14, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁷⁸ Letter, Messersmith to Sumner Welles, March 6, 1943; Messersmith to Welles, March 8, 1943; Messersmith to Welles, March 11, 1943; Messersmith to Welles, March 22, 1943; Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

defining moment between their two countries.

Indeed, Roosevelt's journey to Mexico—and Avila Camacho's subsequent trip to Corpus Christi, Texas—was seen as extremely significant. The April 1943 meeting was the first time an American and Mexican president had met in thirty-four years, and unlike that previous meeting, rather than simply confer at the border, Roosevelt traveled over a hundred miles into Mexico. While the two presidents discussed substantial issues of economics and war, the imagery of the visit and what it represented took center stage. As one Mexican official noted, "President Roosevelt's visit to Mexico has done more to improve relations with the United States than any single gesture on the part of Washington in this century."⁷⁹ Ambassador Messersmith concurred. "It is safe to say that there has been no event in Mexican history in many years which has made so profound an impression on so great a mass of Mexican people," he reported. "So far as the press reaction is concerned it was all that could be desired and unusual for the Mexican press...[which] appreciated particularly the gesture of President Roosevelt not only in coming to Mexico but to penetrate into Mexican territory...and not merely to meet President Avila Camacho at the border."⁸⁰

The trip had significance beyond U.S.-Mexico relations and was seen to symbolize Pan-American solidarity as well. By that point in 1943 Roosevelt had met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to discuss war related matters multiple times, and though yet to meet Soviet premier Joseph Stalin or Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, it was well known of his desire to do so. However, the American president had yet to meet with any Latin American leader since the start of the war. Thus, his meeting with Avila Camacho helped demonstrate U.S. appreciation of its southern neighbors and their contribution to the war effort. The visit was also seen as a

⁷⁹ Camille M. Cianfarra, "Mexicans See Ties Cemented By Visit," *New York Times*, April 22, 1934.

⁸⁰ Letter, Messersmith to Welles, April 30, 1943, Folder: President's Secretary's File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

message to the Axis powers. As one *New York Times* reporter wrote, “It was, of course realized that the visit would also take on the character of a gesture to all of Latin America...At the same time it was felt that the visit would have even a wider significance and influence. It was realized that Mr. Roosevelt by going to Monterrey...could exercise an influence beyond the borders of the Western Hemisphere. He would impress...the Axis powers.”⁸¹ Messersmith echoed the same sentiments in his report back to Washington. Though initially concerned that other Latin American nations would be jealous that Roosevelt honored Mexico with a visit, he found the opposite. Other nations in the Americas saw the visit as proof of hemispheric solidarity.⁸²

In the months and years that followed Avila Camacho and Roosevelt would often reflect on their meeting in their correspondence.⁸³ And plans to meet again emerged soon after their initial encounter. Within months the two presidents again discussed getting together for a fishing trip.⁸⁴ At the time of Roosevelt’s death in April 1945, concrete plans had been made. After attending the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, Roosevelt planned to drive across the border and met Avila Camacho.⁸⁵

“There is no Chief of State in the other American Republics,” the American ambassador in Mexico wrote, “who is a sounder and firmer and more convinced friend of our country than President Avila Camacho...what an understanding friend our country has in the President of

⁸¹ Bertram Hullen, “Mexico Meeting Viewed As Solidarity Gesture: Desire to Impress Latin America on Spain a Motivating Factor,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1943.

⁸² Letter, Messersmith to Welles, April 30, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁸³ For example, see Letter, Avila Camacho to Roosevelt, July 9, 1943; Roosevelt to Messersmith, October 25, 1943; Messersmith to Roosevelt, November 30, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁸⁴ Letter, Roosevelt to Messersmith, October 25, 1943; Roosevelt to Avila Camacho, December 29, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1943; Box 44: Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL; Memorandum, Messersmith, January 7, 1944, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1944-45; Box 44: Mexico: 1944-45; Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁸⁵ “Reveal F.D.R. Planned to Meet Avila Camacho,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 27, 1945.

Mexico.”⁸⁶ With WWII raging, Roosevelt no doubt appreciated a friendly leader on the country’s southern border. Avila Camacho might have been predisposed to this position, but without Roosevelt meeting him halfway, cooperation between Mexico and the United States would not have been as smooth. In this sense, personal diplomacy gave Roosevelt one less thing to worry about during the war, and their highly publicized exchange of visits was a public relations boon, as well as symbolically important to U.S.-Mexico relations and the Good Neighbor Policy.

“I Am Sure There Are Many Things That Can Only be Satisfactorily Settled If We Can Meet Face to Face”: A New Role in Africa and Asia

Unlike in Latin America, the United States’ interests and ties to Africa and Asia in the 1930s were minimal. Though issues of trade and commerce were present, close political connections were absent. During Roosevelt’s first three terms there was not much need or concern for America’s political involvement in those regions, nor would the American public have allowed it. Thus, face-to-face interactions with leaders of Asia and Africa did not occur, though Roosevelt was in correspondence with some of his counterparts in those areas.⁸⁷ World War II changed this. With the United States involved in a global conflict, the extent of the nation’s interests grew immensely. Both politically and militarily, the United States was no longer confined to its own hemisphere, and as the country’s international role began to change, the American public began to accept that its nation would have a global presence, not only during the war but after as well. As the *Washington Post* noted, “The knowledge of the world which this war has provoked among Americans is not the least of its side products. One of the

⁸⁶ Letter, Messersmith to Roosevelt, June 29, 1944, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, Mexico: 1944-45; Mexico 1938 thru Netherlands 1940-41; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁸⁷ The one pre-war meeting Roosevelt did have with a non-Western head of state was in 1938 with the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. See, “In Best Clothes, Capital Greets Muscat Sultan: Little Ruler of 500,000 Gets Same Welcome Accorded Kings,” *Washington Post*, March 4, 1938; “Sultan of Oman in Washington; Nation’s Guest: Rules Tiny Patch of Hill in Arabia,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 4, 1938.

countries we have become aware of is little Liberia. . . . It went its way in obscurity till war broke out, and then we realized Liberia's importance to our Atlantic security."⁸⁸ Though writing about Liberia, the sentiment applied to many other nations.

As America's stature and place in the world community grew, Roosevelt arranged meetings with multiple leaders from Asia and Africa. Edwin Barclay, president of Liberia, was one of the first. Traveling back from the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, FDR stopped at the small nation on Africa's western coast where he lunched with Barclay and toured a large Firestone rubber plantation that produced large quantities of war materials. Four months later Barclay reciprocated the visit, and he became the first black leader to sleep in the White House.⁸⁹ The fact that the Liberian president received the same welcome that other foreign dignitaries did was—like so many aspects of personal diplomacy—seen as symbolically significant. “The visit of Mr. Barclay,” a Liberian official noted, “will do much toward creating international and interracial goodwill.”⁹⁰ And with U.S. interests and involvement now spanning the globe, appearances of equality became increasingly important.⁹¹

During Roosevelt's journey to and from the Tehran Conference in November 1943, Roosevelt made time to meet with the leaders of China, Turkey, and Iran. In Turkey, Roosevelt

⁸⁸ “Host To A President,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 1943.

⁸⁹ In the nineteenth century slaves and free blacks part of the White House staff did stay in the servants' quarters, which were either in the basement or the attic. One exception to this was Andrew Jackson's body servant, who actually slept in the same room as the president. See William Seale, *The President's House* (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1986); William Seale, “Upstairs and Downstairs: The 19th-Century White House,” *American Visions* (February-March, 1995): 16-20; Margaret Truman, *The President's House 1800 to the Present: The Secrets and History of the World's Most Famous House* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005).

⁹⁰ “Barclays' Visit Stirs Washington: Liberian President Due Here Soon; May Address Congress,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 1, 1943.

⁹¹ Issues of appearance and symbolism were especially acute in Roosevelt's meetings with non-Western countries. By meeting with nationalist leaders of African and Asian countries, FDR signaled support for decolonization, a message not missed by these nations or by Europeans. See Kimball, *The Juggler*, 127-157; Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 191-193; Jason Parker, *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

met President Ismet Inonu for the first time, though the two had exchanged letters. When they met, Turkey was still neutral, and there was much talk about whether it would finally declare support for the Allies. Indeed, Roosevelt and Churchill's conference with Inonu was designed to help persuade the Turkish president to provide greater assistance to the war effort. Though sympathetic to the allied cause, Inonu was more concerned with Turkey's strategic position and thus remained noncommittal and would not declare war against the Axis powers until 1945. Still, the conference allowed Roosevelt and Inonu to get to know each other better and set the stage for future cooperation. A few months after their meeting, Roosevelt wrote to Inonu saying, "I do not have to tell you how very happy I was in our talks in Cairo. Now you and I can talk to each other as old friends."⁹²

Though the meeting with Inonu was more substantive and garnered more attention, Roosevelt's encounter with the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was in many ways more interesting and illustrative of how personal diplomacy (or lack thereof) can have important consequences. As head of the host nation of the Tehran Conference, the Shah called upon the Allied leaders. Though nothing of strategic importance was exchanged between Roosevelt and the Shah, this simple courtesy call took on an extra dimension when the American president did not return the favor and make a reciprocal visit to see the Iranian leader. According to the Office of Strategic Services (the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency), "Because the Shah did not receive a return visit after his call upon the President at Tehran, it is reported that the Iranians may not cooperate with American advisers in Iran. Moreover, since the Shah's visit with the President was not a[s] long as that with Stalin, the observer reports that the prestige of America

⁹² Roosevelt also added, "I wish much that you and I were not four thousand miles apart, for I find that there are many matters I would like to talk with you about almost every day in the week." Letter, Roosevelt to Ismet Inonu, March 10, 1944, Folder: President's Secretary's File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Turkey; Box 51: Sweden thru Vatican: Taylor, Myron C.: 1942; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

has been lowered to the level of the British. The prestige of Russia has increased.”⁹³ In a memo to Roosevelt, Secretary of State Cordell Hull added that the Iranian leader was “bitterly disappointed and even felt humiliated that you were unable to make a return call...and receive the hospitality and the honor which he was eager to accord you.”⁹⁴ No long-term damage occurred in the American-Iranian relationship, however, and soon after the president left Iran he sent the Shah a very warm and friendly letter, inviting him to visit the United States.⁹⁵

When Roosevelt traveled to the Yalta Conference in 1945, he again met with a set of non-Western leaders. Over a two day period, Roosevelt conferred with three monarchs on a naval ship in Great Bitter Lake near Cairo: Egypt's King Farouk, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, and King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. These meetings were both substantive and symbolic of the increasing reach of U.S. global interests. They also represented a meeting of different cultures that fascinated the American public.⁹⁶

Of the three kings, Ibn Saud interested the public the most. With his flowing robe and team of servants—including his bodyguards armed with swords—he most closely conformed to the American people’s expectations of what an “orient” ruler should look and behave like.⁹⁷ For

⁹³ Report, Office of Strategic Services, John Magruder to Col. L. Mathewson, “Reports Received in Office of Strategic Services, No. 89,” December 21, 1943, Folder: OSS Numbered Bulletins, September-December 1943; Box 72: Map Room, O.S.S. Numbered Bulletins: MR 203 (12) March-December 1943; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL.

⁹⁴ Memorandum, Hull to Roosevelt, December 23, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Iran; Box 40: Iran thru Ireland; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁹⁵ Letter, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to Roosevelt, December 6, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Iran; Box 40: Iran thru Ireland; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

⁹⁶ These “Kings of the Orient” fascinated the press, leading to colorful commentary: “First to the President’s man-o’-war came King Farouk, bearded like the pard and topped with a fez. But hark! Who comes now? Batten my hatches, but unless these old eyes deceive me, yon lean and hungry knight, bearded like the pard, is Haile Selassie, King of Kings and Lion of Judah, out of the fastness of Ethiopia. But soft, my hearties, who’s that knocking at my door? Aye, righty ye are, mates. It’s King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, come from the desert land where the coyotes howl o’er the long prairie and the sands shift ever to the fickle winds.” See “Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1945.

⁹⁷ For the persistence of “orientalist” stereotypes in U.S. culture and foreign policy, see Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3d ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

the Saudi king, his meeting with Roosevelt was the first time he had ever left his country. To facilitate the meeting, the United States sent a naval vessel to pick him up and bring him to Great Bitter Lake. Once onboard the ship, rather than sleep in a cabin made available for him, Ibn Saud and his party set up tents on the ship's deck. They even brought their own food, which included seven live sheep, and special water for the King that came from two holy wells.⁹⁸

While these facets of Roosevelt's meetings most captivated the public, he had serious matters to discuss with these rulers. Prior to the encounters memos were prepared that provided biographical sketches of the kings and background information on their countries. Proposed subjects for discussion were also mentioned. These documents helped FDR prepare, and in the second half of the twentieth century would become standard. In the Roosevelt Administration they were more ad hoc, but in the future, as meetings between political principals grew and institutional resources of the presidency increased, advisory documents became formalized and institutionalized.⁹⁹

Roosevelt and Ibn Saud had previously communicated (as had the president with Farouk and Selassie), discussing issues such as the British presence in the region and the situation in Palestine.¹⁰⁰ FDR had even sent a special representative to Saudi Arabia in 1943 to sound out Ibn Saud and investigate the U.S. position in the Middle East more broadly. "As yet the United

⁹⁸ The Saudis originally wanted to bring about fifty or sixty live sheep and goats. They had planned to provide food for the entire ship, but after the ship's leader assured the Saudis that the crew had more than enough food, they settled on seven sheep. For a summary of the naval voyage with Ibn Saud, see Memorandum, The Commander Destroyer Squadron Seventeen to Roosevelt, "Mission to Mecca," February 18, 1945, Folder: Naval Aide's Files: Crimean Conference A/16; Box 165: Map Room Papers: A16 Warfare-China to Crimean Conference; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL. For a sample of press coverage of the meeting with the three kings, see "White House Announcement of New Talks," *New York Times*, February 21, 1945; "Kings Of The Orient," *New York Times*, February 22, 1945; "FDR Host to 3 Rulers: One Brings Live Sheep," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 21, 1945.

⁹⁹ For the background reports on the three kings, see Folder: Naval Aide's Files: Crimean Conference A/16; Box 165: Map Room Papers: A16 Warfare-China to Crimean Conference; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL.

¹⁰⁰ A central subject in the many letters exchanged between the two men was the issue of Palestine, with Ibn Saud often using emotional language and Roosevelt playing counselor, constantly trying to reassure him of American goodwill and intentions. For example, see Ibn Saud to Roosevelt, March 10, 1945 and Roosevelt to Ibn Saud, April 5, 1945, Folder: Folder: President's Secretary's File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Saudi Arabia; Box 50: Russia: Bullitt, William C.: 1933-1936 thru Spain: 1940-1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

States does not have a similar [compared to the British and French] coordinated political set-up in the Middle East,” the envoy reported, “and, as a result, American political interests tend at times to suffer.” Looking ahead to the postwar period, this was seen as extremely problematic because the United State was “for the first time developing some fundamental postwar economic interests of a long-term character in the Middle East and particularly in Saudi Arabia. Primarily, these consist of our interest in the enormous oil reserves of the Arabian Peninsula.”¹⁰¹ The United States, then, needed to increase its organization and influence in the region. Ibn Saud also sought something from America. He wanted to counterbalance the British, get American support for the Arabs of Palestine, and receive American assistance for a number of domestic projects.¹⁰²

Thus when they finally met, both had goals and objectives they hoped to achieve. The two discussed important regional issues such as Palestine and the King’s fear that France was threatening the independence of Syria and Lebanon.¹⁰³ On a personal level, the two men quickly formed a rapport. As the American minister in Saudi Arabia noted, “a very friendly relationship was quickly established. The King spoke of being the ‘twin’ brother of the President, in years, in responsibility as Chief of State, and in physical disability.” On that last point, Roosevelt offered one of his wheelchairs to the King so they could truly be “twins.” The minister continued that since Ibn Saud’s meeting with FDR, he had repeatedly commented, “I have never met the equal of the President in character, wisdom and gentility.” He went further, comparing Roosevelt to

¹⁰¹ Memorandum, Harold B. Hoskins to Roosevelt, September 27, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Saudi Arabia; Box 50: Russia: Bullitt, William C.: 1933-1936 thru Spain: 1940-1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

¹⁰² Memorandum, Hoskins to Roosevelt, September 27, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Saudi Arabia; Box 50: Russia: Bullitt, William C.: 1933-1936 thru Spain: 1940-1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL; Letter, Patrick Hurley to Roosevelt, June 9, 1943, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Saudi Arabia; Box 50: Russia: Bullitt, William C.: 1933-1936 thru Spain: 1940-1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

¹⁰³ Memorandum of Conversation Between the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz Al Saud) and President Roosevelt, February 14, 1945, *FRUS, Diplomatic Papers 1945, Volume III: The Near East and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 2-3. For a brief overview of FDR’s meeting with Ibn Saud, Farouk and Selassie, see Lloyd C. Gardner, *Three Kings: The Rise of An American Empire in the Middle East After World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 19-25.

Churchill. ““The contrast between the President and Mr. Churchill is very great,” the King said. “Mr. Churchill speaks deviously, evades understanding, changes the subject to avoid commitment... The President seeks understanding in conversations; his effort is to make two minds meet; to dispel darkness and shed light upon the issue.””¹⁰⁴ Just as the Shah perceived the United States negatively because Roosevelt did not repay his visit while Soviet prestige increased because Stalin did, Ibn Saud’s comparison of FDR and Churchill illustrates how personal diplomacy often involved more than the individuals directly engaged. Presidents often had to consider not only the leader they interacted with, but also how they measured up to other world figures.¹⁰⁵

Of all the non-Western leaders Roosevelt engaged with, he had the most contact with China’s Chiang Kai-shek. Though Churchill and Stalin receive the bulk of attention when discussing Roosevelt’s wartime relationships, Chiang and FDR’s connection should not be forgotten. The two men met only once, but they engaged in an extensive correspondence, and their relationship was the longest of any of the Allied leaders.¹⁰⁶

American familiarity with Chiang dated back to the 1920s when China was fractured and brimming with warlords. He emerged as the key strong man pushing to unify the country. Referred to sometimes as the “Napoleon of the Far East” and “the Chinese Theodore Roosevelt,”

¹⁰⁴ The Minister of Saudi Arabia William Eddy to the Secretary of State, March 3, 1945, *FRUS, 1945, Vol. III*, 7,8. For those who dealt with FDR domestically, this notion that his intentions were clear and he lacked guile would have been surprising.

¹⁰⁵ Roosevelt—as well as his successors—was interested in meetings between other world leaders. In the context of WWII, anytime Axis leaders met Roosevelt was informed, and when Churchill met alone with Stalin, he was very keen to know all the details. He was equally well informed about a meeting between Churchill and Ibn Saud. See William A. Eddy to Cordell Hull, “Conference between King Abdul Aziz and Prime Minister Churchill,” February 22, 1945; Memorandum, Joseph Grew to Roosevelt, “Meeting between Ibn Saud and Churchill,” March 10, 1945, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, Saudi Arabia; Box 50: Russia: Bullitt, William C.: 1933-1936 thru Spain: 1940-1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

¹⁰⁶ Ch’i Hsi-sheng, “Chiang Kai-Shek and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 27. An example of their extensive correspondence can be seen in a six-month period between January 10, 1944 and July 6, 1944, when they exchanged over twenty messages. List of Messages January-July 1944, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-shek 1944; Box 10: Map Room: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

American newspapers gave readers in the 1920s and 1930s frequent accounts of the developments in China and often wrote profiles of Chiang. He was described in various ways: young, modern, temperamental, modest, scholarly, and pleasant. But above all he was a nationalist and seen in the West as the person best able to unify his country. The *New York Times* wrote that Chiang “has made a powerful impression on all the Occidental observers who have met him,” and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that foreign business interests in China backed him because they believed he was “all that stands between them and many more years of chaos or even bolshevism.”¹⁰⁷

Roosevelt and Chiang’s relationship began in 1937 with the start of the Sino-Japanese War.¹⁰⁸ After Pearl Harbor, and as the conflict between China and Japan morphed into the larger Pacific theater of WWII, the volume of communication between the two men increased. In addition to the various tactical and strategic issues, three main features stand out: Chiang’s frequent emotional pleas, Roosevelt’s constant reassurance, and Chiang’s desire that China be recognized as a world power on par with the other Allies.

In many ways Chiang was the catalyst for the relationship. The main component of his approach to U.S.-China relations and his war strategy was personal diplomacy. The key for Chiang was forming a bond with the American president. In many of his letters he praised Roosevelt and tried to ingratiate himself. “I feel impelled to seek your counsel and assistance,” he wrote to FDR, telling him another time that he held “the key to the solution of all Far Eastern problems, and consequently other problems of the world.”¹⁰⁹ After Roosevelt’s reelection in

¹⁰⁷ “Chiang Called Sun’s Heir: Generalissimo, Still Only 39, Has Had Amazing Military Success,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1927; John Powell, China Looks to Chiang To Save It From Chaos,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 10, 1930.

¹⁰⁸ Ch’i, “Chiang Kai-Shek and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 127.

¹⁰⁹ Letter, Chiang Kai-shek to Roosevelt, June 14, 1940; Chiang to Roosevelt, July 20, 1939, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, China 1939-40; Box 27: China 1938-Military Dispatches thru China 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

1940, Chiang was especially effusive, writing, “It is with the greatest gratification that I learn of your reelection for a third term...This is good tidings for the cause of human justice and world peace...rejoicings are shared by all those nations who love freedom and are striving to defend themselves.”¹¹⁰

As we have seen, Roosevelt had a great belief in the power of personal diplomacy, thus Chiang’s emphasis on the practice suited the president. Months before Pearl Harbor, White House advisor Lauchlin Currie made a report for the president on the situation in China. “I think Chiang can be held in line with a little care and attention from America. His attitude toward America is compounded partly of sentiment and partly of self-interest,” he wrote. The Generalissimo “admires America, and particularly you [FDR], tremendously, and to be treated as an equal or ally would mean a great deal to him...I think it most important, in addition to giving material aid, to go out of your way to say nice things about China and to speak of her in the same terms now used toward England.”¹¹¹

Whether it was because of Currie’s advice or his own instincts, Roosevelt followed that strategy. He continuously sought to reassure and encourage Chiang and heap praise on him. For example, in January 1943, Roosevelt wrote that after the war he hoped Chiang could visit the White House “to accept tribute of the citizens of the United States to your heroic leadership of the Chinese people.”¹¹² In another letter he wrote of the Chinese leader’s “far sighted vision, which has guided and inspired.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Letter, Chiang to Roosevelt, November 6, 1940, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File Diplomatic Correspondence, China 1939-40; Box 27: China 1938-Military Dispatches thru China 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹¹¹ Lauchlin Currie to Roosevelt, “Confidential Report to the President On Some Aspects of the Current Political, Economic and Military Situation in China,” March 15, 1941, *FRUS, 1941, Vol. IV: The Far East* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1956), 92.

¹¹² Roosevelt to Chiang, January 23, 1943, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1943; Box 10: Map Room: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹¹³ Roosevelt to Chiang, September 16, 1944, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1944; Box 10: Map Room: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

Whether Roosevelt truly believed what he wrote is secondary to the aims he hoped to accomplish. His goal was to bolster Chiang, and by extension Chinese morale, in order to keep them fighting. He felt it imperative that China stay in the war against Japan. With American attention focused on Europe, Chinese forces were important in keeping at least some Japanese troops occupied. But Roosevelt had difficulty getting Chiang to fight, as he was more concerned with battling his communist rivals than the Japanese. And he was never satisfied with the aid he received from the Allies. He always wanted more.

Yet for the most part, Roosevelt remained patient with Chiang, unlike some of the president's subordinates. Joseph Stilwell, the American general assigned to the China-Burma-India Theater, interacted with Chiang on a regular basis, but had a poor relationship with him. Lacking the patience of the president, Stilwell wrote to his superior General George Marshall that Chiang worried about low morale and had concerns that the prestige of the rival communists was on the rise. The Chinese leader also said if Japan attacked he would need more assistance. "He would not listen to reason, logic or argument," Stilwell grumbled. "He complains about the little help the United States is giving him. My impression is that it is partly acting, that he is also getting wind up."¹¹⁴

In another letter, Stilwell stated that the United States needed to take a harder line with Chiang. Roosevelt, however, did not agree. In a memo to Marshall he wrote,

Stilwell has exactly the wrong approach in dealing with Generalissimo Chiang...When Stilwell speaks about the fact that the Generalissimo is very irritable and hard to handle, upping his demands, etc., he is, of course correct; but when he speaks of talking to him in sterner tones, he goes about it just the wrong way...All of us must remember that the Generalissimo came up the hard way to become the undisputed leader of four hundred million people...He is the Chief Executive as well as the Commander-in-Chief, and one cannot speak sternly to a man like that or exact commitments from him the way we might

¹¹⁴ Joseph Stilwell to George Marshall, April 23, 1943, Folder: Naval Aide's File-China, A 16-3; Box 165: Map Room Papers, A16 Warfare-China to Crimean Conference; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL.

do from the Sultan of Morocco.¹¹⁵

Roosevelt recognized that Chiang needed to be approached in a particular way. Though at times frustrated, he knew that it was in the United States' long-term interest to have a friendly leader in China. Plus, Roosevelt believed that there was no alternative to the Generalissimo. As he told his son Elliott, "Who is there in China who could take Chiang's place? There's just no other leader. With all their shortcomings, we've got to depend on the Chiangs."¹¹⁶ If that meant having to play counselor and continually provide a psychological boost, Roosevelt was willing.

However, even as he sought to assuage Chiang's worries and reassure him of Allied support, the American president could never completely alleviate the Generalissimo's concerns. In letter after letter Chiang constantly described dire situations and his need for more assistance. In one particularly evocative telegram he appealed for three hundred planes: "In all my life-long military experience, I have seen nothing to compare with the deplorable unpreparedness, confusion and degradation in the war areas of Burma... There was an intolerable stench from the corpses of those killed in the raid and from the carcasses of animals which had not been removed. The same was the case with the corpses in the houses... The whole scene was therefore one of desolation and disorder."¹¹⁷ Though Roosevelt always tried to provide encouragement and convey how valuable China was to the war effort, these reassurances had limits. In October 1942, Roosevelt sent a letter pledging more aid to China, but it still fell short of what Chiang wanted. "For your renewed assurance of aid to the Chinese I am deeply grateful," the Generalissimo wrote. "However, in order to reach the greatest efficiency in our combined

¹¹⁵ Memorandum, Roosevelt to Marshall, March 8, 1943, Folder: Naval Aide's File-China, A 16-3; Box 165: Map Room Papers, A16 Warfare-China to Crimean Conference; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL.

¹¹⁶ Elliott Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946), 154.

¹¹⁷ Telegram, Chiang to Roosevelt, April 13, 1942, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1941-42; Box: 10 F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

operations, I am firmly convinced that further action is necessary.”¹¹⁸

Roosevelt also had trouble—for good reason—convincing Chiang that the other Allied powers recognized China as an equal. This was because they did not. As the Generalissimo wrote to his foreign affairs ministers in April 1942, “As you know, I have to fight continually against demoralizing doubts on the part of my officers, who conclude that American attitude towards China is in essence no different from that held by other nations, both in the all-important matters of joint-staff conferences, and war supplies, China is treated not as an equal like Britain and Russia, but as a ward.” If the situation did not change and China continued to be excluded, Chiang lamented that his country “would be just a pawn in the game.”¹¹⁹ He and other Chinese officials were also unhappy that as late as 1943, he had not met with the president, yet Roosevelt and Churchill had met many times. From the Chinese perspective this was evidence that their nation was not viewed as an equal. When Roosevelt and Churchill met at Casablanca in January 1943, Chiang, while publicly supportive, was privately angered he was not invited.¹²⁰ According to an American intelligence report, a Chinese official close to Chiang was puzzled why Roosevelt had not yet met with him, especially since the president’s meetings with Churchill were generally well received and seen as significant. The intelligence report continued that the Chinese official believed that by not inviting Chiang to a conference it showed “that the Allied Leaders regard China as an inferior power and [believed] that no possible advantage could be gained by such a meeting...He pointed out that a Chiang-Roosevelt meeting, even if nothing important is discussed other than a friendly exchange of greetings, would enhance Chinese morale to such an extent that it would be even better than all the Lend-Lease materials the United

¹¹⁸ Chiang to Roosevelt, November 14, 1942, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1941-42; Box 10: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹¹⁹ Telegram, Chiang to T.V. Soong, April 19, 1942, *FRUS, China, 1942* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1956), 33.

¹²⁰ Ronald Ian Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference of 1943: Roosevelt, Churchill, Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 40.

States could get into China.”¹²¹

Whether as a result of the report or because Roosevelt already had a meeting in mind, in the months that followed he assured Chiang of his “anxiety” to meet.¹²² “I am looking forward to seeing you,” he wrote, “because I am sure there are many things that can only be satisfactorily settled if we can meet face to face.”¹²³ They would finally meet in November 1943 in Cairo, a few days before Roosevelt flew to the Tehran Conference. A somewhat disgruntled Winston Churchill also joined Chiang and the president. The British prime minister had hoped to meet with Roosevelt alone before meeting with Stalin and did not appreciate having to entertain Chiang and discuss matters he saw of secondary importance.

For FDR, the meeting was mainly about making Chiang feel important. Secretary of War Henry Stimson wrote in his diary that Roosevelt made it seem that the most important aspect of the conference was “the psychological benefits which would come from such a meeting rather than the solution of any concrete special problems.”¹²⁴ If Roosevelt’s goal was to give Chiang and China their place in the sun it worked—at least temporarily. The press coverage of the conference was extremely positive, with headlines such as “China’s Triumph” and “China Gets Her Place In ‘Big Four’ Councils.”¹²⁵ In China itself, Chiang’s position was greatly enhanced.

¹²¹ Intelligence Report, Intelligence Division Office of Chief of Naval Operation, Navy Department, “Chinese Official’s Opinion On The Advantages Of A Chiang-Roosevelt Meeting,” May 21, 1943, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1943; Box 10: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹²² Roosevelt to Chiang, June 30, 1943, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1943; Box 10: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹²³ Roosevelt to Chiang, October 27, 1943; Roosevelt to Chiang, November 10, 1943, Folder: President-Chiang Kai-Shek 1943; Box 10: F.D.R.-Chiang Kai-Shek Messages 1941-April 1945; Map Room-Messages; FDRL.

¹²⁴ As quoted in Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference*, 51. On the Cairo Conference see also Keith Sainsbury, *The Turning Point: Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, and Chiang-Kai Shek, 1943; The Moscow, Cairo, and Tehran Conferences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹²⁵ “China’s Triumph,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1943; Arthur Krock, “China Gets Her Place in ‘Big Four’ Councils,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1943. Upon his return to the United States, Roosevelt also heaped praise on Chiang in a fireside chat. He said, that Chiang was “unconquerable... a man of great vision, great courage.” See “Keep Us Strong in Our Faith That We Fight for a Better Day for Humankind”—Christmas Eve Fireside Chat on Tehran and Cairo Conference,” December 24, 1943,” *PP, 1943: The Tide Turns* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950), 555, 556.

As the *New York Times* reported, once news of the conference and its agreement reached the Chinese people, “it was hailed everywhere as a great diplomatic and political triumph for China that would establish the country’s position as a major power.”¹²⁶ Chiang’s wife, who accompanied the Generalissimo to Cairo, confirmed this view. Writing Roosevelt a little over a week after the conference, she said, “Since our homecoming the Cairo communiqué has been published. Its effect of uplifting the morale of our army and the people has been electric; in fact the entire nation is articulate to a degree that has never been known before in unanimously hailing the conference.”¹²⁷

In addition to the publicity and China’s symbolic elevation to a world power, Chiang got promises that Japan would be removed from all territory it took by force and that China would reclaim its lost land. Additionally, Roosevelt verbally committed to grant China a billion dollar loan, and a new military operation was planned (Operation Buccaneer). But the loan never materialized and after the Tehran Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt met again in Cairo and decided to cancel Buccaneer in order to focus solely on upcoming operations in Europe.

Chiang was frustrated. He considered it “a breach of faith,” according to a British admiral in close contact with the Chinese leader.¹²⁸ After receiving Roosevelt’s letter breaking the news, Chiang responded, “If it should now be known to the Chinese Army and people that a radical change of policy and strategy is being contemplated, the repercussions would be so disheartening that I fear of the consequences of China’s ability to hold out much longer...my task in rallying

¹²⁶ “China Is Jubilant As Chiang Returns: Attitude Shows Acceptance of Global War Strategy of Other Leaders,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1943.

¹²⁷ Madame Chiang also took the opportunity to praise and flatter Roosevelt, telling him, “The leadership which you so eminently displayed and the magnificent spirit permeating all that you are undertaking for the good of humanity are subjects of conversation amongst all Chinese circles. The consensus of opinion is that ‘President Roosevelt is a great man and he does things in a truly great spirit.’” See Madame Chiang to Roosevelt, December 5, 1943; Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, China: 1943; Box 27: China 1938-Military Dispatches thru China 1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

¹²⁸ Louis Mountbatten, *Report to the Combined Chief of Staffs by the Allied Supreme Commander Southeast Asia: 1943-1945* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1951), 29; Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference*, 155.

the nation to continue resistance is being made infinitely more difficult.”¹²⁹ Though privately angry, publicly he remained positive and continued to praise Roosevelt.¹³⁰ For the cancellation of Operation Buccaneer Chiang tried to extract some concession, mainly increased loans and credits. While unsuccessful, he was able to achieve one of his goals. For years he had been trying to have Joseph Stilwell replaced as the top American general in the region. As noted, the two men never saw eye-to-eye and Chiang wanted someone more supportive and understanding. It took Roosevelt some time, but he finally removed Stilwell in October 1944, a move that pleased the Chinese leader and provided a boost to his domestic standing.¹³¹

Though disappointed and angered with the American president, Chiang would never publically break from FDR. He had put too much effort into the relationship. It was the central aspect of his wartime strategy. He realized that Roosevelt was still his best means for acquiring what he wanted. As one Chinese scholar described, “Chiang gave personal diplomacy such a preeminent role because, in his view, the president had practically become the only one in the U.S. government who was both sympathetic to China’s cause and capable of satisfying China’s needs.”¹³² This calculation never changed during the war. He might not have got everything he wanted, but just as FDR saw no alternative to Chiang, Chiang had no alternative to Roosevelt.

Despite moments of discord, both Chiang and Roosevelt latched on to each other. The Chinese leader saw the American president as the best avenue to get the aid and support he needed, and for Roosevelt, in dealing with a country as large, complicated, and divided as China, Chiang appeared to be the solution. He might not have been the perfect or even preferred

¹²⁹ Chiang to Roosevelt, December 9, 1943, *FRUS, 1943: China* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957), 181. For Roosevelt’s letter to Chiang breaking the news, see Roosevelt to Chiang, December 5, 1943, *FRUS, 1943: China*, 178.

¹³⁰ Heiferman, *The Cairo Conference*, 158.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

¹³² Ch’i, “Chiang Kai-Shek and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 138.

interlocutor, but he was seen as the best option available. For a president trying to make sense of a complex region thousands of miles away, dealing closely with one individual was the simplest solution.¹³³ Their connection was the defining feature of U.S.-China relations during the war, a fact that a 1944 report entitled “The President and U.S. Aid to China” confirmed, as the bulk of its sixty pages documented the ebb and flow of the two leaders’ relationship.¹³⁴ Both Roosevelt and Chiang engaged in personal diplomacy because their personalities and management styles predisposed them to it, but in the particular case of U.S-China relations, cultivating a personal relationship with the other was also seen as the best policy.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Roosevelt’s personal diplomacy touched every continent and numerous leaders. As of January 31, 1943, Roosevelt had traveled 252,335 miles in his ten years in office. While that included domestic travel as well, much of that mileage was from traveling abroad. Many marveled at the distance he trekked, and laudatory articles were written that cheered his use of conferences and personal diplomacy.¹³⁶ Others, however, were critical, especially the *Chicago*

¹³³ Chiang, like other leaders, attempted to give Roosevelt the impression that he spoke for all of China. Over a year before the United States joined the war, Chiang wrote to Roosevelt, “My personal views...I am sure, represent the unanimous sentiment of the Chinese people.” See Letter, Chiang to Roosevelt, July 20, 1939, Folder: President’s Secretary’s File, Diplomatic Correspondence, China 1939-40; Box 27: China 1938-Military Dispatches thru China 1945; PSF-Diplomatic Correspondence; FDRL.

¹³⁴ “The President and U.S. Aid to China,” (n.d.), Folder: Naval Aide’s File-Chiang, A 16-3; Box 165: Map Room Papers, A16 Warfare-China to Crimean Conference; Map Room-Military Files; FDRL. The report stated that on a wide arrange of issues the two leaders had communicated directly, and that “constant discussion has brought about understanding and mutual confidence, and faith in their ability to solve their problems easily.”

¹³⁵ When the president died, the Generalissimo wanted to go to Washington to attend the funeral. Though unable, he officiated a memorial service for the president in China. Years later, after Chiang’s Nationalist were defeated by the communists and forced to flee to Taiwan, he bestowed upon Roosevelt an honor that no other foreign leader has received there. Chiang named a prominent road in the capital city after Roosevelt. See Ch’i, “Chiang Kai-Shek and Franklin D. Roosevelt,” in *FDR and His Contemporaries*, 129-130. For description of the memorial service Chiang held for Roosevelt, see “Chiang Leads Rites For Late President,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1945.

¹³⁶ “Two Presidents,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1943; Paul Schubert, “Value of Conferences: Travel Teaches,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 1943; Thurston Macauley, “At Last, a Full Year of Military Progress: Greater Conferences Rivalled Great Military Victories for Attention in 1943,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1943.

Daily Tribune. “Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill’s junkets are becoming tiresome,” the paper wrote. “It ceases to be impressive when journeys to the far corners of the earth and meeting surrounded with a panoply affected by dictators and inappropriate to the leaders of self-governing people result only in announcements of trivial arrangements in earth shaking terms. The theatricism [sic] is becoming comic and the country is sick and tired of it.” A few weeks later the paper wrote that though few former presidents had the “opportunity to dash away on these Champagne Charlie trips,” they would have known better than to go. “Mr. Roosevelt’s touring had no counterpart in history. Nero fiddled as Rome burned, but at least he stayed in Rome.”¹³⁷ Thus, though many saw Roosevelt’s personal diplomacy as both new and exciting, many also viewed it as suspect.

Whether people loved or hated it, presidential personal diplomacy was here to stay. Roosevelt’s successors would continue to engage in the practice and do so for similar reasons. During the 1930s and 1940s the features that would define leader-to-leader contact in the second half of the twentieth century were made evident. A changing international environment that saw the United States become the leader of a growing global community, a push by foreign leaders to establish a relationship with the president, the aggrandizement of presidential power and desire for control, and domestic political incentives all made presidents increasingly look to personal diplomacy. And as presidents engaged with foreign leaders, they often acted as a counselor, dealing with the emotions and psychology of their counterparts.

¹³⁷ “Cut The Comedy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 3, 1943; “The Grand Tour Ends,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 18, 1943. Upon returning from Tehran, FDR did have many domestic issues to deal with, and there was talk that “the President’s power and prestige as a leader at home has been dissipated by his preoccupation with affairs abroad.” See Luther Huston, “Complex Issues Strain President’s Prestige: Numerous Domestic Problems Arise Amid Stress on Affairs Abroad,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1943. See also Walter Trohan, “F.D.R. Back; Faces Rising Tide of Issues,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 17, 1943; Bert Andrews, “Return of President Emphasizes His Job Is ‘Toughest in the World,’” *Washington Post*, December 19, 1943.

CHAPTER 2

“THIS IDEA OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES GOING PERSONALLY ABROAD TO NEGOTIATE—IT’S JUST DAMN STUPID”: TRUMAN, EISENHOWER, AND THE RETREAT AND RESURGENCE OF PERSONAL DIPLOMACY

When Franklin Roosevelt died in April 1945, the United States and its allies were well on their way to victory against the Axis powers. But questions about the postwar period occupied American officials. In the aftermath of the Yalta Conference in February, the intentions of the Soviet Union and its leader Joseph Stalin came under increasing scrutiny. The weeks leading up to Roosevelt’s death saw strains in the Grand Alliance, as Stalin failed to carry out his end of the Yalta agreements and accused the United States and Britain of attempting to negotiate a separate peace with Germany. Roosevelt was filled with “astonishment” at the allegations and had “a feeling of bitter resentment” toward those you fed Stalin such lies.¹ But he was still committed to working with the Soviet leader. As he told British Prime Minister Winston Churchill a little over a week before his death, “I would minimize the general Soviet problem as much as possible because these problems, in one form or another, seem to arise every day and most of them straighten out.”²

Perhaps if Roosevelt had lived things would have straightened themselves out, but under his successor Harry Truman it was not to be. Insecure and unsure how to handle the Soviets, Truman increasingly relied on the State Department, which had been mostly relegated to the sideline by FDR as he personally handled policy. As the previous chapter demonstrated, a large part of his control of policy had to do with his attempts to manage the personalities of his foreign

¹ Telegram, Roosevelt to Stalin, April 4, 1945, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1945, Vol. III: *European Advisory Commission; Austria; Germany*, doc. 222 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 1968), 745, 746.

² Telegram, Roosevelt to Churchill, April 11, 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V: *Europe*, doc. 742 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1967), 210.

counterparts. For Truman, however, this was not a priority. During his time in office the practice of personal diplomacy, so evident in the Roosevelt era, would decline. This did not mean that Truman did not meet with foreign leaders or correspond with them. Rather, the grand summits of World War II and the place of personal diplomacy in the public imagination appeared a thing of the past. And as tension with the Soviets grew and the Cold War began, Roosevelt's personal diplomacy came under increased scrutiny. Some saw his dealings with Stalin at Yalta as treasonous, turning personal diplomacy of the FDR variety into a political liability.

Under Truman's successor Dwight Eisenhower there was a similar revulsion, at least early on, to the type of grand summitry and personal diplomacy that Roosevelt delighted in. By the end of his second term, however, there was a revival of the great power conferences made famous (or infamous) during WWII. But they failed to produce concrete results or live up to public expectations, thus causing personal diplomacy to once again fall out of favor. Less controversial, the Eisenhower years also saw the rise of an informal personal diplomacy, where the president met with other world leaders, often outside of Washington, D.C., with no formal agenda. While not cheered by all, many ordinary Americans and even political elites accepted this practice as a useful diplomatic tool.

This chapter explores these developments. The Truman and Eisenhower years began with personal diplomacy in retreat, then saw its resurgence, and then its fall back into disrepute. But the practice would not fade and was more firmly entrenched by the end of the period than it was at the beginning. As the chapter will demonstrate, Truman and Eisenhower were not necessarily opposed to interacting with their foreign counterparts, especially with allies. It was personal diplomacy with adversaries, particularly Soviet leaders, which gave them pause. And in this

period the same factors that drove Roosevelt toward personal diplomacy also motivated his successors.

“The End of a Colorful and Dramatic Era in American Diplomacy”: Truman’s Personal Diplomacy³

From the moment he took office, Harry Truman communicated with foreign leaders, and within days met with the president of the Philippines, who had met with Roosevelt just days before his death. Overall, Truman was in a difficult spot. Replacing FDR would have been difficult under any circumstance, but the suddenness in which it occurred made the problem acute. Not only did Truman not have a chance to prepare—both mentally and policy wise—but neither did foreign leaders. As Truman attempted to find his footing in the Oval Office, his foreign counterparts frequently sought to reaffirm commitments that Roosevelt had made to them. For example, Chiang Kai-shek of China reminded the new president that at the Cairo Conference in 1943, “after long and careful deliberations,” FDR had agreed to provide military aid to China for ninety divisions of troops and that this material would be given even if the war ended earlier than anticipated.⁴ When the Truman Administration could not find any record of this agreement they consulted FDR’s close adviser Harry Hopkins, who confirmed that the former president did indeed make such a promise. He added, however, “in a half joking-half serious manner that, if the Chinese were now trying to hold the U.S. to President Roosevelt’s verbal agreement... Truman should reply that he could find no record of it.”⁵ The King of Saudi Arabia pressed Truman on “the promise made by your late predecessor” over French control of

³ John M. Hightower, “Any More Talks With Attlee and Stalin Vetoed by Truman,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 1945.

⁴ Letter, T. V. Soong to Truman, August 30, 1945, Folder: 151-8, China: 1945; Box 151; President’s Secretary’s Files (hereafter PSF)—Foreign Affairs; Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (hereafter HTL).

⁵ Memorandum, George M. Elsey to Commodore Vardaman; September 3, 1945, Folder: 151-8, China: 1945; Box 151; PSF—Foreign Affairs; HTL.

Morocco.⁶ And British Prime Minister Winston Churchill reminded the new president that Roosevelt had agreed to visit Britain before he visited France, thus he hoped rumors to the contrary were false. “I am sure you will bear this in mind in any decision you may take,” the prime minister told Truman.⁷

In those early days the direct communication Truman had with his foreign counterparts was of great importance, particularly with Churchill and Joseph Stalin. With the United States still waging global war, it needed to coordinate with allies. A day after Roosevelt’s death, Truman told Churchill he hoped to meet soon and that he would “continue the loyal and close collaboration” that the British prime minister had with his predecessor.⁸ He also suggested that he and Churchill have “another go” at Stalin and send him a joint message regarding the makeup of the provisional Polish government.⁹

After the defeat of Germany in May, the new president also agreed with Churchill’s belief that another Big Three summit was needed to settle remaining questions between the allies. Truman did, however, want Stalin to ask for a meeting rather than one of them, and felt that the Soviet leader should come west rather than he and the prime minister travel east as in previous summits.¹⁰ But getting Stalin to request a meeting was no easy task, as he did not seem

⁶ Telegram, Department of State, Amman (Fritzlan) to Secretary of State, March 4, 1951, Folder: State Department, Correspondence, 1951-52 [2 of 6]; Box 42; White House Central File (hereafter WHCF)—Confidential File; HTL.

⁷ Telegram, Churchill to Truman, June 16, 1945, doc. 72, *FRUS, The Conference of Berlin 1945, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 104.

⁸ Telegram, Truman to Churchill, April 13, 1945, doc. 152, *Ibid.*, 211. Truman also told Churchill that he was familiar with the vast correspondence of his predecessor. But Truman had been left in the dark by FDR and did not have an intimate understanding of the exchanges with Churchill and Stalin. On the day he became president, Truman admitted in his diary that though he obviously knew about FDR’s Big Three meetings, “I was not familiar with any of these things and it was really something to think about.” In May 1945, however, Harry Hopkins—a close adviser of Roosevelt’s—came to the White House and briefed Truman on aspects of the former president’s personal diplomacy. See Harry Truman, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, Robert H. Ferrell ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 16; “Hopkins Visits Truman, Gives Diplomatic Data: Presents 90-Minutes Report on Roosevelt’s Personal Role; Will Return Today,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 5, 1945.

⁹ Telegram, Truman to Churchill, April 13, 1945, doc. 153, *FRUS, The Conference of Berlin 1945, Vol. I*, 211.

¹⁰ See Telegram, Churchill to Truman, May 6, 1945, doc. 1; Telegram, Truman to Churchill, May 9, 1945, doc. 2; Telegram, Truman to Churchill, May 11, 1945, doc. 5, *Ibid.*, 3-4, 8.

particularly interested in one. Months earlier when Churchill raised the prospect of a face-to-face meeting to work out the issues that had arisen since Yalta, Stalin ignored the suggestion.¹¹ Thus it fell to the United States and Britain to pursue a meeting. While Churchill sent Stalin a message, Truman sent Harry Hopkins to confer with him about U.S.-Soviet relations and raise the prospect of a Big Three meeting.¹²

At the same time Truman sent Hopkins to Moscow, he also sent Joseph Davies to confer with Churchill. As he noted in his memoirs, he was aware that the death of Roosevelt could not but help “raise questions about the working relationship” of the leaders of the Big Three. Truman realized that FDR, Churchill, and Stalin had “personal knowledge and estimate of each other,” and that he would now have to form his own personal relationship with these two leaders. By sending Hopkins and Davis as his surrogates, he could get “personal, on-the-spot reports from men with judgment and experience,” which Truman felt was extremely important. “It was necessary,” he recalled, “for me to know more than I was able to get from messages and cables or even from telephone conversations.” In particular, he wanted to know if Roosevelt’s death had caused any changes in Churchill and Stalin’s thinking. He also wanted to get a sense from Churchill “what I would have to face,” if he met with Stalin.¹³

Whatever Truman hoped to learn before meeting the Soviet leader, he would not have much time. In Moscow, Hopkins broached the topic of a Big Three gathering and reported that Stalin “indicated that he was anxious to meet you [Truman] at any time you wished” and suggested the suburbs of Berlin.¹⁴ Truman and Churchill got their meeting, and though not

¹¹ Telegram, Churchill to Truman, May 15, 1945, doc. 10, note 1, *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² Telegram, Churchill to Truman, May 27, 1945, doc. 141, *Ibid.*, 156; Memorandum by the Assistant to the Secretary of State (Bohlen), May 26, 1945, doc. 24, *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³ Harry Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. 1: Year of Decisions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1955), 110, 257.

¹⁴ Telegram, Hopkins to Truman, May 28, 1945, doc. 36, *FRUS, Berlin Conference, Vol. I*, 86.

traveling as far east as before, the meeting was held in territory under Soviet control. But Churchill was determined that they “meet on equal terms” and not “merely as guests” of Stalin.¹⁵

Despite pushing for a summit, Truman was not looking forward to it. Still insecure in his new role as president, he worried how his interactions with Stalin and Churchill would go. “I’m on my way to the high executioner,” he told his wife.¹⁶ But whatever worries Truman had, his first impression of Stalin was rather positive. He found the Soviet dictator “honest—but smart as hell,” and someone he could “deal with.” Further boosting his spirits was news of the successful testing of the atomic bomb, which made him more confident and confrontational.¹⁷

Overall, Truman and most observers at the time saw the conference at Potsdam as successful. Though the agreements were not perfect, most believed they would promote peace better than the arrangements made at Versailles after World War I.¹⁸ Reporting to the nation, Truman said, “It was easy for me to get along in mutual understanding and friendship with Generalissimo Stalin, with Prime Minister Churchill, and later with Prime Minister Attlee... There was a fundamental accord and agreement upon the objectives ahead of us.” He ended on a hopeful note, telling the American public, “The Three Great Powers are now more

¹⁵ Telegram, Churchill to Truman, June 9, 1945, doc. 55, *Ibid.*, 94, 95.

¹⁶ In his diary, Truman’s Assistant Press Secretary Eben Ayers probably gets close to some of the reason for the president’s dread, as well as an opinion that many at the time probably shared: “I am not convinced that all of this [Potsdam] is a wise thing. It may do no harm, but I cannot help recalling what happened in the case of Woodrow Wilson... I hope this will not prove a ‘babes in the wood’ affair. But the president has no experience in these international meetings and discussions, and the other two are tough old hands.” See Eben A. Ayers, *Truman in the White House: The Diary of Eben A. Ayers*, Robert H. Ferrell, ed. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 51.

¹⁷ As quoted in Andrew J. Rotter, *Hiroshima: The World’s Bomb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 162, 163. Truman later recalled he was “impressed” with Stalin in their first meeting and “talked to him straight from the shoulder,” adding, “I was pleased with my first visit with Stalin. He seemed to be in a good humor. He was extremely polite, and when he was ready to leave he told me that he had enjoyed the visit. He invited me to call on him, and I promised him I would.” See Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. 1*, 341, 342.

¹⁸ Michael Neiberg, *Potsdam: The End of World War II and the Remaking of Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 249-251.

closely than ever bound together in determination...we shall continue to march together to a lasting peace and a happy world!”¹⁹

Despite this upbeat (and erroneous) assessment, those close to Truman said “he came away from it [Potsdam] with a feeling of dislike for a big shot personal diplomacy.”²⁰ He was finished with great power summitry. Asked four months after the conference about another Big Three meeting he answered, “I am not in favor of special conferences, and never have been.” Rather, he wanted the fledgling United Nations to take the lead. “The League of Nations was ruined by a lot of special conferences,” he stated.²¹ Many others agreed. During the last half of the 1940s, personal diplomacy became a much-criticized practice. New York Governor Thomas Dewey, the Republican presidential nominee in 1948, said that despite the problems Roosevelt and Truman’s personal diplomacy had caused, he was not going to make it a campaign issue, but added, “I would not have gone [to summits] myself, if President, because that is the way we

¹⁹ “Radio Report to the American People on the Potsdam Conference,” August 9, 1945, *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (hereafter *PP*), *Harry S. Truman: April 12 to December 31, 1945* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1961), 204, 214. Truman’s prediction failed to materialize, as the wartime alliance soon disintegrated. As Frank Costigliola has argued, Truman deserves some of that blame. Unlike FDR, Truman was unable to handle the personal politics involved in maintaining the grand alliance. But the idea that Truman came to office and immediately broke sharply with Roosevelt’s Soviet policy is inaccurate, as Wilson Miscamble has argued. See Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁰ John M. Hightower, “Any More Talks With Attlee and Stalin Vetoed by Truman,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 1945. Part of his dislike came from the physical demands of the conference, which he found “exacting.” In his memoirs he noted that while he started his days early, Stalin and Churchill were night owls. “This made my days extra long, and they were filled, in addition to the formal sessions, with long rounds of preparatory conferences with my advisers, with the study of documents pertaining to meetings, and with work that was required on many state papers sent on from Washington.” Whenever possible he tried to move proceedings at a brisk pace. “I’m not going to stay around this terrible place all summer just to listen to speeches,” he told his diary. “I’ll go home to the Senate for that.” See Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. 1*, 412; Truman, *Off the Record*, 54.

²¹ “President’s News Conference,” November 29, 1945, *PP: 1945*, 511. Though Truman did invite Stalin to visit the United States, once at Potsdam and then again in 1946 in the aftermath of Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech. Both times Stalin said his doctors felt it unwise for him to travel. See Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945-1953* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 137; “President’s News Conference,” May 31, 1946, *PP, Truman: January 1-December 31, 1946* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1962), 281-283.

always lose our shirts.”²² The Democratic National Committee, sensing Truman’s vulnerability on the issue, produced a fact sheet attempting to defend the president. It argued that he and Roosevelt “stood up strongly” for American war aims, and those critical of their handling of Stalin “do not know the truth—or they are lying for political purposes.”²³

But as relations with Stalin soured and the Cold War intensified, Roosevelt’s wartime diplomacy came under increased scrutiny, particularly the agreements reached at Yalta in 1945. Within a year, the secret deals he worked out with Stalin became public and further turned many against diplomacy at the highest-level. “It seems clear in retrospect,” syndicated columnist Roscoe Drummond wrote, “that personal diplomacy and secret diplomacy were carried to a point at Yalta not only incompatible with democratic principles but also recklessly inefficient.”²⁴ The conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune*—always happy to editorialize against FDR’s personal diplomacy, even during the war—wrote, “Roosevelt’s personal diplomacy was a model of everything that the responsible leader of the nation ought not to do. It was reckless and mistaken.”²⁵ Five years after Roosevelt’s death, the paper was still on the attack: “We have been hooked by the secret and personal diplomacy of the vainglorious war time President.”²⁶

Truman was true to his word and did not meet with Stalin again, though he did flirt with sending Chief Justice Fred Vinson to Moscow as his personal peace emissary weeks before the

²² Clayton Knowles, “Big Parties to Avoid Foreign Policy Fight: But They Probably Will Indulge in Some Sniping on the Details,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1948. Dewey, like Truman himself, wanted to return to normal diplomatic channels. While not outright rejecting the possibility of a summit with Stalin, he felt that “the record of personal diplomacy in the past is not good.” See Thomas Morrow, “Dewey Sketches Policies: Leaders to Get Voice in Legislative Forums,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 26, 1948.

²³ “Fact Sheet no. 10: The Yalta and Potsdam Conferences With Russia,” Democratic National Committee Research Division, August 17, 1945, Folder: 1948 Pres Campaign Foreign Affairs; Box 33: 1948 Campaign Reference Material; Papers of George M. Elsey—Speech File; HTL. For the ways Republicans used Yalta as a political issue in the decades following the conference, see Athan G. Theoharis, *The Yalta Myths: An Issue in U.S. Politics, 1945-1955* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1970).

²⁴ Roscoe Drummond, “State of the Nation,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 31, 1946.

²⁵ “A Few Home Truths,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 2, 1947

²⁶ “The Ghost of Yalta,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 27, 1950.

1948 election.²⁷ But with the return to power of Winston Churchill in 1951, the idea of a Big Three gathering was rekindled. A well-known advocate of personal diplomacy, Churchill suggested that a summit held the possibility of lowering tensions and solving problems between the Soviet Union and the West.²⁸ His counterpart in France, Vincent Auriol, was of a similar mind. But not all shared this view. As one paper editorialized, “In today’s world illusions are risky; and none is more dangerous than the one which assumes that high policy for great states can be manipulated successfully as a personal affair by three or four leading personages.”²⁹

If Truman’s own attitude toward the practice and the public backlash against it was not enough, Secretary of State Dean Acheson also opposed presidential personal diplomacy. He had a “deep dislike and distrust” of it. Though diplomacy at the highest-level might be “glamorous,” he believed that leaders at the summit were often “ill prepared” or “unreliable.” By meeting face-to-face, Acheson believed that presidents lost the advantage that distance provided and therefore weakened their bargaining position. If a diplomat makes a bad agreement, there is always the president behind him to correct it. But when a president does the negotiating, there is no safety valve. Using a sports analogy, Acheson mused, “When a chief of state or head of government makes a fumble, the goal line is open behind him.”³⁰

But this attitude did not mean that Truman would have no interaction with his foreign counterparts. Rather, he and Acheson made a distinction between meeting with leaders of friendly nations and high-profile summits with the Soviet Union. Indeed, in many instances the

²⁷ The Vinson gambit was met with some harsh editorials. The *Hartford Courant*, for example, wrote that it was an “off-the-cuff” idea that “bother[s] most thoughtful Americans.” The UN and Western allies were “dismayed” at the president’s attempt to bypass them, and “his willingness to manipulate our foreign policy to aid his own political advantage is shocking.” See “A Dangerous Proposal,” *Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1948.

²⁸ For Churchill’s belief in and use of personal diplomacy, see Klaus Larres, *Churchill’s Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

²⁹ “Personal Diplomacy,” *Daily Boston Globe*, November 7, 1951.

³⁰ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987 [1969]), 480.

Administration saw Truman's interactions with other leaders as an important element in its foreign policy. For example in the Middle East, where the Administration sought to use personal diplomacy to achieve multiple objectives in Iran, such as bolster it against communist aggression, keep its oil fields in friendly hands, and secure the U.S. position in the country. To further these aims the State Department's Middle East hands suggested that the Shah of Iran should visit the United States. Though the "most influential and only stable element in Iran," he needed to be "constantly encouraged [in order] to keep Iran firm in the face of continuing Soviet pressure which threaten United States security interests in the Middle East." It was believed a visit by the Shah would promote this.³¹

Less than a month before the visit, U.S. Ambassador to Iran John Wiley provided Truman with an analysis of the Iranian leader's background and personality. In describing the potential benefits of a visit, Wiley told the president that the young Shah "is susceptible to very considerable development and that his trip to the United States can be a most important turning point in his life and in our relations with Iran," adding that "personal contact with you... will be of great value." Overall, the ambassador felt that the visit "may exercise a decisive influence upon him, with an impact upon the development of the American position in this strategic segment of the Middle East."³² When the Shah arrived in November 1949 the Administration tried to downplay the political aspects and portray the visit as simply one of "goodwill." But with the Shah asking for money and weapons and directly linking the security of Iran with the "peace and prosperity of the world," the political elements were clear.³³

³¹ Memorandum, Joseph Satterwaite to Stanley Woodward, "Invitation by the President to the Shah of Iran to visit the United States," January 13, 1949, Folder: 158-8, Iran: General; Box 158: PSF—Foreign Affairs; HTL.

³² Letter, John C. Wiley to Truman, October 25, 1949, Folder: 158-8, Iran: General; Box 158: PSF—Foreign Affairs; HTL.

³³ Harold B. Hinton, "Soviet Disregards Contracts, Truman Tells Shah of Iran," *New York Times*, November 17, 1949; "Iran's Shah Asks U.S. Arms, Funds," *New York Times*, November 18, 1949.

The Truman Administration used personal diplomacy in other regions as well. In Asia, it tried to prevent war between newly independent Pakistan and India. The main source of tension was the region of Kashmir, which both nations claimed and had been a powder keg since independence in 1947. The UN had tried to mediate, but progress lagged. If India and Pakistan failed to come to an agreement, world peace would be threatened and both nations would fail in their development efforts, Dean Acheson warned. “I need not dwell upon the opportunities which these developments would afford to subversive elements in both countries,” he said. To help forestall this, in the summer of 1949 Acheson suggested Truman send letters to the leaders of both nations urging them to cooperate with the UN. He believed that a presidential message “would lend vigorous support” to any new efforts, and “would provide a further affirmation of the faith and confidence of the United States in the United Nations as a means of preserving peace.”³⁴ Truman approved and letters were dispatched. But as all presidents learned, personal diplomacy does not always work. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was “surprised at the intervention” of Truman—and not in a good way. Both Pakistan and India were “cool” to the president’s proposal of UN mediation. Eventually Pakistan consented, but India did not.³⁵

Closer to home, Truman went on goodwill trips to Mexico, Canada, and Brazil in 1947. The trip to Mexico was the first official state visit ever undertaken by an American president. Truman’s visit to Brazil was also a state visit, and provided the opportunity for him to address

³⁴ Memorandum, Acheson to Truman, “Proposed Message to Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan Urging Arbitration of a Truce in Kashmir,” July 5, 1949, Folder: State Department, Correspondence, 1949 [2 of 3]; Box 40; WHCF—Confidential File; HTL.

³⁵ Percy Wood, “India, Pakistan Cool to Truman Kashmir Plea: Neither Side Wishes to Withdraw Troops,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 5, 1949; “Nehru ‘Surprised’ At Truman Move: Indian Prime Minister Speaks Caustically of ‘Intervention’ in the Kashmir Dispute,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1949; Memorandum, James E. Webb to Truman, “Proposed Letter to Prime Minister of Pakistan Commending His Attitude in Kashmir Dispute,” October 31, 1949, Folder: State Department, Correspondence, 1949 [1 of 3]; Box 40; WHCF—Confidential File; HTL.

the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security, which produced the Rio Pact, a mutual security agreement for the hemisphere.³⁶

On all three trips Truman received high marks. A survey of U.S. editorials showed “endorsement” of the Mexico trip, which according to the report “seems to come closer to being unanimous than has been the case with any of the other acts or statements of the President yet covered.”³⁷ The results in the Mexican press were even better. The State Department reported the visit was an unqualified success, and Truman’s honoring of the Niños Héroes—a small group of teenage soldiers who died in 1847 during the Mexican-American War—“had tremendous emotional appeal, [and] was deeply appreciated.”³⁸ The trip to Canada had a similar effect. The president’s three-day visit was front-page news in Canadian papers with editorials that were “unanimously highly favorable.” The approximately thirty-five U.S. correspondents who travelled with the president also reported positively.³⁹ And in Brazil, Truman experienced a raucous reception, as a million Brazilians lined the streets to welcome him. While the president’s trip might not have enthralled those in the United States, it meant something to the nation’s southern neighbors according to the *New York Times*. “South of the Rio Grande the arrival of a United States President is first page news for weeks before and after the event,” the paper stated. “It is concrete evidence to them that the United States Government’s whole attention is not

³⁶ The decision to address the conference, however, only came once it was clear that the meeting would be successful. As presidential adviser Clark Clifford said, “Regarding the President’s trip to Rio...the most important question involved is whether or not the Rio conference is a success... We do not want the President to come down and make a speech to the conference if it has become involved in serious difficulties and if it has been unable to reach its goal.” Thus, the plan was to accept Brazil’s invitation for a state visit, but not set the date. Then if it the conference’s prospects looked promising, tell Brazil the exact date for the trip and that the president would address the conference. See Transcript of Telephone Conversation, William Pawley and Clark Clifford, August 5, 1947, Folder: 87-7, Brazil: August 31-September 20, 1947 [1 of 2]; Box 87; PSF—Trip File; HTL.

³⁷ “Editorial Reaction to Current Events: President’s Trip to Mexico,” Division of Press Intelligence, Office of Government Reports, March 14, 1947, Folder: 88-7, Mexico: March 3-6, 1947 [2 of 2]; Box 88; PSF—Trip File; HTL.

³⁸ Letter, Dwight Dickinson to Secretary of State, “Visit of President Truman to Mexico,” March 15, 1947, Folder: 88-6, Mexico: March 3-6, 1947 [1 of 2]; Box 88; PSF—Trip File; HTL.

³⁹ Airgram, Department of State, Atherton to Secretary of State, June 13, 1947, Folder: 88-5, Canada, Ottawa: June 9-12, 1947; Box 88; PSF—Trip File; HTL.

centered on Europe or Asia when our busiest executive finds the time to call on them and to acquire a first-hand knowledge of their problems and their attitudes.”⁴⁰

While symbolically the South American sojourn was important, Europe remained central. In Truman’s last year in office his most high-profile visitor was Winston Churchill, recently returned to office. Some predicted his return would mean closer Anglo-American ties. But differences remained. Most evident was Churchill’s desire for summit diplomacy. But as the Associated Press reported, “Truman is expected to throw cold water on Churchill’s pet project for a meeting of top western leaders with Premier Stalin.”⁴¹

In the months leading up to the visit, the State Department expected Churchill to want to discuss a Big Four summit or a solo visit to Moscow. It noted, however, that the Administration “presumably would attempt to discourage such meetings.”⁴² While this was said privately, the British press was predicting the prime minister would be received coolly. One British paper reported that Truman ““saw no reason for Mr. Churchill’s visit at all, was really rather annoyed at the prospect of it, and had told the British Embassy that he was going to bed at 9 o’clock regardless of the Prime Minister.”” Another noted that it was ““bad manners”” to receive Churchill in ““such a surly way.””⁴³

Truman rejected such stories as “foolish” and told the press he would give Churchill “as hearty a welcome as I know how to give any visitor.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the president welcomed the prime minister with kind words, stating at the airport welcoming ceremony, “I can’t tell you

⁴⁰ C.P. Trussell, “1,000,000 Acclaim Truman on Entry in Brazil’s Capital,” *New York Times*, September 2, 1947; “Rolling Down to Rio,” *New York Times*, August 8, 1947.

⁴¹ Associated Press, “Closer Ties for U.S. and Britain Seen,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1951.

⁴² Telegram, Department of State to London, November 21, 1951, Folder: Foreign Relations—Churchill-Truman Conference, January 1952; Box 59; Papers of George M. Elsey—Subject File; HTL.

⁴³ Raymond Daniell, “British Press Says A Cool Reception Awaits Churchill: Correspondents in Washington Intimate That His Parley With Truman Will Fail,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1952.

⁴⁴ “The President’s News Conference,” January 3, 1952, *PP, Truman: January 1, 1952 to January 20, 1953* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1966), 5.

when I have had more pleasure than I have this morning in welcoming you as a visitor to the United States.” Later he toasted Churchill as ““the great man of the age.””⁴⁵ And despite the stories of disharmony, on substantive issues the visit appeared to go well, as both sides came to agreement on various political and military matters. Churchill had said upon arrival that the main goal of the visit was not so much specific agreements, but to ““establish close and intimate understanding between heads of governments.”” Officials on both sides seemed to agree this occurred.⁴⁶

Though Churchill’s visit recalled the days of WWII and his frequent conferences with Franklin Roosevelt, times had changed. The Soviet Union had gone from ally to enemy, and British power had declined. Churchill came as less an equal and more a supplicant. The mood in the United States had changed as well. The nation the prime minister had ““been accustomed to deal has gone beyond recall. There should be no mistake about that,” the *Washington Post* editorialized. “Mr. Churchill will come in contact with a reaction against the personal policymaking on the part of the wartime Roosevelt. In none is the reaction more pronounced than in the present occupant of the White House.”⁴⁷

Presidential personal diplomacy during the Truman years, while not disappearing, lost the glamour, drama, and political effect of the Roosevelt era. Many Americans looked at it suspiciously, as did the president himself. The Administration, however, did believe the practice could serve larger policy objectives and sought to employ it where possible. But Truman would never become associated with personal diplomacy like his predecessor or successors.

⁴⁵ “Remarks of Welcome to Prime Minister Churchill at the Washington National Airport,” January 5, 1952, *Ibid.*, 9; United Press, “Truman Toasts Churchill As ‘Great Man of the Age,’” *New York Times*, January 8, 1952.

⁴⁶ James Reston, “Truman, Churchill Agree On 3 Points As Parley Closes,” *New York Times*, January 9, 1952.

⁴⁷ “Welcome For Churchill,” *Washington Post*, January 5, 1952.

After the Truman-Churchill parley, the *Washington Post* chided a group of Republican senators who criticized the talks. The paper felt they would have done better to pick a different issue for their partisan attacks. “The memory of Yalta, to be sure, gives a certain superficial justification to their resolution calling for ‘full disclosure’ of the matters discussed,” the paper wrote. “The personal diplomacy of the Roosevelt era has left a bad taste. But if there is anything that differentiates the Truman regime from its predecessor, it is the absence of this sort of personal diplomacy.”⁴⁸ Truman’s successor would display certain ambivalence to personal diplomacy as well, but by the end of his term would be full immersed in it.

“I Am Not Afraid to Meet Anybody Face to Face to Talk, But the World Gets in a Habit of Expecting a Lot.”: Eisenhower’s Personal Diplomacy

In Dwight Eisenhower’s first State of the Union message in 1953, he sketched the outline of his Administration’s approach to the Cold War. In proclaiming a new direction in U.S. foreign policy, he averred that the United States “shall never acquiesce in the enslavement of any people...[and] recognizes no kind of commitment contained in secret understandings of the past with foreign governments which permit this kind of enslavement.”⁴⁹ According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “everybody assumed that he intended a resounding repudiation of Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, and the personal and unconstitutional diplomacy of Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Truman.” The paper, however, was not pleased with a resolution Eisenhower submitted to both houses of Congress on the subject of enslaved peoples. It mocked the new president’s proposals as a “threatened bang reduced to a whimper.” Rather than forcefully criticize his predecessors’ dealings, the paper lamented that Eisenhower simply said that the problem with past agreements

⁴⁸ “Notes From The Right,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1952.

⁴⁹ “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” February 2, 1953, *PP, Dwight D. Eisenhower: January 20 to December 31, 1953* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 13, 14.

was not the agreements themselves, but Soviet failure to live up to its end of the bargain. By not directly attacking Roosevelt and Truman's personal diplomacy, the paper said Eisenhower "has adopted the apologia of the New Dealers and has made it his own and seeks to make it that of the Republican party."⁵⁰

Though the *Chicago Daily Tribune* saw Eisenhower's lack of condemnation as tacit approval for the personal diplomacy of his Democratic predecessors, the truth was the opposite. "This idea of the President of the United States going personally abroad to negotiate—it's just damn stupid," Eisenhower once said. "Every time a President has gone abroad to get into the details of these things he's lost his shirt."⁵¹ He was not in favor of a Yalta or Potsdam type meeting with Soviet leaders. Indeed, in his first two years he only left the country three times, and those trips were to neighboring Canada, Mexico, and Bermuda.

Despite Eisenhower's caution on summitry, however, from the beginning of his Administration the possibility of such a parley was frequently mentioned. Weeks before he took office, Churchill once again came to the United States. While calling on Truman, the prime minister came to confer with the president-elect, and one of the topics of conversation was a possible Big Three meeting.⁵² Calls for a summit with the Soviets—especially by Churchill—

⁵⁰ "Yalta in Review: I," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 24, 1953. For text of Eisenhower's message to Congress, see "Letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Proposed Resolution on Subjugated Peoples," February 20, 1953, *PP: 1953*, 56-58.

⁵¹ As quoted in Emmet John Hughes, *The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 151.

⁵² "Big Four to Meet?: Top U.S. Diplomats Sift Developments," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 2, 1953; Drew Pearson, "Ike-Churchill Highlights Disclosed," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1953. This pre-inauguration meeting showed the suspicion that surrounded presidential personal diplomacy at the time. Eisenhower had to reassure Republican senators that his meeting with Churchill was simply a social visit and that no serious negotiating would take place. "He said we didn't have to worry about any commitments," New Hampshire Senator Styles Bridges told reporters, "not only to Churchill but to other foreign leaders." Indeed, in Eisenhower's diary, he noted that he had told the prime minister, "I am quite ready to communicate with him personally on our old basis of intimate friendship, where discussions between us would help advance our common interests. But I made clear to him that when official agreement or understanding must be reached, it must be done through" official diplomatic channels. See Associated Press, "No Promises to Churchill, Senators Told," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1953; Dwight Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, Robert H. Ferrell, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 222.

grew after Stalin's death in March 1953. But the Eisenhower Administration was hesitant. When the British prime minister came back in June 1954, the president told him leader-to-leader negotiations "was one field where he was completely inexperienced."⁵³ The Administration did not think a hastily arranged meeting would be productive. Rather, it wanted to lay the groundwork at lower levels, which it felt would increase the likelihood of a successful meeting at the highest-level. "I am not afraid to meet anybody face to face to talk," Eisenhower told the prime minister, "but the world gets in a habit of expecting a lot."⁵⁴

"When can the heads of states, that are very busy men, when can they meet and discuss...with some promise of progress?" the president rhetorically asked during a press conference. "I am personally ready to do anything, and the only thing that I believe that the dignity and the self-respect of the United States demands is that we have some reasonable indication that progress can be made." When asked his thoughts on the value of leader-to-leader talks rather than diplomacy through subordinates, Eisenhower said, "I suppose there are times when the highest authorities, taking great questions of policy, might do better by meeting, establishing personal contacts, maybe personal confidence, mutual confidence. But, by and large, I think that these things must be done through the Foreign Offices and State Department, because they are so complicated, and so much in the way of procedure, and all that sort of thing, comes into it. It would be unwise to depend entirely on just meeting of the heads of state, and that kind of person."⁵⁵

Many shared Eisenhower's hesitancy. The *Washington Post* objected not to the idea of a summit, but that Churchill "puts the cart before the horse...[having] too much confidence in the

⁵³ Memorandum of a Meeting of President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill, June 26, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol. VI: Western Europe and Canada, pt. 1*, doc. 473, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1986), 1098.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1099.

⁵⁵ "The President's News Conference," May 14, 1953, *PP: 1953*, 284, 285-286.

ability of top-level leaders to solve great problems before the groundwork for solutions has been laid.”⁵⁶ The *Wall Street Journal* agreed, noting that until there is a real possibility of successful talks, personal diplomacy would be “useless” and “build up hopes which must end in disillusionment.” Even worse, “it would be a temptation to the kind of grand and desperate bargaining” seen at Yalta and Potsdam.⁵⁷

It would take two and half years for Eisenhower to sit down with Soviet leaders. But even months before that meeting the Administration was still insisting that certain preconditions had to be met. In March 1955, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Democrat Walter George of Georgia, publically pushed the Administration to agree to a summit without the type of groundwork it continually advocated. “If we insist on advance conditions,” George argued, “we are not going to get anywhere.” The senator’s comments came at the same time that the State Department published documents relating to the Yalta Conference.⁵⁸ This gave the president’s fellow Republicans a new opportunity to attack the personal diplomacy of the Roosevelt era, and gave him another reason for pause.

Eisenhower also made a constitutional argument about why he was reluctant to go abroad. He maintained that his duties in the United States prevented him from leaving for extended periods of time. “It is always an awkward thing,” the president told the British prime

⁵⁶ “Churchill: First Things First,” *Washington Post*, May 13, 1953. For skeptical Americans, Churchill’s love of personal diplomacy was insidious. As journalist Marquis Childs wrote, many Americans saw the British prime minister “as a cunning old spider only waiting to lure the innocent American fly into his web.” See Marquis Childs, “Tight Security Shields Big Three,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 1953.

⁵⁷ “Personal Diplomacy,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 1953.

⁵⁸ Richard L. Strout, “Eisenhower Rejects Big Four ‘Personal Diplomacy,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 22, 1955. The publication of the Yalta papers is a fascinating story of partisan wrangling, bureaucratic infighting, and genuine national security concerns. See Joshua Botts, “‘Out of the Frying Pan Into the Fire,’ 1945-1957” in *Toward “Thorough, Accurate, and Reliable”: A History of the Foreign Relations of the United States*, Williams B. McAllister, Joshua Botts, Peter Cozzens, and Aaron W. Marrs (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, 2015), 148-171. In a letter to Churchill, Eisenhower told the prime minister that he was “unhappy” about the Yalta papers being published. He said that he had tried to keep the documents from being made public, but a leak at the State Department made it impossible. See Letter, Eisenhower to Churchill, March 22, 1959, Folder: President—Churchill Jan. 1, 1955-April 7, 1955 (3); Box 19; Papers of the President (Ann Whitman File) (hereafter AWF)—International Series; Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DEL).

minister, “for the President to leave this country for more than a day or so.”⁵⁹ And as Dulles explained to his British counterpart, while the British public may be accustomed to their prime minister negotiating at a summit, “it is unusual for the President of the US, who is not only head of government but also head of state, to participate personally in international negotiations, and there is considerable sentiment against his doing so at all.”⁶⁰

But in July 1955, Eisenhower, along with the heads of Britain and France, met with the leaders of the Soviet Union. In May, new British Prime Minister Anthony Eden wrote to the president telling him that “the time has come when ‘top level’ talks between heads of Government could play a useful part in the reduction of world tension.” Eden hoped he would give the idea “earnest consideration.”⁶¹ Eisenhower responded that he and Dulles were “a bit surprised” that the British had gone so far as to make an official proposal, and while not completely dismissing the idea, he continued to insist that preparation had to be done at lower diplomatic levels.⁶²

The Administration’s resistance, however, slowly eroded as British and French insistence intensified and public opinion seemed to demand a summit. As Eisenhower recalled in his memoirs, he did not want to “appear senselessly stubborn in my attitude toward a Summit meeting—so hopefully desired by many.”⁶³ The Soviet Union helped move things along as well by finally signing the Austrian State Treaty after years of disputes with the West. According to Eisenhower, many saw this as “a deed auguring well for melting the Soviet ice that had frozen

⁵⁹ Letter, Eisenhower to Eden, May 31, 1955, Folder: Eden 4/6/55-12/31/55 (6); Box 21; AWF—International Series; DEL.

⁶⁰ Telegram, Department of State, Ankara Embassy to Secretary of State, January 29, 1958, Folder: Dulles, John Foster Jan ’58 (1); Box 9; AWF—Dulles-Herter Series; DEL.

⁶¹ Letter From Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, May 6, 1955, doc. 103, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. V: Austrian State Treaty; Summit and Foreign Ministers Meetings, 1955* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), 164.

⁶² Letter From Secretary of State to the British Ambassador (Makins), May 6, 1955, doc. 104, *Ibid.*, 165-167. For Eisenhower’s recollection of Geneva, see Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 503-527.

⁶³ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 506.

fruitful negotiation.”⁶⁴ The president also warmed to the summit because of the type of gathering envisioned. Rather than hard negotiations, the meeting would set the agenda for future talks at lower levels. “I, of course, see serious disadvantages in any meeting of the President with the heads of the Soviet Union,” Dulles noted, “but in the form proposed which is merely to consider whether or not ways and means can be found to settle differences and not to reach any substantive decisions, probably the harm is held to a minimum.”⁶⁵

Thus, though the Administration agreed to a summit it did not believe there would be any major breakthroughs. Despite the peace offensive by the new Soviet leadership, “no change is required in the basic U.S. objectives and national strategy,” the National Security Council stated. The United States should look to negotiate if an issue could be resolved to its advantage, but the nation “should without relaxation continue the steady development of strength, confidence and military readiness.”⁶⁶

In a meeting with members of Congress, Eisenhower noted that the United States “goes with hope, and not with false expectations.” He assured them “there is no sentiment for appeasement.”⁶⁷ To the American public he had a similar message. Speaking to the nation on radio and television, the president said his goal was “to change the spirit” that had existed since the end of WWII. He spoke eloquently of peace and hope, but he also felt the need to defend his mission. With many still opposed to top-level summits, Eisenhower tried to distinguish between the upcoming Geneva summit and those of the past. He noted that this was the first time a president was traveling to such a conference in peacetime. Rather than dealing with issues of

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Telegram From the Secretary of State to the Department of State, May 8, 1955, doc. 107, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. V*, 170-171. For Eisenhower, the summit was “exploratory only, and no substantive problems or decisions should be considered.” Areas of “tension and disagreement” would be identified and then worked out through other diplomatic channels. See Telegram From the Department of State to the Secretary of State, May 15, 1955, doc. 115, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. V*, 180.

⁶⁶ Statement of Policy by the National Security Council, July 11, 1955, doc. 153, *Ibid.*, 290.

⁶⁷ Notes on a Bipartisan Conference, July 12, 1955, doc. 157, *Ibid.*, 306.

war, he was going to “prevent wars, in order to see whether in this time of stress and strain we cannot devise measure that will keep from us this terrible scourge that afflicts mankind.” He also critiqued wartime conferences for “too much... attention to details, by an effort apparently to work on specific problems, rather than to establish a spirit or attitude in which to approach them. Success, therefore, has been meager.”⁶⁸

Eisenhower went on to add that the problem with past conferences was that they had “been mere opportunities for exploitation of nationalistic ambitions” and a venue for “propaganda...to spread to the world.”⁶⁹ This, however, was exactly what the Administration planned to do at Geneva. The propaganda value of the summit was paramount. A report compiled by the State Department noted that “the success or failure of the Big Four Meeting, psychologically, and of the American performance in it, will be determined predominately by opinion reactions in the U.S. and Western Europe.”⁷⁰

The Administration was more concerned with public opinion than actually solving issues—and for good reason. Fifty-five percent of Americans polled before the summit thought the men meeting in Geneva would “be able to reach agreement on...the big problems in the world.”⁷¹ Thus the perception of success was key. “A basic U.S. aim at Geneva,” presidential adviser Nelson Rockefeller told Eisenhower, “must be to capture the political and psychological imagination of the world.” And because the Soviets usually used such conferences for propaganda, the Administration had to be prepared. “In view of the prolonged build-up and the widespread interest shown in the Four Power Conference, the propaganda stakes at Geneva may

⁶⁸ “Radio and Television Address to the American People Prior to Departure for the Big Four Conference at Geneva,” July 15, 1955, *PP, Eisenhower: January 1 to December 31, 1955* (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 701, 702, 703.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 703.

⁷⁰ “Opinion Factors Relating to the Four-Power Conferences,” June 11, 1955, Folder: Geneva Conference (Big Four Conference, July 1955) (1); Box 28; White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF)—Subject Files; DEL.

⁷¹ Foreign Affairs Survey, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, June 1955, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

prove more significant than the actual conference results,” Rockefeller added.⁷² Thus Eisenhower’s revealing of his dramatic Open Skies proposal, which would have allowed each side to conduct aerial surveillance over the other’s territory. The Administration knew there was little to no chance the Soviets would accept, but it correctly assumed that it would be a public relations score.⁷³

Geneva “had been hailed by the world as a great success, even a diplomatic triumph for the West,” Eisenhower recalled. The talks had been amicable and the Soviets seemed willing to look for ways to improve relations. In the month following the summit, one poll found that 78% of Americans had heard or read about it. Eisenhower’s approval rating, an enviable 73% before the conference, was 75% a few weeks later (whether the bump was summit related is unclear).⁷⁴ But post-summit progress failed to live up to expectations, and “disillusionment had followed.” In his memoirs, however, Eisenhower wrote that Geneva was “a limited success” because the Soviets were exposed. “All could now see the nature of Soviet diplomatic tactics as contrasted

⁷² Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rockefeller) to the President, “Psychological Strategy at Geneva,” July 11, 1955, doc. 154, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. V*, 298. Dulles was perturbed by Rockefeller’s proposals. He felt that they were “not in accord” with State Department policy and “had grave questions as to the propriety of the President getting this kind of advice from sources outside of the State Department.” See Memorandum of a Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President’s Special Assistant (Rockefeller), July 12, 1955, doc. 156, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. V*, 305.

⁷³ “West European Press Hails Arms Proposal,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 1955; “Press of Europe Hails Eisenhower,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1955. Members of Congress quickly praised Eisenhower’s plan, but a survey conducted shortly after the summit found Americans divided on the proposal—48% approved, while 47% disapproved. See James E. Warner, “Eisenhower Plan Hailed In Congress: Johnson Leads General Praise,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1955; Foreign Affairs Survey, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, August 1955, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>. For the Administration’s propaganda at Geneva see, Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 181-213; Günter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, eds., *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

⁷⁴ Foreign Affairs Survey, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, August 1955; Gallup Poll, July 14-19, 1955; Gallup Poll, August 4-9, 1955, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

with those of the Free World.” But he also felt that the “spirit of Geneva” never totally died and created opportunities for East-West dialogue.⁷⁵

While Eisenhower shied away from traveling abroad for high-profile summits, he had a steady stream of foreign leaders confer with him in the United States.⁷⁶ Though sometimes these meetings also proved problematic. “It seems to me this business of entertaining Heads of State can be run into the ground a little bit,” Eisenhower told Dulles. “In fact the more we do of it, the more there seems to be done.” During state visits the president wanted to somehow limit the “agony of the state dinner” and the reciprocal dinner at the visiting leader’s embassy.⁷⁷ Dulles acknowledged that Eisenhower’s “calendar has been crowded with foreign visitors,” but he assured the president that he instructed the State Department to limit official state visits. The “agony” of reciprocal dinners, however, was something the president would have to endure, but only on formal visits. More informal ones could limit such affairs.⁷⁸ And it was informal visits where Eisenhower truly made his mark on the development of personal diplomacy.

In Eisenhower’s first three years in office, thirty-seven world leaders came to the United States. His successor John F. Kennedy would welcome nearly that many in his first year in office, yet compared to the eighteen world leaders that came during Truman’s first full three years and only seven during FDR’s first three, Eisenhower set a new record. As the *New York Times* reported, “both the President and his chief foreign policy advisers have become convinced that these personal meetings and intimate tête-a-têtes are a most valuable lubricant to the wheels

⁷⁵ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 530.

⁷⁶ In his memoirs Eisenhower boasted that during his time as president, he hosted thirty-seven official visits by world leaders and 210 meetings, both at home and abroad. See *Ibid.*, 237.

⁷⁷ Letter, Eisenhower to Dulles, May 31, 1954, Folder: Dulles, John Foster Aug. 1954 (2); Box 4; AWF—Dulles-Herter Series; DEL.

⁷⁸ Memorandum, Eisenhower to Dulles, “Visit to the United States of President Magloire of Haiti,” June 16, 1954, Folder: Dulles, John Foster Aug. 1954 (2); Box 4; AWF—Dulles-Herter Series; DEL.

of world diplomacy.”⁷⁹ Rather than formal conferences, Eisenhower favored informal talks, often outside of Washington. This stood in contrast to the president’s predecessors. Journalist James Reston observed that Eisenhower liked talks that had an “atmosphere of genial informality” where there were few advisers, no formal agenda, and little protocol.⁸⁰ This type of personal diplomacy was thought to promote trust and goodwill and was seen as a method to counter Soviet propaganda.⁸¹ According to one Administration official, these private informal talks also had value because “the President brought to later [National] Security Council meetings a freshness of viewpoint and a sense of familiarity with the issues concerning these countries that had been missing before.”⁸²

One example of this type of informal diplomacy was a meeting at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, where in March 1956 Eisenhower conferred with the leaders of Mexico and Canada. There was no formal agenda, and as White House Press Secretary James Hagerty noted, the gathering was “called for the purpose of getting to know each other better.”⁸³ After two days of talks there were no agreements or communiqué, but according to Eisenhower the meeting was “a great success” and accomplished exactly what it was meant to—enhanced understanding and friendship.⁸⁴

Later in the year Eisenhower hosted Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at his farm in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. “Informal, friendly talks between the President and the Prime Minister at this time may have an historic significance,” the State Department predicted. Though

⁷⁹ Cabell Phillips, “Talks With Nehru Typify U.S. ‘Personal Diplomacy,’” *New York Times*, December 23, 1956.

⁸⁰ James Reston, “The President’s Talks: An Appraisal of New Diplomatic Pattern Set by Eisenhower’s Personal Contacts,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1956.

⁸¹ William H. Stringer, “President Plays Role: New Diplomatic Era Seen,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 30, 1956.

⁸² Phillips, “Talks With Nehru,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1956

⁸³ Chalmers M. Roberts, “Ruiz Cortines and St. Laurent Fly to Talks at W. Va. Resort,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1956.

⁸⁴ W. H. Lawrence, “Eisenhower Elated at 3-Power Talks,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1956.

hyperbolic, the Administration felt that events had conspired to align American and Indian policy. Despite disagreements over Pakistan and China, Indian disapproval of Soviet action in Hungary and the split between the United States and its European allies after the Suez Crisis (which the Administration thought gave it added prestige in the developing world) made the State Department think that talks between Nehru and Eisenhower “could have far-reaching consequences.”⁸⁵ But despite the perceived importance of these talks, Eisenhower’s public attitude was not much different than when he met with his Canadian and Mexican counterparts. The president was not looking to negotiate or come to any agreements. Rather, as he noted days before the prime minister’s visit, “its main utility would be to provide for a general discussion of matters of common interest.” On specific issues that Nehru might bring up, he thought he “could do little more than listen. Any detailed discussions and negotiations should be carried out at another level.”⁸⁶

With Eisenhower’s approach, a critic might assume such meetings were simply window dressing, designed to show action, but lacking in substance.⁸⁷ But during the 1950s, these were exactly the kind of meetings the American public wanted. There was no great demand or desire for the president to personally engage in serious negotiations. What the public wanted was for the president to promote peace and goodwill. Indeed, during his 1956 reelection campaign, Eisenhower portrayed himself as the peace candidate. This theme dominated his television ads

⁸⁵ Briefing Book—Nehru’s Visit, Background Paper, “The Circumstances of the Nehru Visit,” December 12, 1956, Folder: State, Department of (1956) [Briefing Book—Nehru’s Visit] (2); Box 72; AWF—Subject Series; DEL.

⁸⁶ Summary of a Meeting With the President, December 14, 1956, doc. 162, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. VIII: South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1987), 329. In the case of Nehru, Eisenhower felt that the Indian leader “seems to be often more swayed by personality than by logical argument. He seems to be intensely personal in his whole approach.” See Letter From the President to the Secretary of State, March 23, 1955, doc. 144, *FRUS, 1955-1957, Vol. VIII*, 278. For Eisenhower’s recollection of his Gettysburg talks with Nehru, see Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 106-114.

⁸⁷ It is quite possible that Eisenhower’s public posture on personal diplomacy was part of a larger strategy to appear non-controversial and a non-political in order to deflect criticism, thus fitting his overall leadership style. See Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

during the election. “I can’t see how Mr. Stevenson has any experience in dealing with foreign countries,” one commercial featuring a college aged woman stated. “But both our allies and our enemies respect the greatness of President Eisenhower. In order to keep the peace, we need a president that other countries will listen to.”⁸⁸ And Eisenhower nurtured this image and advanced U.S. foreign policy through friendly, informal talks with other world leaders.

This sentiment was reflected in two of the nation’s leading papers. “Results from such a[n] [informal] conference are bound to be intangible,” the *New York Times* editorialized, “and no one is truly in a position today to say whether the good that may come of the meeting will compensate for the time spent on it.” But, the paper noted, world leaders, “meeting in an easy, informal atmosphere that induced goodwill and good feelings, are bound to come up with improved understanding and with ideas and suggestions on all sorts of questions.”⁸⁹ The *Washington Post* concurred. “There is much to be said for the calming effect of the easy atmosphere which the President can create. It is in such meetings that the deep sincerity of his personality shines through.” The paper, however, also noted the leeriness many Americans still felt toward personal diplomacy. Roosevelt and his contemporaries were “tempted to the belief that they could change the course of the world by mere verbal accord,” but “history has proved, deep-seated differences and opposite national objectives remained despite the pleasantries.” The paper reminded its readers that Eisenhower’s “homely chats” would not solve world problems by themselves.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ “College Girl,” Eisenhower 1956, Museum of the Moving Image, *The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2012*, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1956/college-girl.

⁸⁹ “Hospitable Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1956.

⁹⁰ “The Little Summit,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 1956.

The Administration sought to leverage other forms of personal diplomacy as well, such as sending Vice President Richard Nixon abroad as Eisenhower's surrogate numerous times.⁹¹ Correspondence was another tool. "You might wish to consider sending personal communications from time to time to those heads of state or government who have visited the United States and have had the opportunity to become acquainted with you," Secretary of State Dulles told the president. "Such communications, I believe, will prove very effective in promoting closer relations with our friends."⁹² With close allies, Eisenhower found that personal messages assisted in keeping the channels of communication open and helped him formulate ideas. For example, he found it "useful" to "think out loud" through correspondence when he was unable to meet with his British counterpart.⁹³

Eisenhower also kept up a steady correspondence with Soviet leaders, though it eventually devolved into a public relations campaign more than serious diplomacy. Beginning in September 1955, after the Geneva meeting, Eisenhower and Soviet leaders exchanged seventy-two messages over five years. Though covering important topics, the messages tended to be very detailed, concerning themselves with points generally discussed at lower diplomatic levels. But what made this exchange truly unique was that the messages were made public, sometimes before the recipient even received them. As Elmer Plischke noted, the exchange "tended to take on characteristics of 'speechmaking' rather than instruments of consultation and negotiation. As

⁹¹ John C. Baumgartner, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 32, 121.

⁹² Memorandum, Dulles to Eisenhower, "Suggested Message to Prime Minister Nehru of India," April 18, 1957, Folder: India, P.M. Nehru 1957-61 (1); Box 29; AWF—International Series; DEL.

⁹³ Telegram, Department of State, Secretary of State to London Embassy, January 6, 1958, Folder: Macmillan-President, December 1957-May 30, 1958 (6); Box 22; AWF—International Series; DEL.

a result, they became an element of ‘public enlightenment’ if not outright Cold War propaganda” and did little to improve understanding and advance relations.⁹⁴

*“Both Agreed They Had Much to Talk About, ‘the President Added, Like Gullivers’”:
Eisenhower’s Second Term*⁹⁵

In Eisenhower’s second term, the scope and scale of his personal diplomacy dramatically increased. Gone was the reluctance to go abroad for an extended period of time. In his last year in office, he went on multiple world tours visiting Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Though these meetings were still more about generating goodwill than hard negotiations, they signaled a shift in the development of presidential personal diplomacy.

In explaining his mission to another world leader Eisenhower said, “My purpose in visiting these nations is to do what I can to strengthen the ties which bind the nations of the Free World together. I have found from experience that there is no substitute for personal contact in furthering understanding and good will.”⁹⁶ After Eisenhower’s first world journey at the end of 1959—which kept him out of the country for three weeks—he told the nation, “My trip was not undertaken as a feature of normal diplomatic procedures. It was not my purpose either to seek specific agreements or to urge new treaty relationships. My purpose was to improve the climate

⁹⁴ Elmer Plischke, “Eisenhower’s ‘Correspondence Diplomacy’ with the Kremlin—Case Study in Summit Diplomats,” *Journal of Politics* 30, no. 1 (February 1968):139. Eisenhower sent thirty-one messages, forty-one were sent by the Soviets.

⁹⁵ Eisenhower said this to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan during a telephone call in the spring of 1960. This was a period when both leaders were engaged in extensive travel and personal diplomacy. See Telephone Call, Eisenhower and Macmillan, March 21, 1960, Folder: Macmillan, Harold, Jan. 1 to August 4, 1960 (7); Box 25(b); AWF—International Series; DEL.

⁹⁶ Letter, Eisenhower to Arturo Frondizi, December 1, 1959, Folder: Argentina (3); Box 1; AWF—International Series; DEL.

in which diplomacy might work more successfully; a diplomacy that seeks, as its basic objective, peace with justice for all men.”⁹⁷

In recounting the origins of his goodwill missions, Eisenhower recalled conversations he had with Dulles. He said that while the secretary of state was a professional diplomat, he realized the “world prestige” of the presidency, and from the beginning of the Administration, saw the need to have foreign leaders visit the United States. “Dulles was very clear,” Eisenhower said, “that he did not think such visits would solve any particular problems—and was not in favor of going somewhere just to solve a problem.” And he thought summits “were not only futile but had many dangers,” a sentiment the president shared. But in the last years of the Administration, Dulles saw the rise of new nations in Africa and Asia as a potentially potent bloc, and believed “it was most important to establish a foothold of friendship in such nations as we could in anticipation of this kind of influence developing in the United Nations.” Having Eisenhower visit these parts of the world might create goodwill and a positive impression of the United States, thus providing the West with an edge in its battle with the Soviets.⁹⁸

While confronting the Soviets remained the priority in Eisenhower’s second term, he faced a succession of crises all over the globe. During his reelection campaign in 1956 there was trouble in the Suez and an uprising in Hungary that the Soviets brutally crushed. The following year brought the Soviet launch of Sputnik and domestic turmoil as Eisenhower sent federal troops into Little Rock to enforce desegregation. Middle East crises in Lebanon and Iraq followed in 1958, as did renewed tension in the Taiwan Straits. And the specter of communism

⁹⁷ “Radio and Television Remarks on the Good Will Tour Delivered at the Pageant of Peace Ceremonies,” *PP, Eisenhower: January 1 to December 31, 1959* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 880. For Eisenhower’s account of his goodwill trips, see Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 485-513. For a journalist’s account, see Merriman Smith, *A President’s Odyssey* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

⁹⁸ Memorandum for the Record, December 26, 1960, Folder: [ACW] Diary, December 1960; Box: 11; AWF—Ann Whitman Diary; DEL.

loomed in Cuba, Congo, and Laos. But the most pressing issue of the late 1950s was Berlin. If the Cold War turned hot, most believed the divided German city would be ground zero. As Eisenhower recalled, “trouble was always afoot” in Berlin.⁹⁹

For both the United States and the Soviet Union the city was a strategic liability. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev referred to it as “a cancer” and a “bone in my throat.”¹⁰⁰ Yet he also saw Berlin as the “testicles of the West,” believing that “every time I give them a yank, they holler.”¹⁰¹ In late 1958, as East Germany continued to hemorrhage skilled workers who fled to West Berlin, furthering eroding its economy, Khrushchev hastily issued a six-month ultimatum to settle the city’s status. The deadline passed without a word from the Kremlin, but it was designed in part to lure Eisenhower into a summit. Since the Geneva Conference in 1955 little had changed in U.S.-Soviet relations, and Khrushchev had a slate of issues he needed dealt with. First among them was West Germany’s continuing integration into the West and fear of it acquiring nuclear weapons, as well as an arms race that was escalating and becoming an ever-greater drain on the Soviet economy.¹⁰²

At the same time Khrushchev’s ultimatum expired, a conference of foreign minister that had been meeting in Geneva also failed to make progress. Running out of ways to move issues along, the only other idea Eisenhower had “was to ask Mr. K over here” to meet face-to-face.¹⁰³ He continued, however, to resist pressure for a formal four-power summit with hard negotiating. With no progress coming out of Geneva, he felt there was no reason for a summit. “It is still my conviction,” he told British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, “that such a meeting would be a

⁹⁹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 336.

¹⁰⁰ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 407.

¹⁰¹ As quoted in Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, rev. ed. (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 200.

¹⁰² Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 403.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 415.

fraud on our peoples and a great diplomatic blunder.”¹⁰⁴ But even without progress at lower levels, there was pressure on Eisenhower. “The summit issue seemed to occupy the center of the stage in all the Western capitals,” he recalled.¹⁰⁵

The idea of preliminary negotiations before a summit was one Khrushchev never liked. As early as June 1958, he told Eisenhower that he had “serious doubts” whether such talks would actually lead to a summit. Even worse, he questioned whether the lower level negotiations then being conducted were actually “calculated to put additional difficulties in the way of convening a summit conference.”¹⁰⁶ This was, of course, an allegation Eisenhower denied. Rejecting that his nation was stalling, the president responded, “The fact is that the differences between us are not procedural but basic.”¹⁰⁷

Though Eisenhower had the idea for informal talks, he still wanted some progress in Geneva to justify Khrushchev coming to the United States. At a press conference he said his Administration had recently grappled with the question of inviting the Soviet leader, and while he did not “reject out of hand” the idea, his team weighed “the pros and cons and we thought the

¹⁰⁴ He added, “I know that there has been some argument that the less the progress at the Foreign Ministers level, the more necessary a Summit meeting becomes. I am quite clear in my mind that such a feeling is not shared by the bulk of our people. This may sound to you overly pessimistic. But you know that I have very much wanted to participate in a meeting in which there was even the slightest promise of a successful outcome.” The summit issue during the Berlin crisis was one that divided Eisenhower and Macmillan, as the British leader pushed for a gathering without preconditions. See Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, July 22, 1959, doc. 468, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. VIII: Berlin Crisis, 1958-1959* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 1034; For Eisenhower’s difference of view with Macmillan, see Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 401-403.

¹⁰⁵ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 350.

¹⁰⁶ Letter, Khrushchev to Eisenhower, June 11, 1958, Folder: Khrushchev April 1958-Sept. 1958 (2); Box 51; AWF—International Series; DEL. On issues other than Berlin, Khrushchev thought a summit was the answer as well. As Eisenhower recalled, when tension in the Middle East grew in 1958, the Soviet leader “returned to his favorite formula for solving world problems—a summit meeting.” And never one to shy away from publicity, he made this proposal in a letter that he simultaneously made public. “This proposal was attractive on the surface,” Eisenhower said, “and, I understand, made a strong impression in the United Nations.” But the president refused. See Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 283.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Eisenhower to Khrushchev, August 1, 1958, Folder: Khrushchev April 1958-Sept. 1958 (5); Box 52; AWF—International Series; DEL.

cons, for the moment, sort of had the day.”¹⁰⁸ But a few days later the Administration invited Khrushchev, who quickly accepted.¹⁰⁹

“The visit of Khrushchev to the United States,” a top State Department official noted, “was in the nature of an experiment.” The Administration did not know “what its historical effect would be, and perhaps it might be proved that we were wrong in inviting him.”¹¹⁰ Explaining to French President Charles de Gaulle what he hoped to accomplish with Khrushchev, the president said a trip to the United States would give the Soviet leader “a better picture of our strength and way of life. It would also serve to reduce the atmosphere of crisis should the Foreign Ministers recess without progress.” He went on to say that in his talks he would strive to “assure that he [Khrushchev] obtains a clearer understanding of American attitudes, power, and resources.” Eisenhower did not think that their talks alone would solve every problem, but he believed the “effect might be considerable” and help lead the way to a four-power summit.¹¹¹

Before meeting with the Kremlin leader, however, Eisenhower felt it necessary to consult with European allies. Thus in the weeks leading up to the Soviet leader’s visit, the president traveled to West Germany, Britain, and France. As the State Department wrote, the trip “will serve a necessary psychological function and provide a valuable means of political consultation on the current situation.” After the Geneva Conference in 1955, the mood in Europe had become

¹⁰⁸ “The President’s News Conference,” July 15, 1959, *PP: 1959*, 530.

¹⁰⁹ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 415-416. According to British Prime Minister Macmillan, part of the reason Khrushchev wanted a summit was his feeling of inferiority. Writing to Eisenhower, he mused that Khrushchev must ask himself, “Lenin built the Party and Stalin created the empire; what am I going to do?” Related, the prime minister said that Khrushchev “desire[d] to become ‘respectable’ and a member of the Heads of Government Club. Above all, I think, he would like to feel himself recognised as an equal by you and by the United States.” See Letter, Macmillan to Eisenhower, July 21, 1959, Folder: Macmillan 7/1/59 to 12/31/59 (1); Box 25(a); AWF—International Series; DEL.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, “Khrushchev’s Visit to the United States and Related Matters,” September 17, 1959, doc. 12, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. IX: Berlin Crisis 1959-1960; Germany; Austria* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 31.

¹¹¹ Telegram, Department of State, Acting Secretary to Paris Embassy, August 1, 1959, Folder: DeGaulle, June, 1958-October 30, 1959 (1); Box 13; AWF—International Series; DEL. According to Eisenhower’s memoirs, the reliance on personal diplomacy at this time bothered him. He “regretted that normal diplomatic channels... were being so markedly ignored.” Instead, the reduction of world tensions “now seemed to lay, for the time being at least, in direct contacts between the heads of governments.” See Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 412.

a “curious mixture of expectation and frustration.” There was hope on the Continent that the meeting of the leaders of the world’s most powerful nations would produce greater understanding and reduced tensions. But there was also great pessimism that the West would be able to successfully resolve the Berlin issue. Part of Eisenhower’s goal, then, was to reassure Europeans that a main objective of Khrushchev’s visit was “to provide evidence that the West will not succumb” to his pressure, and that no negotiations on Berlin would be held.¹¹²

Eisenhower’s journey was complicated by the fact that each of the European leaders he met with had different views on his talks with the Kremlin head and a four-power summit. In West Germany and France he encountered leaders who met the news with “consternation,” while in Britain, Khrushchev’s visit was “applauded.”¹¹³ West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer feared a weakening of U.S. support and worried that Eisenhower—with British prodding—might make concessions to the Soviet Union that adversely influenced his nation’s position. Thus, the U.S. ambassador in West Germany saw the president’s trip as a chance to “soothe [the] Chancellor’s apprehensions.”¹¹⁴ In Britain, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan greatly favored a formal summit, and while Khrushchev’s visit to the United States quieted demand for one, the State Department believed Macmillan would want “some public assurance” that a four-power meeting would occur, especially as he had an election quickly approaching.¹¹⁵ And in France Eisenhower dealt with the irascible Charles de Gaulle. The French leader was “rather rigidly opposed” to a summit and wanted to know the Administration’s thinking and purpose for

¹¹² Scope Paper—President’s Trip to Europe: August- September 1959, “The Khrushchev Visit and the Aftermath of the Geneva Conference,” n .d., Folder: European Trip-General Aug./Sept. 1959; Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL.

¹¹³ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 413.

¹¹⁴ Telegram From the Embassy in Germany to the Department of State, August 10, 1959, doc. 1, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. IX: Germany; Austria* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 2.

¹¹⁵ President’s Trip to Europe, August-September 1959: Talks With Macmillan, “Key Questions,” n. d., Folder: London Visit—Aug. 27 to Sept. 2, 1959 (1); Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL.

Khrushchev's visit—which he thought “a futile gesture”—as well as assurance that Eisenhower would only be speaking for the United States and not the West as a whole.¹¹⁶

Overall, Eisenhower's European sojourn was successful. In Bonn, he and Adenauer had private talks so “absorbing” that they never bothered to bring in their advisers, though they were scheduled to join the two leaders a half hour into the meeting.¹¹⁷ In France, Eisenhower found his time with de Gaulle “more than rewarding,” and the U.S. ambassador there reported the president's trip “was [an] unqualified success,” resulting in a “vastly improved atmosphere.”¹¹⁸ From Britain, the U.S. ambassador noted that the “personal impact of [the] president was enormous,” and the visit had “left Anglo-American relations in [a] rosy glow and has unquestionably enhanced British confidence in United States leadership of [the] Free World.”¹¹⁹ Though differences between allies remained, Eisenhower's European junket reassured them and was a “personal triumph.” For the peoples of Europe, “the doubt and apprehensions regarding his own and America's capacity for leadership vanished into thin air,” the *New York Times* editorialized, and “so did most the mutual suspicions, bickering and wrangling among our European allies that perturbed the Atlantic community before his trip.”¹²⁰ For some observers,

¹¹⁶ President's Trip to Europe: Talks With De Gaulle, “Key Questions,” n. d., Folder: Paris Visit—Sept. 24, 1959 (1); Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL; Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 426. In addition to visiting Paris, Eisenhower spent the night with de Gaulle in Rambouillet. This was something that the president originally did not want to do. But the U.S. ambassador to France urged him to reconsider, as he believed the purpose of the visit would be “greatly aided” by going to Rambouillet, and help create a “rapport” with the French leader, which was a main reason for the trip. As the ambassador reported, de Gaulle placed great importance on this, believing “that this will offer [the] best and only time for person to person talks which would establish [a] relationship on [a] human basis as distinct from [a] government basis... It is very evident that de Gaulle has his heart set on a peaceful evening at Rambouillet.” See Telegram, Paris Embassy to Department of State, August 12, 1959, Folder: Paris Visit—Sept. 24, 1959 (1); Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL.

¹¹⁷ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 418.

¹¹⁸ Telegram, Embassy in France to Department of State, September 15, 1959, Folder: Paris Visit—Sept. 24, 1959 (2); Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL.

¹¹⁹ Telegram, Embassy in United Kingdom to Department of State, September 8, 1959, Folder: London Visit—Aug. 27 to Sept. 2, 1959 (1); Box 4; AWF—International Meetings Series; DEL.

¹²⁰ For Macmillan and Adenauer, the president's visit paid political dividends as well, as many agreed that the two leaders would almost certainly be reelected now. See Drew Middleton, “Tour By Eisenhower a Personal Triumph: But Allied Differences Remain As to Approach to the Summit,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1959; “The

Eisenhower's journey and his pending talks with Khrushchev clearly demonstrated that he was now his own secretary of state.¹²¹

With the European allies dealt with, Eisenhower finally met with the Kremlin head in September 1959. In their first private meeting the president made his desire for peace plain. He stated he had invited Khrushchev because of "one deep conviction." Flattering the Soviet leader, the president said he "believed that Mr. Khrushchev had an opportunity to become the greatest political figure in history because he has a tremendous power in a complex of states with great might," and with all that power the Soviet leader "could do a great deal for peace." Eisenhower said the issue of world peace was "very close to his heart" and why he had spoken on "such a personal basis."¹²²

After their initial talks the Soviet leader went on a tour of the United States, visiting New York, Iowa, and California, after which he returned to Washington for more talks with the president at Camp David. "My purpose in these man-to-man talks," Eisenhower noted, "was to learn more about his [Khrushchev's] intentions, objectives, and personal characteristics."¹²³ Overall, the two leaders' discussion went well. Despite Khrushchev's reputation for colorful language and behavior, "the conversations were carried out in a generally dispassionate, objective, and calm tone. There were no harangues or outbursts."¹²⁴ The focus of their talks was Berlin, as Eisenhower refused to discuss other issues until he felt Khrushchev would cease

President's Achievement," *New York Times*, September 6, 1959; Bill Henry, "Ike's Friends Aided by Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 1959.

¹²¹ Drew Pearson, "Ike Now His Own Secretary of State," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1959.

¹²² Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Private Conversation with Mr. Khrushchev," September 15, 1959, doc. 111, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. X, pt. 1: Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 409.

¹²³ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 444.

¹²⁴ Memorandum, "President Eisenhower's Talks with Chairman Khrushchev at Camp David," Folder: Khrushchev Visit Sept. '59 (1); Box 52; AWF—International Series; DEL.

pressure on the city. They also discussed a presidential visit to the Soviet Union, as well as a four-power summit the following year.¹²⁵

But this “spirit of Camp David” did not last. A four-power summit was scheduled for May 1960 in Paris, but two weeks before the gathering the Soviets shot down a U-2 spy plane. The Administration at first tried to deny it was involved in aerial espionage, but was forced to when Khrushchev unveiled captured American pilot Francis Gary Powers. The Soviet leader demanded an apology, but Eisenhower refused. Khrushchev’s language became increasingly inflammatory and undiplomatic, yet he reportedly still wanted a successful summit.¹²⁶ But hope faded. “Let’s face it!” one journalist wrote on the eve of the parley. “Nobody is quite sure what we’re getting into in the Big Four summit...No matter what the basis for this four handed diplomatic power game may have been originally, it’s all changed now.”¹²⁷ No one knew what to expect in Paris.

The speculation would end quickly. When the four leaders gathered for a “pre-summit” meeting, Khrushchev opened with a long statement attacking American actions and saying the summit needed to be postponed for six to eight months and that Eisenhower’s visit to the Soviet Union should be postponed as well. “I naturally deplore that after the long and painful ascent to the Summit,” British Prime Minister Macmillan said, “we now find this dark cloud upon us.” He and de Gaulle tried to convince Khrushchev to participate in the summit, but to no avail. “The insult to our country has been made public. It has not been made to your country,” Khrushchev

¹²⁵ Discussion of a summit was the only “real argument” the two men had, according to Eisenhower. While Khrushchev wanted to convene one quickly, the president did not. “Like mountain summits, political summits are normally barren, but that under proper circumstances, I would have no particular objections to such a meeting.” But he warned the Soviet leader he would never go to a summit under any threat or ultimatum on Berlin. See Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 446.

¹²⁶ Drew Middleton, “Khrushchev Voices Hopes To British on the Summit,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1960; Elie Maissi, “Khrushchev Writes West to Save Summit,” *Washington Post*, May 10, 1960.

¹²⁷ Bill Henry, “Summit Is Big Question Mark,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1960.

told the Europeans. He “would not participate in the Summit Conference until the United States has publically removed the threat it has imposed.”¹²⁸

From the U.S. perspective, the Soviet leader “had crossed the Rubicon,” and had decided “even before arriving to torpedo the meeting.”¹²⁹ After Khrushchev’s outburst, Eisenhower, Macmillan, and de Gaulle met to decide whether to invite him for another round of talks. If they did, and Khrushchev did not show, it was thought this “would help the West to dramatize” Soviet intransigence.¹³⁰ Subsequent meetings were held, and Khrushchev was a no-show, thus dashing the hopes of millions.¹³¹ For many the Soviet leader bore the brunt of responsibility for the failed summit, but American prestige was damaged as well.¹³²

Though wounded by the summit and leader-to-leader contacts in disrepute after Paris, Eisenhower went on a previously planned goodwill tour of Asia, where he visited the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea.¹³³ And at home his personal diplomacy continued unabated as well. In September, he went to New York for the opening of the UN General Assembly where he met with numerous world leaders.¹³⁴ In using the UN gathering for a succession of short bilateral talks, Eisenhower initiated a practice that future presidents would

¹²⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, “Pre-Summit Problems Among the Four Powers,” May 16, 1960, doc. 168, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Vol. IX*, 445, 451, 452.

¹²⁹ Telegram From the Delegation at the Summit Conference to the Department of State, May 16, 1960, doc. 170, *Ibid.*, 453.

¹³⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, “Summit Situation,” May 16, 1960, doc. 172, *Ibid.*, 456.

¹³¹ When the three Western leaders met without Khrushchev, de Gaulle raised the prospect of having photos taken of their talks. Eisenhower agreed, jokingly asking “whether a fourth chair should be left vacant” for the Soviet leader. See Memorandum of Conversation, “Report to NATO: Berlin; Disarmament,” May 18, 1969, doc. 187, *Ibid.*, 490. For Eisenhower’s recollection of the failed summit, see Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 543-559.

¹³² Thomas P. Ronan, “World Reaction: Shock At The Summit’s Failure,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1960. In retrospect, Eisenhower said that even if the summit had been held, it “would have proved to be a failure and thus would have brought the Free World only further disillusionment.” See Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 558.

¹³³ Before Paris, this trip to Asia was originally supposed to include Eisenhower’s visit to the Soviet Union. For his account of the trip, see Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 560-566.

¹³⁴ Eisenhower held ten bilateral meetings while in New York, conferring with the leaders of Ghana, Nepal, Lebanon, Yugoslavia, Togo, India, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Cambodia, and Canada. For his account, see Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 582-586.

imitate. But for all the high-level talks in his final year, presidential personal diplomacy was under attack.

The events in Paris left a bitter taste for Americans. Returning home, the *Washington Post* said that though the president handled himself well, he “ought not to be greeted as a conquering hero. He did not conquer; he, and the country with him, suffered a humiliating rebuff.” And the *New York Times* sounded the death knell for summitry: “The Paris fiasco is not merely the fiasco of a single conference. It casts new doubt on the wisdom of the whole concept of ‘summitry’ as practiced in the past, beginning with Tehran through Yalta, Potsdam and Geneva to Paris. Certainly no American President should again be exposed to the verbal assaults, abuses and humiliations heaped upon President Eisenhower, nor should the Soviets ever get a new opportunity to pull the rug from under him on some other pretext if he does not yield to their demands.” Like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* commended Eisenhower’s handling of Khrushchev’s attacks, but if such an event happened again, it “could only demean the dignity of the Presidency itself and therewith the dignity of the United States.”¹³⁵

Even Eisenhower’s post-summit goodwill trip was not without controversy. Originally he had planned to visit Japan as well. Intense demonstrations over a U.S.-Japan security treaty, however, caused the Japanese prime minister to request a postponement of the visit. Thus in the span of two months the American president was verbally insulted by Khrushchev and had his invitation to visit the Soviet Union rescinded, and then had a trip to an allied nation cancelled because of a wave of anti-American sentiment.

At the start of Eisenhower’s final year in office and months before the Paris summit, the *New York Times* ran an article with the headline, “Eisenhower Focuses on Peacemaker Role: Personal Diplomacy Enhances His Stature in His Final Year.” It noted that though early in the

¹³⁵ “Mr. Eisenhower’s Return,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 1960; “Summitry,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1960.

1950s the Administration had “turned a chilly glare” to Winston Churchill’s infatuation with summitry, Eisenhower was “now pressing [summitry] toward maturity.”¹³⁶ With his meeting with Khrushchev and his goodwill tours, journalist Roscoe Drummond said Eisenhower’s “ambitious venture in personal diplomacy...will make Franklin Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson look like stay-at-homes.”¹³⁷ And it was not just the American president engaging in personal diplomacy. Toward the end of 1959, as word came that Khrushchev would visit de Gaulle, the Italian president would visit Moscow, and China’s Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Nehru might meet, one reporter mused that the “maneuvers in the new global game of personal diplomacy came so fast last week it was difficult to keep tabs on the travel plans of the world’s leaders.”¹³⁸

Eisenhower’s burst of personal diplomacy initially helped him domestically. He had bipartisan support from members of Congress for his goodwill tours, and at the start of 1960 a Gallup poll found his approval rating at 71%. Investigating what was behind perceptions of the president, Gallup noted four elements, one of which was the view of him as “master diplomat.” His “program of simple and direct personal diplomacy has made a deep impression on many.”¹³⁹ But even amongst this praise, there were rumblings against Eisenhower’s use of leader-to-leader contacts. In late 1959 former Secretary of State Dean Acheson criticized what he saw as “a policy of locomotion.” Instead of a real policy, Eisenhower simply traveled. “When the

¹³⁶ Russell Baker, “Eisenhower Focuses on Peacemaker Role: Personal Diplomacy Enhances His Stature in His Final Year,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1960.

¹³⁷ Roscoe Drummond, “He Will Make Woodrow Wilson and FDR Look Like Stay-at-Homes: Eisenhower’s Last Year,” *Daily Boston Globe*, November 16, 1959.

¹³⁸ United Press International, “Personal Diplomacy Maneuvers Come Fast In New Global Game,” *Hartford Courant*, November 15, 1959; Warren Rogers, Jr., “Age of Do-It-Yourself Diplomacy Downgrading the Career Officer: All Heads of Government Try to Get Into Summit Act,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 15, 1959.

¹³⁹ Russell Baker, “2 Parties’ Congress Chiefs Support Eisenhower Trip,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1959; George Gallup, “Poll Gives President Huge Confidence Vote: Latest Gallup Survey Shows Steady Climb in Popularity From Depths of April, ’58,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1960. Evidence of this support for Eisenhower’s personal diplomacy was made clear when Khrushchev came to visit in 1959. According to a Gallup poll, 66% approved of the visit, and 71% approved of Eisenhower visiting the Soviet Union. See Gallup Poll, August 20-25, 1959, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

Administration comes to the end of its wits, everybody starts moving around... The mileage clocked up by this Administration is impressive, but the results are not,” he said.¹⁴⁰ The *Chicago Daily Tribune*'s first editorial of 1960 argued against the upcoming four-power summit in May. Noting the failure of the first presidential summit at Versailles after WWI, which produced “sour fruits” that led to a second world war and left Wilson “broken and dispirited,” the paper said the nation should “not be misled into believing that summit meetings lead to lovely settlements greatly to the advantage of the United States. They have never yet, and 1960 is unlikely to prove an exception.”¹⁴¹

By mid-1960, this view came to dominate. Positive talk about personal diplomacy ceased. In the aftermath of the failed summit and the cancellation of the trip to Japan, “personal diplomacy for better or worse has fallen to low repute,” a reporter for the *Boston Globe* noted.¹⁴² The father of containment George Kennan told Congress that the United States needed to think ““very, very carefully before we submit the prestige of the President”” to a repeat of what happened in Paris.¹⁴³ The Administration essentially agreed. While defending Eisenhower's recent goodwill trip to Asia and arguing it was successful despite not visiting Japan, Secretary of State Christian Herter said that the president would not be going on any more grand tours. Rather than presidential personal diplomacy, the secretary stated that U.S. diplomacy ““should return to traditional channels and procedures of international contact.”” According to one journalist, Herter was admitting “presidential touring and personal diplomacy is ill-conceived, and unproductive and...[should] be discontinued.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ “Acheson Hits Diplomacy by ‘Locomotion’: Doubts Results of President's Trip,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 17, 1959.

¹⁴¹ “Summit of Hump?,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 1, 1960.

¹⁴² Robert J. Donovan, “President Flies From Hawaii to Washington: Ends Last of Tours Still Believing in Personal Diplomacy,” *Boston Globe*, June 26, 1960.

¹⁴³ Sterling F. Green, “Shun Summits, Kennan Warns,” *Washington Post*, May 27, 1960.

¹⁴⁴ Roscoe Drummond, “No More Trips For Eisenhower,” *Boston Globe*, June 24, 1960.

For Eisenhower personally, what six months ago seemed a boon to his popularity now was a millstone. In the aftermath of the cancelled Japan trip, the president's approval rating dropped seven points. Although 61% of Americans still approved of his performance, the drop was the largest one-month decline for Eisenhower since the 1958 midterm elections. "Most of the loss in popularity can be attributed to voter's dissatisfaction with the recent course of Eisenhower's personal diplomacy," George Gallup stated. Americans had "misgiving about the merits of personal diplomacy efforts," and some told Gallup that Eisenhower would be more popular "if he stayed home more," and that his world tours were "stirring up trouble."¹⁴⁵

But if the Administration wanted to put personal diplomacy—specifically summitry—on the back burner, other world leaders had different thoughts. Toward the latter part of 1960, the biggest names in the non-aligned movement put forth a resolution at the UN urging Eisenhower and Khrushchev to meet. This irritated the president, who said he "could not understand why the rest of the world had not reacted with shock and resentment" at the proposal.¹⁴⁶ Part of what bothered Eisenhower was that these neutral leaders placed Soviet and American actions on equal footing. Also, he had just met with four of these leaders the previous week and they had not "even hinted" at such a proposal. "Their purpose was far from clear," Eisenhower recalled. "At best it seemed totally illogical; at worst it seemed an act of effrontery."¹⁴⁷ He responded by stating that the United States was more than willing to "undertake serious negotiations" with any

¹⁴⁵ George Gallup, "Gallup Poll Eyes Far East: Eisenhower Popularity Drops Off After Japan," *Boston Globe*, July 3, 1960.

¹⁴⁶ When he met with one of the neutral leaders, President Sukarno of Indonesia, Eisenhower had a slightly different tune, telling Sukarno that he "had no quarrel" with the proposal or the efforts of the neutral leaders, he just did not see how anything positive could come of a meeting. In addition to Sukarno, the other neutral leaders who put forth the proposal were Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Josip Tito of Yugoslavia, and Prime Minister Nehru of India. See Memorandum of Conference—October 2, 1960, October 6, 1960, Folder: Macmillan, Harold 8/10/60 to 1/20/61 (5); Box 25b; AWF—International Series; DEL; Memorandum of Conference with the President—October 6, 1960, October 12, 1960, Folder: Indonesia (1); Box 31; AWF—International Series; DEL.

¹⁴⁷ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 586.

nation to resolve global problems. “The importance of these matters is such as to go beyond personal or official relations between any two individuals to impede their solution,” Eisenhower said, “and I have many times personally pledged myself, regardless of every kind of consideration, to meet with anyone at anytime if there is any serious promise of productive results.” But Soviet words and actions made this seem highly unlikely he argued. “I would not wish to participate in a mere gesture which, in present circumstances, might convey a thoroughly misleading and unfortunate impression to the peoples of the world.”¹⁴⁸

Privately, the Administration was doing a postmortem on summitry as a practice. In a report titled “The Future of Summitry,” the State Department examined the pros and cons of formal, big power summits. “Whether summitry is as dead as some think and perhaps more hope,” the report began, “it is still alive as a theme of public discussion and diplomatic maneuver.” Some of the advantages the State Department saw were that summits could settle important issues quickly, could have a positive impact on world opinion, allow for direct communication between leaders, and create a better atmosphere. On the negative side it noted the heavy time demand not only on the president but many other parts of the government, decisions might be rushed, rather than understanding misunderstanding may occur, failure could hurt the president’s prestige, and summits diminished the importance of regular diplomatic channels. In conclusion, the report stated, “It is generally in our interest to avoid summit meetings and pursue our objectives by other means, including negotiations at other levels.” Rather, when the president needed to directly interact with the Soviet leader, when such an occurrence was again “feasible and desirable, it should generally be sought in the guise of informal exchanges—e.g., during visits or attendance at the UN—rather than of summit conferences.” The State Department

¹⁴⁸ “Letter in Reply to a Proposal for a Meeting of the President and Chairman Khrushchev,” October 2, 1960, *PP, Eisenhower: January 1, 1960 to January 20, 1961* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1961), 743, 744.

recognized that a desire to avoid summits would be unpopular in some quarters, thus in order to “sustain minimum political losses,” it recommended “develop[ing] now and immediately begin implementing a political strategy to win as much support” for the U.S. position as possible.¹⁴⁹

Yet, though Eisenhower’s high-profile personal diplomacy was over, the Administration still engaged in the practice. As the president’s time in office came to an end the Administration prepared to send farewell messages to world leaders the president had personally come to know. The State Department worried, however, that if some leaders received messages and others did not, this might create problems. “If, as is likely to happen in some cases, the recipient gives publicity to his message,” one State Department official wrote, “other heads of state or government in the same area, for example Latin America, who have not received messages may well feel disappointed even though the basis of the message is personal acquaintance with the President.” Particularly problematic was that “among the leaders who would not receive messages are some who have been friendly and cooperative with this country.” Thus, it was recommended that in addition to those Eisenhower personally knew, less personal messages should also be sent to other world leaders.¹⁵⁰ In the end, the Administration sent notes to leaders

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum, Walter J. Stoessel, Jr. to A. J. Goodpaster, “Summitry,” September, 19, 1960, with attachment “The Future of Summitry,” Folder: Herter, Christian October 1960 (2); Box 13; AWF—Dulles-Herter Series; DEL. While summitry had gotten a bad name, the Administration still believed Eisenhower’s goodwill trips were a boon for U.S. foreign policy. A report delivered to Eisenhower weeks before leaving office, which reviewed the Administration’s foreign policy over the past eight years, said, “President Eisenhower’s reception during his ‘good will’ trips in the free world has shown how significant these travels have been in the battle for the minds of men. His world-wide reputation as a man of peace has served strikingly to strengthen the cause of peace wherever he has gone. Most of the countries he visited had never before welcomed an American President.” See Memorandum, Christian Herter to Eisenhower, January 6, 1961, with attachment “Summary,” Folder: Herter, Christian A. January 1961; Box 13; AWF—Dulles-Herter Series; DEL.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum, Walter J. Stoessel, Jr. to A. J. Goodpaster, “President’s Farewell Messages to Heads of State, January 6, 1961, Folder: Farewells/Replies: DE/Heads of State A-L (1); AWF—Presidential Transition Series; DEL; Memorandum, Walter J. Stoessel, Jr. through A. J. Goodpaster to John S. D. Eisenhower, “President’s Farewell Message to Heads of State,” January 12, 1961, Folder: Farewells/Replies: DE/Heads of State A-L (1); AWF—Presidential Transition Series; DEL.

the president was personally acquainted with and those he was not. The result was messages to over eighty nations.¹⁵¹

Why would the Administration bother sending farewell messages to so many world leaders? Part of the answer could be found in the fact that Eisenhower was a polite and gracious individual. But beyond that, the messages were a way to further create goodwill and advance U.S. foreign policy, and fits into Eisenhower's overall view of leader-to-leader contacts. When he returned from his final goodwill tour in June 1960, he addressed the nation in what was fundamentally a defense of his personal diplomacy. He explained the origins of his goodwill journeys, spoke of the objectives of his trips, and contrasted them with official summitry. The goodwill tours demonstrated U.S. desire for peace and helped create understanding, but "none of my visits has been planned or carried out solely as a diplomatic mission seeking specific agreements, even though discussions have invariably involved important issues," the president said. Going beyond a specific defense, Eisenhower then described his overall views on leader-to-leader contacts:

I believe that Heads of State and Government can, occasionally, and preferably on an informal basis, profitably meet for conversations on broad problems and principles. They can, of course, also convene to give solemn approval to agreements previously prepared by normal diplomatic methods. But Heads of Government meetings are not effective mechanisms for developing detailed provisions of international compacts, and have never been so considered by this government. On the other hand, the good will aspects of a visit by a Head of Government can frequently bring about favorable results far transcending those of normal diplomatic conferences. They have resulted in the creation of a more friendly atmosphere and mutual confidence between peoples. They have proved effective in bringing closer together nations that respect human dignity and are dedicated to freedom.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ A select group of leaders received signed originals. This special group was limited to seventeen, including the prime ministers of Canada, Britain, India, and Japan, the presidents of Mexico and France, the German chancellor, and the Pope. See Memorandum, John S. D. Eisenhower to Walter J. Stoessel, January 17, 1961, AWF—Presidential Transition Series; DEL.

¹⁵² "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Trip to the Far East," June 27, 1960, *PP: 1960-61*, 532. Eisenhower would also use his memoirs to defend his personal diplomacy. The two volumes are replete with his interactions with foreign leaders and his views on presidential personal diplomacy. In one particular passage he forcefully makes the case for not only his actions, but for future presidents to act similarly. Noting the criticism of

Though critics might scoff, Eisenhower believed these intangibles a powerful product of personal diplomacy and reason enough for future presidents to continue in his footsteps. “So long as the threat of Communist domination may hang over the free World,” he said toward the end of his address, “I believe that any future President will conclude that reciprocal visits by Heads of friendly Governments have great value in promoting free World solidarity.”¹⁵³ This manifesto on personal diplomacy impressed the *Los Angeles Times*, who said that Eisenhower’s “words on this vital aspect of his office might well serve as a guide for future chiefs of state,” and that his “experiences are a major contribution to a fuller understanding of the power and responsibilities of his office and future Presidents would do well to pay them heed.”¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

Toward the end of 1959, as the nation prepared to enter a presidential election year, some speculated on the role personal diplomacy might play. The *Washington Post* noted that if Eisenhower’s planned trip to the Soviet Union reduced tensions at all, Republicans would have “tremendous political talking points...inspiration for the sloganeers could be fabulous.” It went on to say that the majority of presidential contenders, both Republican and Democrat, seemed to

Wilson and Roosevelt, he says, “but even this dreary record does not furnish proof of the unwisdom [sic] of a President’s interjecting himself into international exchanges. Certainly his right to do so cannot be questioned, since by the Constitution he is charged with carrying on our foreign relations. Moreover, postwar criticisms of President’s meetings with other heads of government have not been confined solely to those that have included Communist representatives. Some writers—either woefully ignorant of facts or attempting to use powers of objective analysis, without noticeable success—have flatly proclaimed that nothing can ever be gained by a President’s meeting even with the heads of the most friendly governments or visiting peoples of other lands. I believe the record shows gains for the United States from such meetings. In some I have been a participant.” See Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 504.

¹⁵³ Eisenhower also noted that while he had no further plans to travel, “I assure you. If any unforeseen situation or circumstances arising in the near future should convince me that another journey of mine would still further strengthen the bonds of friendship between us and others, I would not hesitate a second in deciding to make still an additional effort of this kind.” See “Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Trip to the Far East,” June 27, 1960, *PP: 1960-61*, 535, 536.

¹⁵⁴ “A Clear View of Personal Diplomacy,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1960.

be embracing leader-to-leader contacts, as almost all had met with Khrushchev either at home or abroad. “Altogether it looks as if a personal mission to Moscow, or at least some acquaintance with Mr. K, may become as familiar a political badge as the log cabin, red galluses or respect for motherhood,” the paper mused, though this was not a development it championed. And in the buildup to the Paris summit one journalist noted that no matter “whether it is a howling success or a dismal flop or something in-between,” it was going to be a “hot political issue” in the presidential campaign.¹⁵⁵

By the time John F. Kennedy assumed office in January 1961, his Administration appeared to be moving away from presidential personal diplomacy. His Secretary of State Dean Rusk had previously published an article in *Foreign Affairs* arguing against summitry, and the message coming out of the White House in the first days of Kennedy’s tenure was that the new president preferred “quiet diplomacy” through traditional diplomatic channels rather than a summit with Khrushchev.¹⁵⁶ This approach earned praise from the *New York Times*, who derided the idea that “personal diplomacy...or new spectacular ‘summit’ meetings were supposed to have a magic of their own in solving problems.”¹⁵⁷ And the prominent journalist Walter Lippmann penned two articles on the topic of quiet diplomacy in the span of two weeks. “It is undesirable and impossible to go back to Eisenhower’s summitry,” Lippmann argued. “Quiet diplomacy is for the time being the hope of the world.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ “Every Man a Summiteer,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 1959; Robert T. Hartman, “Politics Also a Summit Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1960; James Reston, “The Political Consequences of Following the U-2,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1960.

¹⁵⁶ According to sources in the Administration, Rusk’s promotion of “quiet diplomacy” mere days after inauguration was meant not only to discourage the Soviets from pressing for an early summit, but also to discourage other world leaders from trying to get invitations to visit Kennedy. See Dean Rusk, “The President,” *Foreign Affairs* 38, no. 3 (April 1960): 353-369; W. H. Lawrence, “Kennedy Prefers Quiet Diplomacy To Summit Talks: Rusk Statement Puts Stress on Normal Channels and the Need for Secrecy,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1961.

¹⁵⁷ “Return to Quiet Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1961.

¹⁵⁸ Walter Lippmann, “Quiet Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, January 10, 1961; “Rusk on Quiet Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 1961. Lippmann’s fellow journalist Marquis Childs also approved, writing that the

The *New York Times* wondered, however, how long Kennedy could resist the pull of summitry. Noting that the Eisenhower Administration took a similar position at the onset, “yet in the end they had to yield to public clamor set up in part by Soviet propaganda but also backed by wishful thinkers in the West,” the paper said “it will take firmness and skill for President Kennedy to make his method a success.”¹⁵⁹ Four months later, however, Kennedy found himself sitting face-to-face with Khrushchev in Vienna.

Despite the backlash against personal diplomacy at the end of the Eisenhower era, the practice was here to stay. Through his meetings in the United States, extensive travel, and mediations on personal diplomacy, Eisenhower re-legitimated the practice. Thus, unlike the hostility that developed toward personal diplomacy in the wake of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, which caused a retrenchment of leader-to-leader parleys, Eisenhower’s successors would engage with their foreign counterparts on an increasing large scale. Some, like Kennedy and Richard Nixon, welcomed it. Others like Lyndon Johnson were unenthusiastic. But every future Administration engaged in personal diplomacy to some extent and was driven by similar motives. Whether it was the need to offer psychological succor to a foreign leader, the exigencies of world crises, the potential political benefits, the push by a foreign leader, or the desire to maximize control of U.S. foreign relations, occupants of the White House often turned to personal diplomacy.

“the quiet and private diplomacy” the Administration advocated was “the opposite of spectacular. It will not produce immediate headlines nor will it result in those newsreel and television shots of seemingly happy statesmen clinking their martini glasses. But the method should have a serious try and those who have been most critical of summitry should be the first to welcome it.” See Marquis Childs, “The New Style In U.S. Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 1961.

¹⁵⁹ “Return to Quiet Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1961.

CHAPTER 3

“LARGELY AN EXERCISE IN PSYCHOTHERAPY”: JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE PRESIDENT AS COUNSELOR

When John F. Kennedy traveled to Canada for his first trip abroad as president his briefing book noted, “The essential element in problems involving Canada is psychological.” In addition to forming a “frank working relationship” with the Canadian prime minister, part of the goal was to help ease Canadians’ “inferiority complex” over American economic and military power. To do so, Kennedy was instructed that he needed to project a reassuring, positive image of the United States in order to counteract Canadian perceptions of America as having “a trigger-happy military...not regardful of cultural values...[and] absent-minded and neglectful of the interests of Canada.”¹ While impossible to change these opinions with one visit, the Kennedy Administration thought that a presidential visit could go a long way in starting to dispel them, and for the most part Kennedy succeeded in starting to alter perceptions. He “seem[ed] to have charmed Canadian officialdom and populace alike,” the *Washington Post* reported.²

When the Italian prime minister came to visit Kennedy in 1963, the Administration saw it as an opportunity “to build up the prestige and self-confidence of Italy, thus helping her to overcome her chronic worries about the role of a second rate power in Europe.”³ Advisers told the president that the Italians still felt they were “being left out of everything” and that what they wanted was “a greater sense of participation.” Kennedy was advised to give his views on issues,

¹ “President’s Trip to Ottawa, May 16-18, 1961: Scope Paper,” May 2, 1961, Folder: President’s Trip to Ottawa, 5/61, Briefing Book, Ottawa Trip, 5/16/61-5/18/61; Box 233; National Security Files (hereafter NSF)-Trips and Conferences; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (hereafter JFKL).

² “Harmony With Canada,” *Washington Post*, May 19, 1961.

³ Telegram, G. Frederick Reinhardt to Rusk, January 12, 1963, Folder: Italy, Subjects, Fanfani Visit, 1/16/63-1/17/63, 1/7/63-1/15/63; Box 121a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

as well as ask for the prime minister's opinions.⁴ This focus on the Italian leader's psyche seemed to pay off. The U.S. ambassador in Italy reported that the prime minister "has increased his prestige and this is a source of bitterness to his many enemies... We understand that he was profoundly pleased with [the] reception he got especially from [the] president personally. Long-range benefits may flow to us from this."⁵

The importance of the psychological was not unique to Canada, Italy, or Kennedy. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, American presidents and their advisers saw the importance of tending to the psychological needs of their foreign counterparts. Regardless of the type of nation, whether it was a European ally, a non-aligned leader, or a non-Western ally, presidents sought to soothe the worries and concerns of their counterparts and convince them of American credibility. Foreign leaders might not have seen the president as performing this function, but president and their advisers did.

Using the Kennedy Administration, this chapter examines how the president acted as a counselor for world leaders. Throughout, the benefits and limitations of the president as a counselor become clear. In the thick of the Cold War with allies who were often frightened and frequently in need of affirmation about America's commitment to defend them, Kennedy provides an excellent glimpse into how the president functioned in this role. He had to express sympathy and understanding for allies' economic and security problems, while also dealing with their frequent concerns about their political standing back home. In addition to allies, Kennedy provides insight into how presidents sought to deal with neutral countries. Claiming to be neither in the Soviet or American camp, these non-aligned nations sought a third way, attempting to

⁴ Memorandum, Arthur Schlesinger to Kennedy, January 12, 1963, Folder: Italy, Subjects, Fanfani Visit, 1/16/63-1/17/63, 1/7/63-1/15/63; Box 121a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁵ Telegram, G. Frederick Reinhardt to Rusk, January 21, 1963, Folder: Italy, Subjects, Fanfani Visit, 1/18/63-1/25/63; Box 121a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

have relations with those on both sides of the Cold War divide. Though many often saw these types of nations as leaning toward the Soviets, Kennedy sought to engage them. What we see is a president trying to form a rapport with various non-aligned leaders and convince these often-skeptical individuals of American goodwill toward their country, and convey presidential support for them personally.

But as presidents dealt with emotions and tended to the psychological needs of their counterparts, this was not necessarily based on any personal affinity. While presidents could form friendships with other world leaders and truly care about their well-being, the president as counselor was more a function of the president's institutional role as Chief Diplomat (and Commander in Chief) rather than personal factors. The counselor role, and the personal diplomacy it entailed, was strategic. It was a way to bolster U.S. foreign policy, and what made it work was the power and prestige of the presidency more than any personal attributes of the president.

A New Frontier in Personal Diplomacy

The United States has never had a Gemini President...this is the sign of 'born salesmen' and those who can combine mental ingenuity with practical application...Although he has indicated he intends to remain at the White House during this period [first several months in office], unexpected conditions can force him to travel or there will be even more persons traveling to confer with him than with his predecessor.⁶

This was what the future held for John F. Kennedy according to an astrologian consulted by the *Los Angeles Times*. Whether one believes in psychics or not, the prediction was correct. Kennedy did travel sooner than expected and would have more visitors than his predecessor.

In his short time in office, Kennedy would take personal diplomacy to new heights. As the previous chapter showed, Truman and Eisenhower were, at least at first, less inclined to

⁶ Carroll Righter, "Astrological Outlook: Stars Threaten Castro, Nikita K.," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1961.

follow in Franklin Roosevelt's footsteps. But during the Kennedy years personal diplomacy was a set fixture from the beginning. Ironically, however, he had campaigned on not engaging in that type of diplomacy. Rather, he said most diplomatic activity would be handled through official State Department channels. This did not mean Kennedy was opposed to engaging with foreign counterparts or going to a summit, but—sounding much like Eisenhower—before such meetings took place preparation had to be done through normal diplomacy. “If I am elected,” Kennedy proclaimed in a campaign speech, “I want to be the President known...as one who not only held back the Communist tide but advanced the cause of freedom and rebuilt American prestige...not by tours and conferences abroad, but by vitality and direction at home. My opponent promises, if he is successful, to go to Eastern Europe, to go perhaps to another summit, to go to a series of meetings around the world. If I am successful, I am going to Washington, D.C., and get this country to work.”⁷ Before becoming Kennedy's secretary of state, Dean Rusk, was also against summit diplomacy. In a 1960 article in *Foreign Affairs* he wrote, “Summit diplomacy is to be approached with the wariness with which a prudent physician prescribes a habit-forming drug—a technique to be employed rarely and under the most exceptional circumstances, with rigorous safeguards against its becoming a debilitating or dangerous habit.”⁸

Kennedy and Rusk's words would be cited and used to criticize the Administration's turn toward personal diplomacy. Again similar to the Eisenhower years, Kennedy, as well as most in the press, did not have an issue with the president hosting foreign leaders in the United States. It was trips abroad for negotiations that were problematic. Conjuring images of secret backroom deals by Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt during and after the past two world wars,

⁷ “Excerpts of Remarks by Senator John F. Kennedy, New York Coliseum, New York, NY,” November 5, 1960, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=60436>. This sentiment no doubt played well in the aftermath of Eisenhower's failed Paris summit and cancellation of his visit to Japan earlier in 1960.

⁸ Dean Rusk, “The President,” *Foreign Affairs* 38, no. 3 (April 1960): 361.

critics felt that presidents going abroad not only hurt the nation, but also were improper for a democracy. “At summit conferences,” a *Washington Post* columnist wrote, “there are not treaties to be ratified by the Senate, after proper investigation and debate. Instead there are private conversations among exalted rulers sitting on a summit, as though they were absolute monarchs. The real peril is that these men are, in their own estimates, monarchs who cannot trust their own people and who demand acknowledgment and support for whatever they do although we do not know what they do.”⁹

Despite this view, Kennedy quickly changed his mind about going abroad. Less than five months into office he traveled to Europe for a state visit to France, an encounter with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, and talks with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in London. This was in addition to the state visit he took to Canada shortly before the European journey. By the end of the year he had also been to Venezuela, Colombia, and Bermuda.¹⁰

While many were suspicious of any presidential trip, the focus was obviously on the meeting with Khrushchev. As noted, Kennedy had previously advocated that such high-level meetings should be preceded by normal diplomacy at lower levels. This meeting, however, came with little of that kind of diplomatic groundwork. Some worried that nothing positive could come from the talks. Though allowing the two leaders to get acquainted, risks seemed quite high, one of which was elevated expectations. As rumors of a possible Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting began to circulate, the *Los Angeles Times* argued, “The danger... is that while the President might

⁹ George E. Sokolsky, “The Visitations,” *Washington Post*, June 1, 1961.

¹⁰ Wallace Carroll, “Kennedy Is Easing His Aversion To Foreign Trips and Summitry,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1961. Kennedy’s change of heart led to numerous articles debating the merits of summits. For example, see Robert T. Hartmann, “Are the Summit Trips Worth the Hike?,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1961. At the end of 1961, James Reston of the *New York Times* looked back over Kennedy’s first year in office and determined that it was a “disappointing year of personal diplomacy.” Reston was critical of the practice in general, but he found 1961 to be particularly bad for leader-to-leader contacts, remarking, “It is hard to remember a year in which there were so many splashy meetings of world leaders with so few tangible results.” See James Reston, “Bermuda: What the Airplane Did to Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, December 22, 1961.

regard his trip as only a limited excursion in personal diplomacy, the rest of the world would attach far greater significance to the meeting. Desperate optimism would make of it something it is not, and the advantage would go to our adversary. There would again be the cruel illusion that the mere getting together of the two world leaders is in itself a tangible step toward ending world tension.”¹¹ The conservative *Chicago Daily Tribune* had a different concern. Playing on the perception of Kennedy as young, brash, and full of empty bluster, it argued that he would get into trouble by trying to tough talk Khrushchev. The paper doubted the Soviet leader would take the president seriously. “We do not have any confidence,” it opined, “that Mr. Kennedy, alone and by any presumed force of will and personality, is the man to make Khrushchev think twice...[Kennedy] is insufficient to arouse either dread or caution in the Kremlin.”¹² Perhaps opponents were right to be concerned, as Kennedy’s first venture into the “big leagues of personal diplomacy” did not go well.¹³

Coming shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Khrushchev saw Kennedy as weak, and hoped to bully his younger and less experienced counterpart. The American president was mentally unprepared for the Kremlin leader’s bellicosity and hard line approach. Rather than reduce Cold War tensions the meeting raised them. After the encounter Kennedy said that Khrushchev “‘just beat the hell out of me.’”¹⁴ In response, he initiated a major military buildup. He increased defense spending, increased draft calls, and extended enlistments. He also

¹¹ “The Inflation of Summit Hopes,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1961.

¹² “Where Angels Fear To Tread,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1961. For another critical editorial by the *Tribune*, see “Personal Diplomacy On The Hoof,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 19, 1961.

¹³ Don Shannon, “Kennedy Moves to the Big Leagues,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1961.

¹⁴ As quoted in George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 799.

advocated a program for building fallout shelters. Khrushchev saw these actions as a prelude to war, and told an American visitor that the Soviet Union ““will meet war with war.””¹⁵

Despite this outcome and the criticism of his trip, Kennedy still looked to personal diplomacy. He met frequently with leaders at the White House and engaged in extensive correspondence. In his first year alone he met with foreign leaders in the United States thirty-four separate times. Throughout the course of his Administration, world leaders traveled to the United States seventy-six times to confer with him. With correspondence, the *Washington Post's* Marquis Childs reported on the “warm and often even intimate exchange of letters” between the president and foreign leaders. These missives covered not only specific issues but “range[d] over the whole field of statecraft...in remarkably frank terms.” Childs suggested that Kennedy “was establishing a precedent to be followed by every successive President.”¹⁶ Indeed, while Franklin Roosevelt created the mold of presidential personal diplomacy, and Eisenhower re-legitimized it, the Kennedy years saw the practice solidified in the presidency. There would be no retreat from the practice by his successors, even if they were not fans of the practice.

¹⁵ As quoted in *Ibid.* Kennedy's correspondence with Khrushchev also ran into trouble. In the spring of 1962, Chester Clifton, a military aide in the Kennedy Administration, wrote a memo to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy warning of a brewing problem. At issue was the speed with which the Administration responded to letters from Khrushchev. In contrast to the “ponderous and slow-moving” Eisenhower Administration, Kennedy replied quickly. However, rather than show Kennedy's eagerness for dialogue and the importance he placed on the exchange, Khrushchev saw the opposite. He felt that the quick response showed that the Administration was not taking his letters seriously or giving them careful consideration. Clifton warned Bundy that while Khrushchev's belief was problematic, more troublesome was that this impression might make its way into the press. “Because the President is young—and the press has capitalized on this—he is very vulnerable to the unwarranted accusation that he shoots from the hip,” Clifton wrote. “We have worked very hard to establish the fact that he thinks through these problems deliberately before making a decision. This public image is becoming corroded with the rapidity of the Kennedy-Khrushchev exchanges.” To help remedy this, it was recommended that the Administration slow its response time, issuing a “message received” note in the interim before a fuller response. See Memorandum, C.V. Clifton to McGeorge Bundy, March 6, 1962, Folder: USSR, Khrushchev Correspondence, Vol. II-C, 3/3/62-3/10/62; Box 183; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁶ Marquis Childs, “JFK's 335 Notes In Invisible Ink,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1963. Childs noted that in 1959, at the height of Eisenhower's personal diplomacy, he sent 281 letters to foreign leaders. In 1962, Kennedy sent 335.

“An Almost Pathological Fear”: Kennedy and Adenauer

For America’s Western allies, like for most others, the Cold War caused great anxiety. In a very literal sense, they were on the front lines. It was their countries that would be invaded by the Soviet Union, not the United States. Thus, the American president had to constantly reassure his counterparts. He had to convince Western leaders that the United States would militarily defend Europe from the Soviet Union with both conventional and nuclear forces. For Europeans, the fear was multifold. They worried about the robustness of the U.S. response if the Soviets crossed the Iron Curtain. There was doubt among European leaders that the United States would actually use its nuclear arsenal to attack the Soviet heartland, as an attack on Moscow would inevitably lead to a nuclear strike on American territory. Rather than risk that, the United States would only use its nuclear forces in Europe, thus minimizing the risk of a direct assault on America, but also raising the likelihood that the Continent would become a nuclear wasteland.

Another worry was that the United States might cut a deal with the Soviets that was detrimental to European interests. Europeans feared the United States would go behind their backs, make peace with the Soviets, and leave them to deal with Moscow on their own. At various times different countries had another concern. There was a general feeling that the United States was not doing enough to support them militarily or economically.

European leaders also looked to the American president for more personal reasons. They not only needed and wanted assurances about U.S. commitments to their countries, but also encouragement for their own political positions. Often it was not enough for the president to signal support for a nation, he frequently had to give personal encouragement and backing to a leader. This pattern of offering support politically and personally was done for all of Europe, but in the early 1960s, a troika of leaders stood at the fore of European politics: Britain’s Harold

Macmillan, France's Charles de Gaulle, and West Germany's Konrad Adenauer. Through letters and face-to-face meetings, Kennedy sought to comfort, reassure, cajole, and convince his European counterparts of America's support and good intentions. This was not always easy, and Kennedy had to do it often. The most intractable of the three was de Gaulle, the most frequent visitor Macmillan, and the one needing the most reassurance for both his country and himself was Adenauer. The Kennedy Administration put great time and effort into dealing with these three leaders, yet Adenauer and West Germany were especially important. As Europe became an increasingly tense Cold War battleground, Germany was the frontline. Thus issues of safety and security were of extreme importance, and Adenauer and the citizens of the Federal Republic needed constant affirmation that the United States would not abandon them.

But this was a complicated task. Both in personality and policy there were differences between the two men. Arthur Schlesinger recalled that in the beginning Kennedy had "great respect" for Adenauer, but as the chancellor became more difficult, the president looked forward to the day the senior statesman stepped aside.¹⁷ And while the Kennedy Administration was committed to West Germany and the integrity of West Berlin, it also wanted to explore some type of settlement with the Soviets, hoping it would stabilize Europe.¹⁸ But moves in this direction—as well as moves toward a general détente with Moscow—were viewed with suspicion in Bonn. When the United States and the Soviet Union came to terms over the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963, Adenauer had "vast discontent" and "complained bitterly."¹⁹

When Kennedy and Adenauer first met in April 1961 the psychological and emotional elements were clear. While the German chancellor publicly expressed his eagerness to meet the

¹⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Mariner Books, 2002 [1965]), 403-404.

¹⁸ For the at times testy relationship between the two leaders and their differences in policy, see Frank A. Mayer, *Adenauer and Kennedy: A Study in German-American Relations, 1961-1963* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996).

¹⁹ Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 917, 918.

president and the value of allied unity, reports from Bonn noted that Adenauer “had a grandfatherly mistrust of the new young man in the White House.” Compared to the Eisenhower Administration it was felt that the guarantees Kennedy gave were “pallid” and “half-hearted.”²⁰ From the start it would be a challenge to reassure Adenauer. Adding to the difficulty were serious psychological issues. In a memo to Kennedy from Henry Kissinger, then a part-time White House adviser, the counselor aspects were made clear. According to Kissinger, a nation that had experienced economic catastrophe, fought and lost two wars, and carried out the horrors of the Nazi years was “bound to suffer from deep psychological scars.” He told the president that West Germany was “a candidate for a nervous breakdown. The fear of being alone or sold out is, in some sense, a quest for emotional security. It is also a sign of great lack of self-confidence.”²¹ Thus the psychological aspects were just as important as the political ones.

In preparing for the encounter with the West German leader, the Kennedy Administration strategized how best to soothe him. It noted that the chancellor had “an almost pathological fear” that the United States would sell out Germany to the Soviets and that this was “not the kind of fear which can be exorcised by rational argument. It is always at the back of the Chancellor’s mind.”²² The Administration knew that this was not a worry it could completely alleviate in a short visit, but it believed that talks at the highest levels of government would “have a

²⁰ Marquis Childs, “The Deep Rifts Are Still There,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1961. After the visit, Adenauer said reports he was nervous about JFK were a press creation. But U.S. diplomats did feel that Adenauer would be cautious with Kennedy and hesitant to discuss certain issues during this early visit. As the embassy in Bonn reported a little less than a month before the visit, Adenauer “elaborated on [the] fact [that a] new administration is still in [the] process [of] studying policies. He said he wished his own trip were going to take place two months later than [the] time now fixed. He did not want to have too broad an agenda. He did not know President Kennedy and wished to move carefully.” See Chalmers M. Roberts, “Adenauer a Bit Older – but Still Sharp,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1961; Airgram, Department of State, March 15, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit 4/61, 2/1/61-4/6/61; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

²¹ Memorandum, Kissinger to Kennedy, “Visit of Chancellor Adenauer—Some Psychological Factors,” April 6, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit 4/61, 2/1/61-4/6/61; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

²² “Chancellor Adenauer’s Visit—Washington, April 12-13, 1961: Scope Paper,” n.d., Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer, 4/61, Briefing Book, Parts I-III; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

psychologically reassuring effect.”²³ Part of the hope was that if Kennedy could give Adenauer the impression he was taking him into his confidence, this might build trust.²⁴

In addition to these psychological concerns about security, the trip was also about Adenauer’s political position back home. Coming at the beginning of election season in West Germany, Kennedy’s briefing materials noted that Adenauer saw the visit and the accompanying publicity “as an important element in maintaining the public image of himself in Germany not only as the national leader who has successfully brought his country through the hard days of reconstruction...but as the world statesman who can best preserve close ties with the leadership of the United States.”²⁵ While expected to win, Adenauer did have reason for pause. His opponent was the young, popular mayor of West Berlin Willy Brandt, who had visited Kennedy earlier in the year. The chancellor was concerned by Brandt’s attempt to link himself and his party to the Kennedy Administration. The United States did not want to give the impression of taking sides and did not think that Adenauer would raise the issue, but the Federal Republic’s elections were always in the background.²⁶

By most accounts the two men’s first encounter went well. When they met privately, JFK spoke of the “great respect in which he himself, as well as previous occupants of the White House and all the citizens of the United States” had for Adenauer and West Germany, and

²³ “Chancellor Adenauer’s Visit—Washington, April 12-13, 1961: Scope Paper,” n.d., Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer, 4/61, Briefing Book, Parts I-III; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL. As the briefing materials stated, “While it may not be possible to give the Chancellor satisfaction in every respect, he should leave here with the firm knowledge that this is not because of [the] lack of basic good will for Germany or [the] lack of esteem for him personally. To the extent possible, we should encourage the Chancellor to think that we are sympathetic to the German desire to be treated as a principle ally.”

²⁴ “Adenauer Visit—Washington, April 12-13, 1961: Points For The President To Make,” n.d., Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Trip 4/61, Briefing Book Part VI; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

²⁵ “Chancellor Adenauer’s Visit—Washington, April 12-13, 1961: Scope Paper,” n.d., Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer, 4/61, Briefing Book, Parts I-III; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL

²⁶ For more on the relation between West German elections and the visit, see Memorandum, Dean Rusk to Kennedy, “Visit of Chancellor Adenauer and Mayor Brandt,” February 21, 1961; Memorandum, Kissinger to Kennedy, “Visit of Chancellor Adenauer—Some Psychological Factors,” April 6, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit 4/61, 2/1/61-4/6/61; Box 79; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

“wished to reassure” him that the United States “was prepared and determined to stand by its commitments.”²⁷ Publically the talks were described as productive and the chancellor took away a positive impression of the young president. He even said he was ““deeply moved”” after Kennedy praised him as a historic figure who had been a leader in creating an integrated Europe and strong Atlantic partnership.²⁸ Yet, Kennedy’s job as counselor was not finished. He continually reassured Adenauer about U.S. support throughout his time in office, especially after the Berlin Wall went up in August 1961. “I wish to reiterate to you our intention to maintain our solidarity with the Federal Republic of Germany,” the president wrote the chancellor. “We are prepared to do whatever is necessary to met this challenge, rather than capitulate, or make damaging concessions.”²⁹ But the impact of such bold assurances is difficult to gauge, as Kennedy acted cautiously in dealing with the construction of the Berlin Wall, and actually viewed the barrier as a measure that might reduce tension in the city.³⁰

The two leaders would meet again at the White House in the months following the crisis in Berlin, and the objective for the Kennedy Administration was again more mental than tangible. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk told the president, “We want the Chancellor...to leave Washington reassured that the U.S. Government has a clear sense of national purpose, firm leadership and a capacity not to be deflected from basic goals by particular crises.”³¹ To accomplish this, Rusk told Kennedy that he should “convince,” “ensure,” and “strengthen his

²⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, “NATO and East-West Relations,” April 12, 1961, doc. 98, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961-1963, Vol. XIII: *Western Europe and Canada* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 1994), 272, 273.

²⁸ William J. Jordan, “U.S.-Bonn Talks End With Accord On Major Issues,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1961; James Reston, “Washington: Kennedy Meets the Test of Personal Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1961.

²⁹ Letter, Kennedy to Adenauer, September 4, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Correspondence, 1961; Box 78; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

³⁰ Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy’s War: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72-78.

³¹ Memorandum, Rusk to Kennedy, “Paper on Objectives and Talking Points,” November 18, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit, 11/61, 11/6/61-11/29/61; Box 79a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

[Adenauer's] confidence" in America's support and strategy.³² Coming during a time of great tension in Europe, some viewed Adenauer's visit as representative of the Continent's aspiration for a peaceful solution to the recent turmoil. In Bonn it was reported that the chancellor's meeting with Kennedy was "the most important political mission he had undertaken."³³

While seeking to bolster the West German leader's mind about security issues, it was also recognized that he would use the meeting to enhance his political standing back home. A successful visit required making the chancellor feel that he was still politically relevant, and Adenauer was in need of a confidence boost. Whereas the Kennedy-Adenauer talks in April 1961 took place at the start of election season in West Germany, this meeting took place after the formation of a new government. Though Adenauer and his party had won, forming a new government had been difficult and wounded the chancellor politically. Rusk advised Kennedy that the German leader had "lost both in prestige and power, and he will undoubtedly regard his early visit here as an important factor in recouping his position. Previous visits to the United States have always been used by the Chancellor to strengthen both his personal position and his self-confidence. He periodically requires assurance that his counsel is still sought and heeded. Coming here in the aftermath of [a] cabinet formation, he will be particularly sensitive to signs of continuing or diminished regard."³⁴

Overall, the visit was considered a success. Signs were encouraging from the start when on the second day of the visit, after meeting together for an hour and forty-five minutes with just their interpreters, the Chancellor emerged from the meeting smiling. Throughout the course of

³² Memorandum, "Your Meeting with Chancellor Adenauer," November 10, 1961, November 18, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit, 11/61, 11/6/61-11/29/61; Box 79a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

³³ Larry Rue, "Adenauer's Trip to U.S. Is Important to Germans," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 19, 1961; Waldo Drake, "Europe Pins Hope on Adenauer Trip: Most Western Allies Support Bonn View Over De Gaulle's," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1961.

³⁴ Memorandum, Rusk to Kennedy, "Your Meeting with Chancellor Adenauer," November 10, 1961, November 18, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit, 11/61, 11/6/61-11/29/61; Box 79a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

their discussions Kennedy reassured Adenauer that there would be no recognition of East Germany, that Western forces would remain in Germany, and ties between West Berlin and West Germany would not only continue but be strengthened. JFK sought to convey unity of purpose, and give the sense that the fate of both nations was intertwined. "It was essential," he said, "for the US and Germany to proceed together...In order to succeed we must have confidence in each other and we must remain in very close contact."³⁵

Returning home Adenauer said publicly that his talks with the president were "excellent."³⁶ Privately, he told the president, "When I took my leave of you I said that I have seldom gone away from the White House with such a feeling of satisfaction and assurance as this time...I should like to say again how much support and reassurance I have derived from my talks with you...the earnestness of your determination, Mr. President, have made a deep impression on me."³⁷

When Kennedy and Adenauer met for the third time in November 1962, the president's goals were much the same as before. Adenauer again found himself politically weakened. Now eighty-six, pressure began to mount for him to step aside in the coming year. He hoped his visit would counteract his political rival Willy Brandt's successful visit to Washington weeks earlier. Thus, in addition to conferring about major issues in U.S.-West German relations, Kennedy once

³⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, "Meeting in the Cabinet Room," November 22, 1961, doc. 221, *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. XIV: Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993), 632.

³⁶ United Press International, "Adenauer Hails Results of Talk With Kennedy," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1961. For more of the press coverage on the assurances Kennedy gave Adenauer, see E. W. Kenworthy, "Kennedy Begins Adenauer Talks To Bolster Unity," *New York Times*, November 21, 1961; James Reston, "Kennedy-Adenauer Talks Follow Hard Line," *New York Times*, November 24, 1961.

³⁷ Letter, Adenauer to Kennedy, November 22, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Correspondence, 1961; Box 78; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Adenauer echoed his faith in Kennedy again almost three weeks later, telling the president, "My talks with you...have convinced me that the West will survive the trials that lie ahead." Kennedy reciprocated the chancellor's sentiment, telling Adenauer that their talks were "the best meeting of this sort that I have had since my inauguration." See Letter, Adenauer to Kennedy, December 11, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Correspondence, Miscellaneous and Extra Copies, 10/16/61-12/31/61; Box 78; NSF-Countries; JFKL; Letter, Kennedy to Adenauer, November 22, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Correspondence, 1961; Box 78; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

again needed to make Adenauer feel special. “It would, therefore, be advantageous for us to deal with him in matters of substance as an old and trusted ally,” Kennedy’s briefing materials noted. “Moreover, given his known susceptibilities to pomp, circumstance and flattery, an appropriate level of red-carpet treatment in the realm of protocol and ceremony would probably pay dividends. All this might serve to help allay his reported sensitivity over the cordial and intimate treatment which he believes to have been extended to Willy Brandt.”³⁸

These talks also came in the aftermath of a crisis. Just weeks earlier the world had been on edge as the United States and Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear war over Soviet missiles in Cuba. For Adenauer this conflict took on added importance. Many feared that it was a prelude to a Soviet attack on Berlin. While not solving the Berlin issue or announcing any concrete moves, the November meeting demonstrated U.S. and German leaders working in close consultation and elicited a recommitment to West Berlin by the Administration.

If every Kennedy and Adenauer meeting had emotional and psychological elements, their final encounter in June 1963 took passions to a new level. More than any other Kennedy sojourn abroad, his visit to West Germany and Berlin was all about his role as therapist. This was Kennedy’s first trip to Germany, but also the first time an American president had visited Berlin since Harry Truman was there for the Potsdam Conference in 1945. Kennedy was also the first leader of a NATO country to visit Berlin. The briefing material stated that the trip “can expect to attract more public attention and interest than any previous visit by a foreign statesman to modern Germany.” Of the seven broad objectives listed, only the last one was related to

³⁸ “Chancellor Adenauer’s Visit to Washington—November 7-9, 1962: Scope Paper,” October 31, 1962, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit, 11/62, 10/12/62-2/5/63; Box 79a; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Adenauer’s irritation over Brandt’s visit was evident back in October during a conversation with the American ambassador in Bonn. It was reported that the chancellor thought “Brandt has been talking too much about his conversation with the president, and indicated he himself was always discreet about such matters.” See Telegram, Department of State, Walter Dowling to Rusk, October 12, 1961, Folder: Germany, Subjects, Adenauer Visit, 11/62, 10/12/62-2/5/63; Box 79a; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

discussion of world problems. The other six were all connected to the president's role as counselor, seeking to reassure West Germans and Berliners of American support, as well as offer praise for Adenauer. For example, the first objective was, "to furnish tangible evidence of American good will toward the German people and of our recognition of the increasing importance of the Federal Republic as one of our major allies." The third stated the visit would "provide graphic emphasis of the continuing American presence in and responsibility for Europe," and the fifth goal was "to accord appropriate recognition and tribute to Chancellor Adenauer, in the twilight of his long tenure as Chancellor, for his invaluable and lasting contributions to the causes of democracy and freedom."³⁹ The trip, then, was overwhelmingly about public displays. The psychological and emotional impact for Germany and its leaders came from Kennedy's presence and public remarks.⁴⁰ The visit was a symbolic reminder to the people of West Germany and Berlin—as well as the rest of Europe—of America's commitment to come to the defense of the Continent if the Soviets attacked.

While the trip to West Germany was not controversial, the decision to visit Berlin was hotly contested.⁴¹ The campaign for a presidential stop in the divided city began months earlier.

³⁹ "President's European Trip, June 1963—Scope: Germany," June 14, 1963, Folder: President's Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Salinger Briefing Book [Folder 1 of 4]; Box 239; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

⁴⁰ Even when discussing substantive issues like the Multilateral Force (MLF), which would have created a nuclear deterrent under NATO command, emotions were in the background. For example, though both Kennedy and Adenauer supported the idea, the United States was having trouble getting other European allies to go along with the proposal. This displeased Adenauer who wanted more action on the issue. In a memo to the president, Bundy made clear that the details of the MLF did not really matter. Adenauer did not feel very strongly about the plan and probably did not understand many of the specifics. Rather, the key to discussing it with him was "his suspicion. If he trusts us, he will do nearly anything. This means the surrounding music of the meeting is as important as the discussion of the MLF." Thus Bundy recommended Kennedy offer a glowing toast to Adenauer and reassure him of both America's vigilance against the Soviet Union and resolve to use nuclear weapons if needed. "He is more interested in your state of mind and will," Bundy noted. "To him the MLF is a means of ensuring American presence, and his willingness to see its establishment deferred will be conditioned most heavily by his sense of confidence in the U.S. and the U.S. President." See Memorandum, Bundy to Kennedy, "The MLF and Adenauer," June 20, 1963, Folder: President's Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 6/11/63-7/12/63, [Folder 1 of 4]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

⁴¹ The trip to the Federal Republic was officially called an "informal working visit." However, some members of the Kennedy Administration thought it should have been an official state visit. The reasoning, like so many elements of the trip, had to do with symbolism and the psychological benefits that could be gained from such a designation. In a

In February, mayor of West Berlin Willy Brandt raised the issue of a presidential visit. He said a visit “would have [the] positive effect of underscoring Western solidarity.” Brandt, however, added that Berliners did not necessarily need the visit. “It could not now be claimed that Berlin morale urgently needed [a] boost such as [the] president’s visit would certainly provide,” the mayor noted, yet his citizens “would be greatly encouraged...and appreciative of, this personal manifestation of [the] president’s support for their cause.” He also argued that though West Berliners did not need psychological uplifting, they would find it hard to understand why Kennedy would not come, especially since Khrushchev had been to East Berlin.⁴²

Despite the mayor’s push, director of the U.S. Information Agency Edward Murrow opposed the idea. Like Brandt he made a psychological argument, but he reached a different conclusion. As the mayor noted, West Berliners did not need a morale boost. Thus, Murrow argued, the United States should save a presidential visit for when it was really needed. Furthermore, if a visit occurred, Murrow believed that the Soviet Union would misinterpret it. It would be seen as an admission that spirits in West Berlin were lagging and needed to be raised.⁴³ In a conflict that was so much about perception, why give the Soviets one of weakness?

Some in the State Department were also concerned that a Kennedy visit would antagonize the Soviets. With the international situation relatively calm, State worried that a visit would upset the precarious tranquility. The West German press, however, rejected that

memo to Bundy, director of the U.S. Information Agency Edward Murrow wrote that no American president had made a state visit to postwar Germany and that this would be a fitting act for the end of Adenauer’s political life. Additionally, he said the West Germans were “motivated by an almost compulsive desire to be ‘accepted’ within the European and Atlantic Communities.” A state visit, Murrow argued, would “make it quite clear to the West Germans that we are ready to treat them and to encourage other Western European nations to treat them as first-class allies.” See Memorandum, Murrow to Bundy, February 26, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

⁴² Telegram, Department of State, Allan Lightner to Rusk, February 5, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

⁴³ Memorandum, Murrow to Bundy, “Proposed Berlin Visit by the President,” February 13, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

reasoning, and by March it became clear that Kennedy had to go to Berlin. If he did not, the criticism would be unrelenting, or as one assistant said, “there will be no end of howling.”⁴⁴

Thus, with the decision made, the Administration focused on what it hoped to achieve. Similar to the objectives for the trip at large, the goals were mostly symbolic and psychological. Among them were “to demonstrate anew and unmistakably” U.S. support for West Berlin and to “reassure” Berlin leaders who were still worried about the city’s long-term viability.

Additionally, while the visit showed “in impressive and personalized form” America’s closeness to Berlin, it would also “produce an advantageous political impression internationally and to give Berliners themselves [a] helpful...psychological lift.”⁴⁵

When the trip was over, the Administration was pleased with the results.⁴⁶ As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, Kennedy “came, he saw and—judging by the response to his presence

⁴⁴ Memorandum, L. J. Legere to Carl Kaysen, “Berlin Visit During President’s European Trip,” March 20, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL. The Administration had a list of eleven reasons why the president should visit Berlin. The most compelling, according to the list, was that it would show the solidarity of the West. Other reasons listed were a “tremendous boost to morale” in not only both parts of Berlin but also West and East Germany; Kennedy would be assured a grand welcome in the city; since Khrushchev had visited East Berlin many times but no U.S. president had visited West Berlin it seemed that the Soviets cared more about the city than the Americans; and since de Gaulle did not visit Berlin on his trip to Germany, this gave Kennedy an “opportunity for a little one-upmanship.” See “Reasons Why President Should Visit Berlin,” n.d., Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL

⁴⁵ Telegram, Department of State, Berlin to Secretary of State, May 1, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 1/17/63-6/10/63, [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL

⁴⁶ The trip also included stops in Ireland, Britain, and Italy. In the weeks leading up to it, the trip became increasingly criticized. Detractors argued that Kennedy should stay home and deal with worsening racial tensions consuming the country. Others made the case that the trip would be useless. Of the four countries Kennedy planned to visit only one had a stable government. The others all had political situations not ideal for a presidential visit. Britain was recovering from a political scandal, Italy had a caretaker government, and as noted, Adenauer was in the twilight of his political career. However, talks of scuttling the trip caused an adverse reaction. According to an editorial in an influential German paper, “cancellation of Kennedy’s visit would prove both a shock and a heavy disappointment. A disappointment for the Federal Government, but also for German public opinion and population, not least the population of Berlin. One cannot at all realize that Washington would seriously consider a cancellation.” See, Telegram, Department of State, Brussels to Secretary of State, “President’s Trip to Europe,” June 11, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 6/11/63-7/12/63, [Folder 1 of 4]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL. See also “Recent Public Comment on President Kennedy’s European Trip,” June 14, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, General [Folder 2 of 4]; Box 239; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL; Memorandum, James L. Greenfield to Carly Kaysen, “News & Comments of June 23 and 24 Related to President’s Trip,” June 24, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 6/11/63-7/12/63, [Folder 1 of 4]; Box 241; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL

and his words—he conquered.”⁴⁷ From the millions who came out to see him, to the words he spoke, the excitement throughout the trip was palpable. “The emotional climax came Wednesday,” the *New York Times* reported, “when the President flew to Berlin. Still another million, at least screamed ‘Ken-ned-DEE’ in the streets. One placard held up for him to read said: ‘John. You our best friend.’ The TV cameras were on Mr. Kennedy for most of the eight hours he was in the city, and especially at the dramatic moments when he gazed in silence over The Wall at the Brandenburg Gate.”⁴⁸

While the press reaction was glowing, the results on the populace of West Germany and Berlin were even better. Kennedy more than succeeded in his counselor role. According to a public opinion poll conducted for Brandt’s office, 58% of West Berliners went out to see the president. When asked to rate Kennedy’s “effort” and “reliability” regarding Berlin, 63% gave him an A, and 29% a B. This was considered a significant feat because, according to one pollster, “as school-masters Berliners tend to be slow with praise...No foreign or West German leader has ever done this well in West Berlin.” The pollster went on to say that “the prospect and especially the experience of having President Kennedy visit Berlin convinced and reassured people who formerly were skeptical.”⁴⁹ An added bonus was that Kennedy’s visit forced Khrushchev to make an impromptu trip to East Berlin in order to bolster morale for his side. Less

⁴⁷ “The Presidency: Strong Words, Warm Response,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1963. Kennedy’s European tour was so successful that the Administration started to plan a similar trip to the Far East. Though never occurring because of Kennedy’s assassination, the objectives were the same as in Europe: reassure Asian leaders and their citizens. “The President’s European trip,” a State department official wrote, “has shown the unifying effect of his [JFK] personality on the Atlantic nations in a period of stress. A similar gesture would have a far greater impact on our Pacific flank, where one-third of the world’s population lives and where the Communist threat looms far larger.” See Memorandum, Roger Hilsman to Michael V. Forrestal, “Presidential Visit to the Far East,” July 8, 1963, Folder: President’s Proposed Far East Trip, 7/63-11/63; Box 242; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JKFL.

⁴⁸ “Cheers & Issues: President on Tour,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1961.

⁴⁹ Harold Hurwitz, *Berlin Briefing*, July 6, 1963, Folder: President’s Trip, Europe, 6/63-7/63, Germany, 6/11/63-7/12/63, [Folder 3 of 4]; Box 241a; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL. For an excellent account of Kennedy’s visit to Berlin and its theatrical elements, see Andreas Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

than two days after Kennedy left the Soviet leader arrived, but his reception was paltry by comparison. Khrushchev failed to match Kennedy as a counselor.⁵⁰

“Jack really got irritated with the Germans,” Jackie Kennedy recalled. No matter what he did to reassure Adenauer it never seemed enough. ““What do you have to do to show the Germans that you care?”” he lamented. Despite his frustration, however, Kennedy continued to try to soothe the West German leader—and not because he was particularly fond of the chancellor. JFK referred to Adenauer as a “bitter old man” who “he got awfully fed up with.” But as president, Kennedy saw it as his job not only to handle West Germany’s military needs, but also its psychological ones. It was thankless work, but deemed necessary to promote U.S. national security.⁵¹

“Major Policy Gambit”: Negotiating a Non-Aligned Nationalist

For American allies outside of Europe, the president’s counselor role operated similarly as it did in Europe. Kennedy, however, also faced non-aligned or neutral countries. These nations tried to have relations with both Western and Eastern camps. During the Eisenhower years neutrality was greatly frowned upon. Thus it is not a surprise that the Eisenhower Administration’s relations with non-aligned countries were often contentious. Kennedy came into office with a different mindset. He was not reflexively opposed to neutrality nor did he have a visceral dislike of it. Instead, he sought to engage these countries. The United States might not have overly friendly relations with them, but they did not need to be hostile.

⁵⁰ “The Presidency: Strong Words, Warm Response,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1963. While millions greeted Kennedy, it was reported that only about 10,000 were present for a speech by Khrushchev. And crowds lining the street were “skimpy” and their praise for the Soviet leader “feeble.”

⁵¹ Jacqueline Kennedy, *Historic Conversations On Life With John F. Kennedy, interviews with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. 1964* (New York: Hyperion, 2011), 220, 233.

Kennedy sought to build relationships with most of the leading non-aligned nationalist of the day, including Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian President Sukarno, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser was doubly important as not only a leader in the non-aligned movement, but also the key figure in the Arab world. He provides an excellent example of how the Kennedy Administration sought to play the role of counselor with a non-ally.⁵²

Though improving slightly toward the end of the Eisenhower years, Nasser's relationship with the United States in the 1950s was contentious. Like with other nationalist leaders, the Eisenhower Administration was never comfortable with his policies. It found his espoused neutralism not only repugnant, but also false. Rather than non-aligned, Eisenhower saw Egypt in the Soviet bloc.⁵³ Kennedy wanted to set this past aside and have a productive relationship. "If we can learn from the lessons of the past," he said during a campaign speech, "if we can refrain from pressing our case so hard that the Arabs feel their neutrality and nationalism are threatened, the Middle East can become an area of strength and hope."⁵⁴ His Administration would cooperate where it could and not let single issues destroy a basis for collaboration. For example, on one of the biggest wedge issues, the Israeli-Arab conflict, the two leaders agreed to put it in the "icebox."⁵⁵

⁵² For Kennedy's attempts at personal diplomacy with other African leaders, see Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For Nasser in particular see, pp. 122-140.

⁵³ For the Eisenhower Administration's relationship with Nasser, see Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). During the last years of the Eisenhower Administration Egypt was formally called the United Arab Republic (UAR). Formed in 1958, it consisted of Egypt and Syria. In 1961 Syria withdrew, but Egypt would continue to be formally called the United Arab Republic until 1971. Here I use the terms Egypt and UAR interchangeably.

⁵⁴ John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace* (New York: Harper, 1960), 108.

⁵⁵ Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2005), 44.

Kennedy's counselor attempts with Nasser consisted of three elements. First, the president tried to convince the Egyptian leader of American goodwill. He sought to convey that the Administration was not hostile to Nasser personally, Egypt, or the Arab world at large. Second, Kennedy tried to lessen the impression that the United States was stringently pro-Israel. Rather, he wanted to portray the Administration as evenhanded. Third, he hoped to use his relationship with Nasser to moderate the Egyptian leader's behavior, which hopefully would lead Egypt to adopt more pro-Western policies.

Kennedy's personal engagement began early. In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961, a State Department official recommended a letter to Nasser on Cuba. "Like other Arabs," the official wrote, "Nasser values personal contact in diplomacy...Accordingly, we believe a patient and dignified letter from you to Nasser...would be useful even though no significant modification" of Egypt's policies were likely.⁵⁶ We see this again regarding U.S. policy toward Israel. To help calm Nasser and other Arab leaders' fears about the new Administration's direction in the Middle East, it was suggested that Kennedy send letters "to make clear the desire of this administrations to deal with Middle Eastern matters on as fair and friendly basis as possible...Arab attitudes toward us at the United Nations and elsewhere have not been helpful and it would be hoped that these letters would reassure Arab leaders of this administration's earnest desire to maintain and enhance friendly and fruitful relations between their countries and ours."⁵⁷ The long-term impact these early letters on Cuba and the Middle East

⁵⁶ Memorandum, Chester Bowles to Kennedy, "Suggested Letter to President Nasser on Cuba," April 27, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Nasser Correspondence, 1/20/61-4/30/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁵⁷ Memorandum, Bowles to Kennedy, "Proposed Message to Arab Leaders," May 6, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 5/61-7/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL. For the message sent to Nasser see, Telegram, Department of State, Kennedy to Nasser, May 11, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 5/61-7/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Though not mentioned in the text of the message, these letters were intended to help offset any negative reaction to the visit of Israeli premier David Ben-Gurion to the United States. In addition to Nasser, Kennedy sent letters to the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. According to a *New York Times* reporter, "to Arab leaders they [the letters] read like a major

had is debatable, but in his response Nasser appeared receptive, noting his “appreciation of the spirit” in which JFK wrote, and he saw it as a “happy sign.”⁵⁸ The State Department saw this as an encouraging signal that Nasser wanted better relations. It hoped that this “friendly correspondence which we consider desirable” would continue.⁵⁹

In August, Nasser responded to Kennedy’s message on the Middle East. “I have tried,” the Egyptian leader wrote, “to open my heart to you.”⁶⁰ Though it was “lengthy and rambling” and had standard Arab criticism of Israel and praise for the Soviet Union, the State Department believed that the letter was overall “extraordinarily warm in tone, mild in language, forthcoming, and hopeful...It is quite clear that President Nasser wants to have friendly and continuing contacts with President Kennedy.”⁶¹

This was something Kennedy desired as well, and the Administration sought to bring it about. One way was through personal communication. Another was through a face-to-face meeting. Within six months of taking office, the Administration discussed the possibility of a Nasser visit. Noting that he was a “key Arab leader,” presidential adviser and State Department official Chester Bowles argued that a visit might appeal to Nasser’s pride, counteract Soviet

statement of United States policy. Mr. Kennedy was in effect telling the Arab leaders that their belief that Democratic administrations are necessarily anti-Arab and pro-Israeli is baseless,” and were “meant to reassure the Arab leaders that the meeting between the President and Israeli Premier did not alter the United States’ relations with Arab states.” It was reported that Kennedy’s support of repatriation and compensation for Palestinians “impressed” these Arab leaders. See Dana Adams Schmidt, “Kennedy Sought to Assure Arabs: Sent Goodwill Letters to 5 Chiefs of State Before Visit by Ben-Gurion,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1961; Dana Adams Schmidt, “U.S. Said to Study Visit By Nasser: Mideast Sees Possibility as Sequel to Kennedy Notes,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1961; “Kennedy Support Is Seen By Arabs,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1961.

⁵⁸ Letter, Nasser to Kennedy, May 18, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 5/61-7/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁵⁹ Memorandum, L. D. Battle to McGeorge Bundy, “President Nasser’s Reply to the President’s May 3 Letter on Cuba,” May 24, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 5/61-7/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL

⁶⁰ Letter, Nasser to Kennedy, August 22, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 8/61-12/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁶¹ Memorandum, L. D. Battle to McGeorge Bundy, “President Nasser’s Reply to the President Kennedy’s Letter of May 11, 1961,” August 30, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 8/61-12/61; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

influence on him, and moderate his policies.⁶² As 1961 proceeded, however, Nasser did not receive an invitation. In September the American ambassador to the UAR, while noting that the timing still was not right for a visit, warned that an “invitation to Nasser cannot be much longer deferred without causing positive damage to our relations.”⁶³

As 1962 began, the Administration debated the pros and cons of a visit. In a memo to Kennedy, State Department official George Ball described the advantages. Psychological aspects were key to his analysis. He stated one of the visit’s goals would be the “amelioration of President Nasser’s sense of ostracism, arising from the fact that he of all neutralist leaders has never been invited to the United States although president of an important country for nearly eight years and its leader for nearly ten.” Ball went on to say that hopefully “an atmosphere of greater confidence” between the two countries would develop, the furthering of “the personal relationship between you [JFK] and President Nasser for future exploitation” would occur, a direct exchange of views would take place, and Nasser would be provided with “firsthand knowledge of our power, our political, economic and social systems and our national character.”⁶⁴ Robert Komer, a National Security Council staff member, also emphasized Nasser’s emotions. Coming after Syria’s departure from the UAR, he thought that a visit would be particularly useful. Nasser was in a “state of nerves,” and a visit would hopefully calm him and

⁶² Memorandum, Bowles to Kennedy, “Consideration Affecting a Possible Official Visit Here by President Nasser,” May 16, 1961, doc. 48, *FRUS 1961-1963: Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1994), 114. C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* echoed this internal assessment: “There is little doubt that should Nasser be invited to the U.S.A. someday...[his] sense of dignity would be complimented. Even if little of material value were to come from such a trip, the emotional climate might be improved.” See C. L. Sulzberger, “Nasser: III—Man Behind the Mask,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1961.

⁶³ Telegram, Department of State, John Badeau to Rusk, September 20, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Badeau, ambassador to the UAR, was a strong supporter of a visit, writing back to Washington that “no miracles should be expected but strong effort [to] increase understanding and urge UAR moderation [is] essential and can most effectively be made by President Kennedy in personal contact with Nasser.” See Telegram, Department of State, Badeau to Rusk, February 22, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁶⁴ Memorandum, George Ball to Kennedy, “Advantages to be Gained from a State Visit by President Nasser in April,” January 31, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

assure him of American goodwill. “It would be tragic,” Komer wrote, “if Nasser’s economic straits and fear that [the] West [is] out to take advantage of his weakened position led him both to lash out blindly...and to turn in desperation even more to [the] USSR.”⁶⁵

Despite all the discussion, the proposed Nasser visit never occurred. But some in the Administration kept the hope alive. Late into 1962, NSC officials were still thinking about a visit in order to “give Nasser the JFK treatment,” but it was too difficult politically.⁶⁶ The Administration could never be sure they would reap substantial benefits to outweigh the risks.⁶⁷ As much as Kennedy wanted to have a good personal relationship with Nasser, dealing with a non-aligned, nationalist leader presented challenges that sometimes could not be overcome.

Nevertheless, Kennedy still engaged Nasser, playing the role of counselor through correspondence. As debates occurred within the Administration, the president continued to build a relationship. On January 24, 1962, he wrote to Nasser, “In the past year I have found that a

⁶⁵ Memorandum, Robert Komer to Bundy, February 1, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Komer to Bundy and Carl Kaysen. November 1, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 11/62-12/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Komer was still advocating for a Nasser visit in January 1963 arguing, “The long-term benefit from giving Nasser the Kennedy treatment would far outweigh the short-term flak it would create.” See Komer to Bundy, January 2, 1963, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁶⁷ Within the Administration there were some who were not quite sold on a visit. Secretary of State Dean Rusk did not think Nasser’s behavior deserved a visit and worried about the domestic backlash. Another adviser, Meyer Feldman, worried about the reaction of the Jewish community in the United States. He advised that if a visit took place it had to occur with as little pomp and ceremony as possible. And to help ward off adverse domestic reactions a visit had to produce some tangible achievement. “It would look like a domestic defeat for the President,” he argued, “to have received a neutralist with a record of hostility without being able to demonstrate that we got something out of doing so.” National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy also wanted to wait on a visit. He too feared a domestic backlash from the American Jewish community, but he also felt that the Administration had given Nasser enough goodies at that time. Having recently pledged a new aid package to the UAR, Bundy believed the United States should wait on a visit. “I question,” he stated, “whether we should throw away so quickly one of our hole cards which may come in handy later.” Bundy thought the Administration should wait for Nasser to reciprocate its gestures of goodwill. By postponing an invitation and “keep[ing] Nasser dangling a bit longer about a visit,” the Egyptian leader might be on his best behavior. Reiterating again how improvement in U.S.-Egyptian relations had mostly been a U.S. endeavor, he concluded that “the President would probably want to see a little more of the color of Nasser’s money before he sat down to play face-to-face poker with him.” See Memorandum, Rusk to Kennedy, “Visit by Nasser,” March 2, 1962, doc. 205, *FRUS: XVII*, 505-506; Memorandum For the Record, “Mike Feldman’s Views on Nasser Visit,” December 20, 1961, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF; JFKL; Bundy to Bowles, May 12, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

major problem in understanding more clearly the conviction and preoccupation of our friends abroad had been the lack of close enough contact with other chiefs of state.” To help remedy this with the UAR, Kennedy informed Nasser he was dispatching Chester Bowles as his special representative. Ostensibly the trip was to get a sense of conditions in Egypt, but the real reason was for Bowles to see Nasser. Bowles was to be a proxy. “I hope that you would speak as frankly to him as you would to me,” the president told Nasser.⁶⁸

Throughout 1962 Kennedy continued to work on the Egyptian leader. That summer the president’s effort seemed to pay off. In June, Nasser wrote a letter that one State Department official described as “a significant step forward in US-UAR relations.”⁶⁹ The message showed the Egyptian president seeking understanding with the Administration, and some at State thought it signaled he would take a moderate course in world affairs: “Nasser is obviously grateful for the help we promised...[and] he appears to agree implicitly to take a more statesmanlike stand on world issues,” in part because he “respects the role we are playing in the world and does not want to be far out of step with it.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Letter, Kennedy to Nasser, January 24, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 1/62-5/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁶⁹ Memorandum, William H. Brubeck to Bundy, “Analysis of President’s Nasser’s Letter of June 22, 1962 to President Kennedy,” June 25, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 6/62-7/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁷⁰ Memorandum, Harold H. Saunders to Bundy, “Nasser Letter,” June 23, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 6/62-7/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFK; Memorandum, Brubeck to Bundy, “Analysis of President’s Nasser’s Letter of June 22, 1962 to President Kennedy,” June 25, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 6/62-7/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL. The most encouraging part of the letter was Nasser’s discussion of the need for “mutual understanding” and his belief that though the two nations will disagree on certain issues, those differences should be kept confined so as to not adversely affect the relationship as a whole. “I have always felt that a mutual understanding of each other’s problems, circumstances and political motives,” Nasser wrote, “is the best factor that can govern our relations and the only right key to all possibilities of cooperation between our two countries.” See Letter, Nasser to Kennedy, June 21, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 6/62-7/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

While Komer saw this as “a score on relations with the key guy in [the] Arab world,” and wanted to “keep nurturing it,” this was not without risk.⁷¹ Attempting to have a personal relationship with Nasser was domestically perilous, but it also threatened to disrupt American relations with other nations. As Kennedy played the role of counselor to Nasser, he also had to be counselor for other leaders concerned about U.S. overtures to Egypt. “Has the United States become a patsy in helping...Nasser to help himself to the rest of the Middle East?” one reporter asked. While the Administration said no, other Middle East nations were not so sure.⁷²

Saudi Arabia had major concerns about the new direction in relations. At its core, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were rivals in competition for preeminence in the Arab world. Both nations represented alternative models: a revolutionary nationalist republic versus a reactionary monarchy. The United States was in a difficult position. It had longer, closer ties to Saudi Arabia, yet was trying to woo Nasser. Adding to the Administration’s difficulties was a proxy war waged between the UAR and Saudi Arabia in Yemen that began in 1962 (with Nasser going so far as to send an “expeditionary force” to fight), which further put the United States in the middle.⁷³

When Kennedy met with King Saud in February 1962, a key goal was to reassure him that the United States still valued Saudi Arabia as an ally. At the top of the agenda was Nasser and his impact on American-Saudi relations. In light of recent economic aid to Egypt, the

⁷¹ Komer to Bundy, July 12, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 6/62-7/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁷² Warren Unna, “Is the U.S. Nasser’s Patsy?,” *Washington Post*, March 17, 1963. On the question of America being Nasser’s pawn, Unna reported, “the Israelis until a few months back were saying yes; the Jordanians maybe; and the Saudi Arabians say definitely.”

⁷³ A year into the Kennedy Administration, Egyptian-Saudi relations were described in the press as “near the breaking point.” By 1963, as the two nations’ proxy war in Yemen intensified there was fear that Nasser would attack Saudi Arabia directly. See Jay Walz, “Cairo-Saudi Split Seems Imminent: Egyptian Paper Says King in U.S., Plots Attacks,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1962; Joseph Alsop, “Nasser Attack on Saudi Arabia Feared; U.S. Sea Move Pondered,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1963. For Egypt’s fraught relations with other Arab states, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Administration noted “the King may be fearful that the U.S. is dropping its support for him in favor of Nasser.”⁷⁴ In many ways Saud’s fears were not far off, as the president wanted to be seen as identifying more with Nasser than the reactionary king.⁷⁵ But Kennedy nevertheless had to alleviate these worries and express America’s continued friendship and explain the benefits of U.S. engagement with Nasser.

Despite attempts to assuage Saudi fears, when the president met with Crown Prince Faisal in October, Nasser was still very much on the Saudis’ minds. Informed how Faisal, like King Saud, “hates and fears” Nasser, Kennedy was advised to essentially do the same thing he did when he met with the King: make clear American support and attempt to explain the Administration’s Nasser policy. But this was made more difficult by the upheaval in Yemen, right on the Saudi border. The Nasser inspired revolt “brought to a boil all Saudi fears of Nasserism (the house of Saud well knows it might be next).”⁷⁶ Faisal and the rest of Saudi leadership wanted U.S. support for their efforts in Yemen, however, with a stated policy of non-involvement, the Administration knew it would have little success calming the Saudis on this front. Instead, Kennedy was counseled to focus on U.S-Saudi relations and all the ways the Administration had aided the kingdom recently. The president was told to clearly communicate to Faisal the Administration’s “firm backing of the House of Saud,” and that it might be a good idea to “give Faisal a personal, oral message to take back to Saud, i.e. let there be no doubt that

⁷⁴ “UAR-Saudi Relations: Discussion,” n.d., Folder: Saudi Arabia, Subjects, King Saud, Briefing Book; Box 157a; NSF-Countries; JKFL. See also “Talking Outline for Subject King Saud May Raise,” n.d., Folder: Saudi Arabia, Subjects, King Saud, Briefing Book; Box 157a; NSF-Countries; JKFL.

⁷⁵ Kennedy initially tried to avoid meeting with Saud. When the king came to Boston for medical treatment JFK made it a point to avoid going to his home state so he would not have to see the monarch. It was only after much pressure from the State Department—and the fact that the king had relocated to within a 15 minute drive of the president’s house in Palm Beach—that JFK met with Saud. See Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, 133-134.

⁷⁶ Memorandum, Komer to Kennedy, October 4, 1962, Folder: Saudi Arabia, Subjects Faysal Briefing Book, 10/3/62-10/5/62; Box 158; NSF-Countries; JKFL.

we continue to stand by our friends.”⁷⁷ Kennedy reinforced this with a letter weeks after the visit, telling Faisal, “You may be assured of full United States support for the maintenance of Saudi Arabia’s integrity.”⁷⁸ With tensions over Yemen rising, the Administration made this letter public, thus highlighting for the world U.S. support for the kingdom.

Throughout the process of navigating domestic pressures, the fears of other nations, and Nasser himself, Kennedy’s attempt to have better relations with the Egyptian leader appeared to go relatively well. Well enough that in late 1962 one NSC staffer wrote, “All things considered, our Nasser experiment has run along better than expected.”⁷⁹ In the last year of Kennedy’s life he was still communicating with the Egyptian president, trying to maintain close contact and understanding. For example, as the situation in Yemen grew worse, threatening to harm relations between the United States and UAR, Kennedy wrote Nasser hoping to “clear the air between” them. “When you and I embarked upon what I think we both regarded as a mutually promising relationship,” Kennedy wrote, “we agreed that it must be on a basis of utmost candor...I fear that this affair [Yemen] has given rise to misunderstandings, which, unless we personally speak frankly to each other, may prejudice our growing rapport.”⁸⁰ That rapport was not damaged in this instance, as Nasser’s response was candid and viewed positively by the State Department. While declaring that Egypt had the right to act in Yemen however it saw fit, Nasser also assured that his country would act along the lines proposed by Kennedy a few months earlier, and that he did not plan to invade Saudi Arabia. He also expressed appreciation for the president’s efforts. In the State Department’s analysis, the Egyptian leader’s reply showed “by its length and cordiality

⁷⁷ Memorandum, Komer to Kennedy, October 4, 1962, Folder: Saudi Arabia, Subjects Faysal Briefing Book, 10/3/62-10/5/62; Box 158; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁷⁸ Carroll Kilpatrick, “Kennedy Emphasizes Support of Saudi Arabia,” *Washington Post*, January 9, 1963.

⁷⁹ Memorandum, Komer to McGeorge Bundy and Carly Kaysen, November 1, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 11/62-12/62; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁸⁰ Letter, Kennedy to Nasser, January 18, 1963, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 1/1/63-3/12/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

that Nasser values his relations with the United States and seeks to maintain the personal rapport developed through correspondence with President Kennedy.”⁸¹

Working as a counselor for a neutral nationalist like Nasser was not an easy task. As the NSC noted, closer ties with Nasser was a “major policy gambit” from the start, and there were concerns that “the approach wouldn’t add up to anything...and be regarded as a New Frontier failure.”⁸² But though issues flared up during Kennedy’s time in office, the Middle East was an area of relative tranquility compared to others. And considering that the Kennedy Administration is a time when many scholars see the U.S.-Israeli alliance being solidified, the ability to stay on good terms with the key leader of the Arab world is impressive.⁸³

No one can know what another year—or another term—for Kennedy would have looked like. Would his budding relationship with Nasser have continued to grow, or would domestic and international difficulties have completely undermined their rapport? At the time, skeptics of good ties between the two men were common. However, as Kennedy wrote to Nasser, “Many people in both of our countries question whether good relations between us are really possible. I think they are wrong, but it is up to us to prove them wrong.”⁸⁴ The president did his best to do this. Nasser never became a full-fledged Western ally, but that was never the goal. Rather, the aim was to try to moderate Nasser’s behavior while simultaneously assuring him of American goodwill. If Kennedy could convince the Egyptian leader that the United States was not hostile and actively trying to subvert his government, perhaps he would not feel the need to take certain actions or turn to the Soviets. “Nasser appreciated Kennedy’s efforts to treat him as an equal

⁸¹ Memorandum, Department of State to McGeorge Bundy, March 10, 1963, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 1/1/63-3/12/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁸² Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, January 29, 1962, “Presidential Meeting on Nasser Problem,” January 29, 1962, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Proposed Nasser Visit, 9/19/61-1/3/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁸³ For the Kennedy Administration’s relationship with Israel, see Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy’s Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁸⁴ Letter, Kennedy to Nasser, January 18, 1963, Folder: United Arab Republic, Subjects, Nasser Correspondence, 1/1/63-3/12/63; Box 169; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

and as an important world leader,” Egyptian Ambassador Mustapha Kamel remembered, “just as he resented Eisenhower and Dulles’s efforts to treat him like some sort of pawn in the big chess game with the Russians.”⁸⁵ If the gamble with Nasser did not pay huge dividends, it at least broke even.⁸⁶

“Particularly Delicate Exercise in Reassurance”: Kennedy and the Shah

If Kennedy had to constantly comfort his European partners and reassure them of American steadfastness, he often had to do even more for non-Western allies. Usually geographically closer to the Soviet Union, in more need of economic and military aid, and frequently having a tenuous control on power, non-Western allies often required more intense psychological comfort. A prime example was the Shah of Iran. In many ways Kennedy’s role as counselor for the Iranian was similar to his task with Adenauer, but the Shah was even more emotional and insecure. His fears were not completely unfounded. Bordered by the Soviet Union to the north, Iran was perilously situated. If the past was any indication, the Shah knew his nation was always at risk of possible Soviet intervention. During both world wars Russia (along with the British) occupied part of Iran. And after WWII the Soviet Union refused to withdraw from Iranian territory and supported separatist elements in the country. Though the Soviets eventually yielded and Iran regained all its territory, the crisis lasted over a year and was one of the first Cold War conflicts outside of Europe. It brought the United States and Iran closer together and

⁸⁵ As quoted in William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt, 1955-1981* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985), 147-148.

⁸⁶ According to Douglas Little, by the time of Kennedy’s death his outreach to Nasser had become a “diplomatic fiasco” and his Middle East policy overall was floundering and in need of adjustment. However, as Philip Muehlenbeck has recently argued, JFK’s personal diplomacy was “far from a complete failure.” It kept strident anti-Americanism at bay, prevented new communist incursions into the region, and kept the Palestinian issue from exploding. See Douglas Little, “From Even-Handed to Empty-Handed: Seeking Order in the Middle East,” in *Kennedy’s Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, Thomas G. Paterson, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 156-177; Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, 140.

was a reminder of how precarious Iran's position was. The Shah and Kennedy shared a mutual contempt for one another, but they could not avoid each other.⁸⁷ For the Iranian leader the American president was the best bet to get the economic and military aid he wanted. And despite all his flaws, Kennedy felt the Shah provided the best prospects for stability in a strategic nation on the Soviet's border.

Coming to power in 1941 and then reasserting his authority with help from the CIA in 1953, the Shah was constantly concerned about his situation, both personally and militarily. When Kennedy came to office those worries appeared to be getting worse. Thus in early 1962, the Administration began discussing a possible state visit by the Shah in late September. That visit, however, would be moved up to April over fears that the Shah could not wait until the fall because of his "depressed mood."⁸⁸ While the press was not privy to the Shah's exact psychological state, it was common knowledge that the visit was advanced because the Iranian leader felt underappreciated and frustrated with U.S. support.⁸⁹ In addition to knowing the Shah wanted an invitation, the State Department recommended a visit because it believed it would provide an important boost to the Shah's mental health. This was key because he was seen as vital to American policy in the region.

Citing the belief of the American ambassador in Iran, the State Department told National Security Adviser Bundy that "an invitation is essential to bolster the Shah's morale and confidence in Western support against Soviet threats and subversive pressures." While the State

⁸⁷ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 137.

⁸⁸ Telegram, Department of State, George Ball to Tehran Embassy, March 16, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 1/31/62-3/20/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁸⁹ Caroline Kilpatrick, "Kennedys Will Meet Shah of Iran Arriving Today With Wife on Visit," *Washington Post*, April 11, 1962; "Shah Receives Kennedy Praise as State Visit Begins," *New York Times*, April 12, 1962. During the 1960 election the Shah had hoped for a Nixon victory, as he correctly feared that a Democratic administration would push him on domestic reforms and, in his mind, downplay the communist threat. See. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 137.

Department and the White House were not necessarily avid supporters of the Shah, they felt he was their only option. “The internal stability of Iran, as well as its foreign policy,” State noted, “is for the present and the near future almost entirely dependent upon the resolution, courage, and common sense of the Shah.”⁹⁰ The need to encourage him and strengthen his confidence in the United States was seen as necessary to counteract other forces, both internal and external, that wanted the Iranian leader to change his pro-Western positions.

No matter how many words of assurance different American officials gave the Shah, however, it all came down to the president. As one NSC staffer noted, “only JFK himself will be able both to reassure him as to our continued backing and tell him gently a few home truths.”⁹¹ Thus, in February 1962, Kennedy wrote to the Shah inviting him to the United States. Knowing that “the Shah’s capacity for absorbing flattery is as unlimited as is his need for reassurance,” the president took the opportunity to not only invite the Iranian leader, but to do so in a way that played to the Shah’s sense of self importance.⁹² “I have long observed,” Kennedy wrote, “the role you have played in leading the Iranian people through the years toward material progress, national unity, and the preservation of the independence and integrity of your nation. Your personal observations on world conditions and on matters of cooperation between our two nations would be of great value to me in these difficult times.”⁹³ While Kennedy might have

⁹⁰ Memorandum, L. D. Battle to Bundy, “Iran: Proposed State Visit by the Shah of Iran,” January 30, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 1/31/62-3/20/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL. The State Department also noted that the Shah’s visit had to be a state visit, not an informal one. One reason was “the Shah personally likes pomp.” Another one was because Nasser was scheduled for a state visit, and since the Egyptian was the Shah’s “deadly personal enemy,” the invitation for anything less than a state visit “would appear to him and his people as a personal insult.”

⁹¹ Komer to Bundy, January 31, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 1/31/62-3/20/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹² “President’s Talking Paper,” April 3, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹³ Letter, Kennedy to the Shah, February 7, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 1/31/62-3/20/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL. Discussing the global situation was mostly a way to make the Shah feel good. As the briefing material stated, the Shah “is vastly impressed by being made privy to top-level thinking on vital world problems, particularly when it appears that his advice is being sought.” See “President’s Talking Paper,” April 3, 1962 (revised

found the Shah's thoughts on international issues interesting and valuable, the visit was all about pampering the Iranian leader.

As the Shah's visit approached and the Administration prepared the president's briefing materials, the psychological aspects of the trip, as well as Kennedy's role as counselor, were continually highlighted. "In the hope of countering his current despondency and talk of abdication that arise out of what he regards as insufficient United States support of Iran and him personally," the briefing book noted, "he badly needs...reassurance." Thus, Kennedy's goal was "to calm his concerns."⁹⁴ This was not necessarily a simple task because the Shah had many anxieties. The Administration saw him as "moody and insecure, preoccupied with military affairs, fearing for his country and his throne, and jealous of possible competitors for power."⁹⁵ For his part, the Shah felt the United States did not do enough to protect his country, either because it could not or would not. He also felt U.S. support for him personally was inadequate. The Administration reported that he "want[ed] to assure himself, in response to his own emotional needs, that he is appreciated and respected by the U.S. for himself and for what he has done for the Free World cause."⁹⁶ The only way to accomplish this, it was thought, was Kennedy. The key was for the Shah to feel "flattered and reassured by the President's personal warmth."⁹⁷

April 6, 1962), Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹⁴ "Visit of the Shah of Iran—Washington, April 11-14, 1962: Scope Paper," March 27, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹⁵ "President's Talking Paper," April 3, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹⁶ "Visit of the Shah of Iran—Washington, April 11-14, 1962: Scope Paper," March 27, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹⁷ "President's Talking Paper," April 3, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL. It was also believed that Kennedy should praise the Shah's "courage and common sense" as well as his "intelligence." Also, it was thought that a "deprecating" remark about Mohammad Mossadeq (the former premier minister who was overthrown in 1953) would be to the Shah's liking. Overall, the goal was sheer flattery: "He [the Shah] would appreciate the President's noting the points on which the Shah and the

In addition to his personal needs, the Shah had a myriad of other concerns. These worries were not as intimate as his need to feel appreciated and respected, but they still adversely affected his psyche and made him nervous and apprehensive. One of his worries was that the United States was more generously supporting neutralist nations such as India rather than staunchly pro-Western nations like Iran. Related, the Shah felt that compared to other U.S. allies, Iran was getting insufficient aid. Prior to the visit, this was something the Administration thought the Shah might “complain bitterly” about.⁹⁸

More serious, though connected to complaints about aid, was the Shah’s “almost psychotic obsession” with military security.⁹⁹ He “saw (the Russians) as eight feet tall,” one British diplomat remembered.¹⁰⁰ Iran was in a geographically hazardous neighborhood, but the Administration felt the Shah constantly overestimated the threat from the Soviet Union. The United States actually wanted Iran to downsize its military, believing that a smaller, more modern force would be best for the country. Kennedy’s goal was to convince the Iranian leader that though the odds of a Soviet assault were slim, he could “rest assured” that Iran was within the U.S. “defensive shield,” and that if attacked the United States would come to its assistance.¹⁰¹

President have parallel ideals, objectives, and outlooks. He would be flattered to have an indication that the President was drawing inspiration, reassurance, and guidance from his meeting with the Shah.”

⁹⁸ “President’s Talking Paper,” April 3, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

⁹⁹ “Visit of the Shah of Iran, Washington, D.C., April, 1962—Background Paper: Analysis of Proposed U.S. Assistance to Iran: Report to the National Security Council,” April 3, 1962,” Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Tab IV-Tab VI; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰⁰ As quoted in April R. Summit, “For a White Revolution: John F. Kennedy and the Shah of Iran,” *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 562.

¹⁰¹ “President’s Talking Paper,” April 3, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Index-Tab III; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL; Barry Rubin, *Paved With Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 38, 102. The Shah was also unhappy with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), a Cold War alliance formed in 1955 and composed of Britain, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iraq (which withdrew in 1958). The United States was associated with CENTO as an “observer,” but not an official member. The Shah felt “dissatisfaction with the amount of ‘benefit’ in both material and psychological terms, which Iran derive[d] from its membership.” He wanted American membership, something the Administration opposed. Kennedy’s job was to make the Shah see the good that CENTO had done and assure the Iranian leader of America’s continued support for the organization. See “Visit of the Shah of Iran, Washington, D.C., April, 1962—Background Paper: Central Treaty Organization,” April 2, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Tab

With such a “particularly delicate exercise in reassurance,” Kennedy’s NSC staff thought the president should have multiple strategy sessions prior to the visit. The purpose of these sessions was to determine how to approach the Shah and what kind of aid they should offer him. Another part of the Administration’s preparation was how to portray the trip in the media. Knowing how sensitive the Iranian leader was, it felt that positive coverage was essential, especially because the Shah was already perturbed by the American press’ coverage of him. “The Shah reads every word which is written about him in the American and British press,” briefing materials noted, “and is similarly interested in transcriptions of radio and television programs mentioning Iran and his role in Iran.” The Shah felt that negative articles about him were done with the consent of the government. This was an “unshakable conviction,” and he felt that if the Administration really wanted to it could end unfavorable reports. Related was dismay over anti-Shah Iranians in the United States who were part of “a vociferous campaign” against him. Like the press, the Shah could not understand why the Administration did not stop such protests.¹⁰²

For a successful visit the Administration knew it would have to counteract these complaints. “Good press treatment of [the] Shah during [his] visit is an important part of the scenario,” Komer noted.¹⁰³ To accomplish this, the NSC tried to coordinate with White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger. Asking for advice, Komer wrote to Salinger inquiring if there was anything the Administration could do to help create a good press environment for the Iranian’s visit. “Since the Shah’s visit is largely an exercise in psychotherapy,” he wrote, “is there anything we can legitimately do in the way of prior build-up and press backgrounders to set

IV-Tab VI; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰² “Visit of the Shah of Iran, Washington, D.C., April, 1962—Background Paper: Special Problems,” April 2, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Briefing Book 4/11/62-4/14/62, Tab IV-Tab VI; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰³ Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, March 21, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/21/62-3/24/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

the stage properly and give the Shah a good press?” This took on added importance, as it was believed anti-Shah forces would seek to hold protests during the visit. As Komer noted, “Though we are under no illusions as to the character of this unstable monarch, the purpose of the visit is to build him up, not tear him down.”¹⁰⁴ To accomplish this the Administration had to quiet criticism and receive favorable press coverage.

In attempting to do this, the American ambassador to Iran, Julius Holmes, outlined a strategy for portraying the Shah publically. “It should be emphasized above all that [the Shah]...is a reformist monarch whose principal desire in life is to use the power and trappings of the ancient Persian monarchy for the betterment of his people,” he stated, and the Administration should not “hesitate to propagate this thesis.” Holmes felt that the better the American press portrayed the Shah, the bigger impact it would have in Iran, thus helping increase the Shah’s prestige and quell domestic dissent.¹⁰⁵

Another issue that arose in planning for the visit was whether the Shah should speak before a joint session of Congress. Originally scheduled to do so, about two weeks before the visit some in Congress doubted the wisdom of it. As Senator Stuart Symington told the State Department, a Shah speech may backfire. He noted that the Iranian leader had previously spoken before Congress and that he was not a polished orator. He predicated that if a joint session were

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum, Komer to Pierre Salinger, March 21, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/21/62-3/24/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰⁵ Telegram, Department of State, Julius Holmes to Rusk, March 20, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/21/62-3/24/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL. The State Department also had some suggestions for the Shah personally, things he could avoid doing that would help with press coverage. If the ambassador thought the Iranian leader would not react negatively, State instructed Holmes to tell the Shah to avoid wearing military uniforms except on certain occasions, buying expensive items such as jewelry and cars, and giving extravagant gifts. See, Telegram, Department of State, George Ball to Holmes, March 21, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/21/62-3/24/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

scheduled, very few members of Congress would attend. This would be “humiliating” for the Shah.¹⁰⁶

Ambassador Holmes, however, had a different take. He felt that if the Shah were told he could not give a speech, a pall would be cast over the whole visit, thus negating any benefits the Administration hoped to achieve. Holmes said that the Shah knew exactly who else had given speeches before Congress, and the fact that the president of Brazil would have done so only a few days before the Iranian leader arrived made it very difficult to tell him no. Additionally, since the Shah had done so before, he expected to speak before Congress again. Holmes concluded that if the Shah was informed that his speech was cancelled, it would “at least plunge him again into dark mood depression in which he will be convinced that he ranks below neutrals in [the] esteem of [the] US and is considered a second-class ally...if [the] choice lies between [the] Shah’s addressing a joint session with very few congressmen and senators present and being told he cannot make such [an] address at all, I certainly choose [the] former.”¹⁰⁷ The speech did take place and Symington’s prediction proved correct. Attendance was poor, with only about half the House chamber full.¹⁰⁸ But Holmes was also right, as the lack of turnout did not sour the trip.

In all its planning and preparation to improve the Shah’s mental state, the Administration was acting not out of altruism but out of self-interest. It believed that improving the Iranian

¹⁰⁶ Telegram, Department of State, Rusk to Tehran Embassy, March 28, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/29/62-4/5/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram, Department of State, Holmes to Rusk, March 30, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/29/62-4/5/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹⁰⁸ In his speech the Shah struck a defiant tone saying that Iran would not yield to communist pressure. He also urged members of Congress to continue providing aid because his country was constantly barraged by Soviet attempts to destabilize him. For coverage of the Shah’s address, see Robert Young, “Shah of Iran Declares: No ‘Neutrality’: Won’t Bend to Reds’ Pressure,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 13, 1962; Associated Press, “Shah Exhorts U.S. To Keep Up Its Aid: He Tells Congress He Knows Burden Is Heavy But Says That Need Remains,” *New York Times*, April 13, 1962.

leader's psyche was the best means of getting him to act how it wanted, thus bolstering America's foreign policy objectives. As Holmes argued,

The Shah should be treated not as an anachronism—which he is—nor as a man who has, perhaps, more responsibilities than he is able to bear well and without flinching—which he is—but as a chief of an allied state whom we respect and will treat as we would, for example, the chief of state of a NATO country. By so treating him we will encourage him as much as by any other means to behave in the manner in which we would like to see him behave. He needs such encouragement...By such a flattering approach we can help encourage the Shah to be the kind of monarch that he says he is, that he wants to be and that we want and need him to be.¹⁰⁹

Kennedy did his best to this such advice. Throughout the visit he praised the Shah and provided assurances of America's goodwill. Upon his arrival the president remarked that the visit was "most valuable" to the United States. "Occupying as you do in Iran a most important strategic area...your country has been able to maintain its national independence century after century, until we come to the present date, where under great challenges you, Your Majesty, lead that historic fight," JFK praised.¹¹⁰ At the Shah's state dinner, the president continued this theme, calling the Iranian leader "a friend and a very valiant fighter." "We are quite aware," Kennedy toasted, "that were it not for the leadership that he has given...this vital area of the world...would long ago have collapsed."¹¹¹

In a private conversation on the second to last day of the visit, the president said he "could leave his present job and the United States would go on, but Iran would collapse if the Shah were to leave his post." Kennedy continued on this theme of the Shah's indispensability, saying he was "the keystone to the arch in Iran," and without him "Iran and then the whole

¹⁰⁹ Telegram, Department of State, Holmes to Rusk, March 20, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 3/21/62-3/24/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹¹⁰ "Remarks of Welcome to the Shah and the Empress of Iran at the Washington National Airport," April 11, 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy: 1962* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1963), 315.

¹¹¹ "Toasts of the President and the Shah of Iran," April 11, 1962, *Ibid.*, 323.

Middle East would crumble.”¹¹² The president’s project of reaffirmation appeared to be successful. Yet, the visit was not an unqualified triumph. As Komer warned, “With a man like the Shah, it is hard to tell how long this effect will last.”¹¹³

Indeed, the Shah was not an easy man to reassure. In a speech before the National Press Club he made some revealing remarks that got to the root of why it was so difficult to soothe his psyche. “This king business,” the Shah remarked, “has given me personally nothing but headaches. During the whole of these twenty years of my reign, I have lived under the strain and stress of my duties.”¹¹⁴ He was never comfortable in his role as king. Coming to the throne during WWII after the Allies made his father abdicate, experiencing a challenge to his rule during the Mossadeq years, and then unsure and hesitant when the CIA sought to make him the unquestioned leader, the Shah never felt secure. Add the fact that he did have real economic and security concerns and it becomes clearer why the Shah needed constant affirmation.

Less than six months after his visit the Administration again sought to comfort him, this time through the vice president. Between August 22 and September 7, Lyndon Johnson traveled to Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iran. Acting as a proxy for Kennedy, Johnson’s whole trip was meant to bolster morale. “There is a real need for reassurance as to US support...[and] that US interest in them remains high,” Komer told Kennedy regarding the purpose of the VP’s trip.¹¹⁵ The Shah heartily welcomed Johnson, and the visit appeared to

¹¹² Memorandum of Conversation, Kennedy, the Shah, et al, April 13, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 4/10/62-4/15/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹¹³ Memorandum, Komer to Kennedy, April 18, 1962, Folder: Iran, Subjects, Shah Visit, 4/16/62-5/14/62; Box 117; NSF-Countries; JFKL.

¹¹⁴ Max Frankel, “‘This King Business’ A Headache to Shah,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1962. While touting Iranian economic progress as well as its strategic role in the Cold War, the Shah also asked for more economic and military aid in the future. Additionally, he urged Americans to not be so quick to criticize himself and Iran. It wasted his energy having to defend against such attacks and it gave comfort to the enemy.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum, Komer to Kennedy, August 20, 1962, Folder: V.P. Trip to Middle East 8/62-9/62, 5/62-8/62; Box 243; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

accomplish its goal of raising spirits.¹¹⁶ Upon return, Johnson reported to the president that though the nations he visited were vulnerable to communist aggression because of their location, “their heads are still high, but there are disquieting indications that the governments and peoples of these countries are beginning to feel the strain of their exposed position, and to question what is in our hearts toward them—what our real intentions are.” The vice president urged the Administration not to neglect these nations even as other crises like Berlin and Cuba took precedence. While a visit like this provided a boost to the Shah and the other leaders Johnson met with, it was only a temporary fix. As the vice president warned Kennedy, “it would be unrealistic to assume that this fear [of U.S. neglect and withdrawal] has been erased by a single effort.”¹¹⁷

And there lies the rub of the president as counselor. The job was never finished. As the Shah illustrates so well, many leaders needed constant reassurance. The Iranian leader had a personal support session with the president in April. By the end of August he already needed more succor, and as Johnson’s warning indicated, he would need more in the future.

Conclusion

In the second half of the twentieth century it was not enough for presidents to simply meet with or correspond with world leaders. Occupants of the White House had to actively tend to their counterparts’ emotional and psychological needs. Whether it was security, economic, political, or even simply a lack of self-confidence, presidents were tasked with easing the minds

¹¹⁶ According to Ambassador Holmes, the Shah was taking “unprecedented measures” to welcome LBJ, including housing him at the royal palace, having his guard of honor consist of the imperial guard, and having his brother greet him at the airport. As Holmes reported, “this may not impress us very much but in [the] Shah’s mind it is an exceptional gesture of deference.” See Telegram, Holmes to Rusk, August 22, 1962, Folder: V.P. Trip to Middle East 8/62-9/62, 5/62-8/62; Box 243; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum, Lyndon Johnson to Kennedy, September 10, 1962, Folder: V.P. Trip to Middle East, 8/62-9/62, 9/62; Box 243; NSF-Trips and Conferences; JFKL.

of foreign leaders. This was not necessarily out of any deep affection for these leaders (though that could have been part of it in some instances), but rather a tool that helped presidents achieve their foreign policy aims. While the success of such a strategy might have varied and some leaders might have needed less reassurance than others, this was a role that presidents never stopped playing. This is not to say that world leaders themselves thought of the presidency in this way. Indeed, many may have taken umbrage at the idea that they needed a therapist—especially in the form of the American president. But the White House, for better or worse, saw itself fulfilling this function.

What made the presidency function in this role was the power and prestige of the office, not the individual holding it, though in some cases the individual could make an even more attractive counselor if he was particularly popular, like Kennedy was. Overall, modern presidents have catered to their foreign counterparts psychological needs by reassuring, comforting, soothing, calming, and bolstering them emotionally. This was a new task for the presidency after WWII, resulting in the White House becoming the most high-profile therapy office in the world.

CHAPTER 4

“THE WORLD IS VERY SMALL AND VERY DANGEROUS”: LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE IMPERATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

The mourning had barely begun for the fallen president. But matters of state stopped for no one. It had been three days since John F. Kennedy’s assassination, and as the country struggled to understand the tragedy that had befallen it, much weighed on the mind of the new president Lyndon B. Johnson. With the nation in the midst of the Cold War and scarcely a year removed from the Cuban Missile Crisis, Johnson knew that any calm in the international sphere was temporary. Sooner, rather than later, crises would erupt. Foreign leaders—particularly the Soviets—would test him. Would Johnson continue the policies of Kennedy? Would he have new priorities? How would he respond to global emergencies? What kind of leader would he be? All questions that foreign governments, both allies and adversaries, were eager to find out.

Compared to his urbane and internationally minded predecessor, Johnson was seen by many as a philistine without foreign policy expertise.¹ Recalling those first few days as president he said, “The most important foreign policy problem I faced was that of signaling to the world

¹ The idea that Johnson lacked foreign policy experience and knowledge, and thus did little of value internationally, has been a dominant theme. It was a view many writing during his presidency had. For example, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power* (New York: New American Library, 1966); Philip L. Geyelin, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the World* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Tom Wicker, *JFK and LBJ: The Influence of Personality Upon Politics* (New York: Morrow, 1968); Erick F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). Mostly negative assessments persisted, as evidence by two edited volumes published in the 1990s in which most authors took a more negative view of LBJ’s handling of foreign affairs. See Diane Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations During the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Warren Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The 1990s, however, also saw an increasing number of scholars who came to see merit in some of Johnson’s foreign policy, and the 2000s have seen even more works in this vein. For example, see H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Mitchell Lerner, “Four Years and a World of Difference: The Evolution of Lyndon Johnson and American Foreign Policy,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (July 2003): 68-95; Francis J. Gavin, “Blasts from the Past: Proliferation Lessons from the 1960s,” *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005): 100-135; Hal Brands, “Progress Unseen: U.S. Arms Control Policy and the Origins of Détente, 1963-1968,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (April 2006): 253-285.

what kind of man I was and what sort of policies I intended to carry out. It was important that there be no hesitancy on my part—nothing to indicate that the U.S. government had faltered.”² To convey this message, he sought to reassure the large gathering of world leaders that had come to the United States for Kennedy’s funeral in November 1963. On the advice of his National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, Johnson met privately with select foreign leaders in attendance. The purpose of the meetings, Bundy told the president, was to “restate...the basic position of the United States and to pick up threads of your own personal acquaintance of these men.” There was “conflict,” however, with the State Department. It argued that meeting privately with select foreign leaders would be inappropriate. Those the president did not meet with might be offended. Bundy was unconvinced. “To have them [foreign leaders] come and go and not to meet with them would be equally foolish,” he said. Johnson did not seem to care much one-way or the other. “Tell me what you want me to do,” he told Bundy.³

In the end, Johnson met individually with dozens of his foreign counterparts. The exact impact of this early venture in personal diplomacy is hard to measure. But it is clear that, for some in his Administration like Bundy, it was an important exercise. And it was the nature of international politics that made it so. As one reporter put it, LBJ’s funeral diplomacy is a “sharp reminder that, in a world torn by big and little conflict and shrunk by jet travel, practical personal diplomacy is an enormous part of being President; domestic problems may be subject to delay,

² Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 22.

³ Michael R. Beschloss, ed., *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 26, 28. Evans and Novak, *The Exercise of Power*, 347; Philip Geyelin, “Johnson’s Diplomacy: Chief Changes Will Be in Method, Not Basic Policy,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 1963. Johnson would have the opportunity for more funeral diplomacy during his presidency, traveling to West Germany for the funeral of Konrad Adenauer and Australia for Harold Holt’s. For the relationship between diplomacy and state funerals, see G.R. Berridge, “Diplomacy after Death: The Rise of the Working Funeral,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 4, no. 2 (July 1993): 217-234.

but world issues are less likely to wait.”⁴ The new president’s diplomatic moves were fruitful according to some like Jack Bell, the Associated Press’ chief political writer. “What came through clearly in those two days of meetings,” he noted, “was that the new Chief Executive would not be overawed by any foreign potentate. What was also clear to his visitors was that while the new President might not possess the brilliance of his predecessor, he was no whit less determined about where he stood.”⁵

Though Johnson took office amid tragedy and uncertainty, the demanding nature of foreign affairs guaranteed he would sooner or later have to turn his attention to global problems. In this he was not alone, as all postwar presidents have felt the burdens of confronting a complex world. For Johnson this burden would be particularly acute. The ever-worsening situation in Southeast Asia destroyed his presidency, and making matters worse was that fact that his real interest was domestic policy, not foreign affairs. The war in Vietnam—and other international crises—diverted his attention from his beloved Great Society. “He wanted to be the education president, the health president, the environmental president, the consumer president, the president who eliminated poverty, who gave to the poor the kind of education, health, and social support that most of us get from our parents,” LBJ’s top domestic aide Joseph Califano remembered.⁶ But as Johnson stated, he ended up leaving “the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of war on the other side of the world.”⁷

The dilemmas of global leadership have confronted all modern presidents. Emerging from World War II as a superpower and then quickly engaged in a decades long struggle with the

⁴ Geyelin, “Johnson’s Diplomacy,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 1963.

⁵ Jack Bell, *The Johnson Treatment: How Lyndon B. Johnson Took Over the Presidency and Made It His Own* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 21.

⁶ Joseph A. Califano Jr., “The Ship Sails On,” in *Lyndon Johnson Remembered: An Intimate Portrait of a Presidency*, Thomas W. Cowger and Sherwin Markman, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 170.

⁷ As quoted in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, with new forward (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 251.

Soviet Union, the United States became the dominant actor in the international arena. Its commitments spanned the globe, and when crises occurred and issues of war and peace were at stake, it often fell to American presidents to become personally involved with their foreign counterparts.

Using the administration of Lyndon Johnson, this chapter examines how the exigencies of the international system led presidents toward personal diplomacy. In many ways, Johnson is the exception that proves the rule. Compared to his predecessor and successor, he was relatively uninterested in foreign affairs. And he did not particularly enjoy interacting with foreign leaders. Later in his presidency this would change slightly, as he sought to use summitry to bolster his legacy, but early on he often had to be persuaded by his advisers to engage in foreign policy. Thus even a president like LBJ, who would have preferred to focus on the home front and not interact with world leaders, was forced to do exactly that by international developments and crises that demanded the attention of the American president.

“Foreign Affairs Devour His Days”: Johnson’s Struggles

“‘If it hadn’t been for Vietnam’—how many times this phrase has been spoken in conversations assessing Johnson’s place in history,” Doris Kearns Goodwin has written. “For it is impossible to disconnect Johnson from that war.”⁸ Vietnam affected nearly all of LBJ’s diplomacy with the rest of the world, especially after 1965. It led to disagreements with other world leaders and made his personal diplomacy less effective. For example, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who came under increasing domestic political pressure over Vietnam, sought to mediate the conflict. Johnson, however, did not welcome this. Speaking to his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara he said, “I told [Bundy] I don’t know how to stop this

⁸ Ibid.

Wilson, but if he thinks *I'm* going to...let Wilson use my platform to talk about my consulting with him about where to have a *conference*, he's crazy as *hell!* If I have to go hide and hold up...I'm not going to do it. And he better *tell* him that!"⁹ With Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson the disagreement over Vietnam became physical. After Pearson delivered a speech at Temple University in Philadelphia suggesting a bombing pause, Johnson was irate. He quickly requested (demanded) Pearson have lunch with him at Camp David where he told the Canadian prime minister his speech was "'awful.'" As the Canadian ambassador recalled, after "'expostulating, upbraiding, reasoning, persuading,'" the president "'strode up to him [Pearson] and seized him by the lapel of his coat, at the same time raising his other arm to the heaven,'" telling the prime minister, "'You don't come here and piss on my rug.'"¹⁰

Vietnam dominated LBJ's foreign policy, and it weakened the nation as well as his political clout. Thus, his attempts to engage other world leaders suffered, and he was often unsuccessful in those endeavors. But despite the failures, the Johnson Administration tried its hand at personal diplomacy on numerous occasions, even with Vietnam itself. As the war dragged on and Johnson became more desperate to end it, he tried to directly communicate with North Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh in early 1967, despite the fact that while still an inspirational figure, he was no longer the key individual.

The idea of personally engaging Ho was not new. While planning for a gathering of Southeast Asian leaders in Manila in the fall of 1966, National Security Adviser Walt Rostow

⁹ Michael Beschloss, ed., *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 214.

¹⁰ As quoted in Andrew Cohen, *Lester B. Pearson* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008), 175. If there was one thing Johnson appreciated it was recognition from other foreign leaders about the domestic constraints and pressures he faced. As he told South Vietnam's Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky in 1966, they needed to seriously study anti-Vietnam sentiment in the United States. "You need to know what our pressures are just as we need to know what yours are," he said. Violation of this tenant, as evident by his anger toward Pearson, made a foreign leader *persona non grata* in LBJ's mind. See Memorandum From the President's Press Secretary (Moyers) to Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Johnson), February 16, 1966, doc. 75, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. IV, Vietnam, 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 228.

suggested the president might meet with Ho. “Now a wild idea,” he told Johnson. “Send a message, in greatest secrecy, to Ho Chi Minh that you want to talk to him personally in say, Rangoon. You win if he refuses or if he accepts.”¹¹ While nothing came of this idea, in February 1967 the president “decided that perhaps the only way to find a path to peace was through direct contact with Ho Chi Minh.” In a letter to Ho, the president said the Administration had tried for years to convey the United State’s desire for peace. Perhaps the failure of these efforts was because “our thoughts and yours, our attitudes and yours, have been distorted or misinterpreted as they passed thorough various channels.” Thus the need for direct communication. The president suggested secret negotiations between their representatives. “If we fail to find a just and peaceful solution,” Johnson wrote, “history will judge us harshly.”¹² According to LBJ, Ho’s response was not positive. It had an “unyielding tone,” he recalled. But despite that, he wrote the North Vietnamese leader a second time, and again the president was disappointed. This second letter received no response or acknowledgment. It was returned to the U.S. embassy in Moscow, though it had been opened and the Administration was sure North Vietnamese leaders in Hanoi had the text of the letter.¹³

This failed attempt encapsulates much of Johnson’s personal diplomacy. To deal with an international problem he would—sometimes reluctantly and often at the urging of his advisers—engage with foreign leaders. But he rarely got satisfaction. Despite the lack of results, however, Johnson’s personal diplomacy was on par with other modern presidents. He might not have liked it, but he did it. And the impetus for this was often the international challenges and crises that

¹¹ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, September 22, 1966, doc. 242, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. IV, Vietnam*, 653. Though Johnson did not take Rostow’s advice, one scholar has compared the National Security Adviser to Rasputin—the Russian mystic who had the ear of Czar Nicholas II—and places much of the blame for America’s quagmire in Vietnam on Rostow. See David Milne, *America’s Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

¹² Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 252, 592.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 255-256.

presidents confront. “Foreign affairs devour his days,” Lady Bird Johnson said of her husband in 1965. “True, he takes less joy in them” than domestic issues, but “[international] problems are harder to solve.”¹⁴

The Johnson Treatment on the World Stage

In the days and weeks following Kennedy’s assassination, political pundits speculated what kind of president his successor would be. The biggest difference between Johnson and his predecessor, popular thinking went, was their political style and intellectual temperament. As one reporter wrote, compared to Kennedy, LBJ was “clearly a man of less intellectual depth and imagination, of less inspiring speaking style, of folksy and almost corny habits of speech and action.”¹⁵ On policy, however, most did not expect any major changes. Domestically it was believed that Johnson would push to implement Kennedy’s unfinished program, most notably in the area of civil rights and taxes. Internationally there was a similar belief. The new president would follow closely in the path of his predecessor. No major departures were expected in American foreign affairs.¹⁶

When Johnson ascended to the presidency there were no major international crises that required prompt action. How exactly he would handle global emergencies was still unknown, but some speculated that he would engage in personal diplomacy. “One who knows him well expects a lot of personal diplomacy,” the *Washington Post* reported. “Another who deals with him believes that, like Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy, Mr. Johnson cannot

¹⁴ Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 327.

¹⁵ Alan L. Otten, “President Johnson: New Chief Seen Keeping Kennedy Policies, But Not Operating Methods,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1963. For more on the presidential styles of JFK and LBJ, see Fred I. Greenstein, *Presidential Difference: Leadership Style From FDR to George W. Bush* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 59-89.

¹⁶ Otten, “President Johnson,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1963; Chalmers M. Roberts, “‘Can Do’ Man Takes Over: Breathing Space on Diplomacy Is a Help,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 1963.

escape the feeling that somehow he may be able to achieve something in face-to-face contact with the Soviet leader.”¹⁷

Despite the popular view of Johnson as a provincial lacking the diplomatic sophistication of his predecessor, he was no stranger to foreign travel or world leaders. As vice president he travelled widely for the Kennedy Administration, making eleven trips to thirty-three countries. Perceptions at the time were that JFK was simply trying to keep LBJ busy, and those who followed the vice president’s journeys, both State Department officials and reporters, were not impressed. “The problem of Johnson’s overseas traveling,” according to prominent journalists covering LBJ in the early 1960s, “was this: constrained and frustrated in the isolation booth of the vice-presidency, Johnson could stretch his legs and revert to a semblance of the vigorous freewheeler only when he traveled. Pent-up energies and excesses of personality burst forth on these trips.”¹⁸ Johnson frustrated State Department officials by breaking with protocol and acting more like a politician on the campaign trail than a statesman. But if his VP trips were so bad and designed simply to keep him occupied, why did he go on so many? The answer is because the missions Kennedy sent him on did have utility, and Johnson, albeit with eccentricity, did more good than harm. Particularly on trips to the Third World, where his experience growing up in rural Texas—where poverty and daily struggle were common—made him able to connect with the people of those countries better than the Ivy leaguers in the Kennedy Administration ever could.¹⁹

¹⁷ Roberts, “‘Can Do’ Man Takes Over,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 1963. A *Wall Street Journal* reporter, promoting the notion of LBJ as anti-intellectual, predicted that he would be most comfortable around a certain type of leader. As vice president, the reporter wrote, “he’s been most at ease with tough military types like Pakistan’s President Ayub Khan and Thailand’s President Sarit Thanarat, rather than intellectuals such as India’s Prime Minister Nehru or suave aristocrats such as Britain’s Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home.” See Otten, “President Johnson,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1963.

¹⁸ Evans and Novak, *Exercise of Power*, 325.

¹⁹ Mitchell Lerner, “‘A Big Tree of Peace and Justice’: The Vice Presidential Travels of Lyndon Johnson,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 357-393; Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: W. W. Norton &

Thus, when Johnson ascended to the presidency he was not unfamiliar with foreign affairs. But his preference was domestic policy, and when advisers proposed meeting with foreign leaders they had to have a good reason. In trying to prod Johnson on the subject, Bundy told him,

I get such a needle from you on this subject that I thought you might be interested in records provided to me from the Appointment Office with respect to all the foreigners for whose visits I am responsible over the 12-week period from February 11 to May 5 [1964]. The official records show that in that 12-week period you averaged 32 minutes a week with people who are my fault... So you see how extraordinarily restrained we have been. What this means, of course, is that under the terms of our treaty you may be hit at any moment by five hours and 33 minutes of accumulated overdue visitors from nearly everywhere. But I am much too kind for that.²⁰

Johnson would improve on this, but as Vietnam increasingly held his presidency captive, he sought to avoid foreign visitors if possible. In March 1967, when Bundy's successor Walt Rostow recommend a foreign visitor, Johnson wrote on the memo, "'Do I have to?'"²¹

During his first year in office, Johnson was not only hesitant to meet with foreigners at home, but also abroad. He made it his policy not to leave the country during 1964. First and foremost, he was simply more interested in domestic issues and had an ambitious legislative agenda he wanted to get through Congress, and with the international scene relatively quiet he saw no pressing need for foreign travel. And 1964 was also an election year, which meant LBJ would be busy campaigning later in the year. This, combined with the fact that he did not have a vice president who could take on presidential duties in his absence, made him reluctant to travel abroad.²²

Company, 1990), 331-332. For a summary of LBJ's vice presidential travels, both its more unconventional aspects and accomplishments, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12-20.

²⁰ As quoted in Joseph S. Tulchin, "The Promise of Progress: U.S. Relations with Latin America During the Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson," in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, 224.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 468. Johnson worried that his plan not to leave the country might become a problem domestically. French President Charles de Gaulle made this an issue when he intimated that LBJ should come to

In the words of reporters, Johnson also wanted to “avoid developing into a tourist.” Though the pageantry and glamour of foreign travel was tempting, the president did not want to go abroad simply for ceremony. He felt world travel by Dwight Eisenhower and Kennedy had produced little.²³ And if he visited one country, there would be pressure to visit another. And another. And another. “If I start going to one place,” LBJ lamented, “I’ll have to go meet others. I can’t have any legitimate excuse for not meeting a bunch of other heads of state that want me to. They’ll be glad to meet me somewhere.”²⁴

Despite this aversion, Johnson could show glimpses of interest in personal diplomacy. Speaking to Secretary of State Dean Rusk less than a month into office, he suggested that since the Canadian prime minister was scheduled to visit the following month, maybe he should invite the president of Mexico to visit as well. “Wouldn’t it be good if [Lester] Pearson’s coming here, why shouldn’t we invite [Adolfo] Lopez Mateos to come up a day or two later, as another neighbor and one that we have some relationship with—personal,” the president told Rusk. “I just thought it would be a nice gesture,” LBJ continued, “since Canada is coming...they’ve [Mexico] got an inferiority complex, and they’re always being mistreated.”²⁵ Johnson also

France or perhaps Martinique, so they could confer. Aiming to counter any negative press reaction if he did not travel to meet de Gaulle, Johnson explained his reasoning to James Reston of the *New York Times*. In a phone conversation with Reston the president made his case: “Now I said at my first meeting with these 82, 92 heads of state when I talked to each one of them individually [at JFK’s funeral] that I wouldn’t be leaving this country this year except in an exceptional situation, maybe a summit or something, that was really imperative...De Gaulle comes along and says that he’ll be seeing us in February... We pointed out we’d said that we couldn’t leave the country, and the reasons for it... We have no—We know nothing that needs resolving. I mean, we don’t see that a meeting right at this moment would produce much...I wanted you to know all the background and the facts. I just leave it with you for your own good patriotic judgment.” But not long after this conversation, Reston’s paper had what LBJ called a “mean editorial,” implying that de Gaulle’s recognition of Communist China was because of Johnson’s refusal to meet with him. See LBJ Conversation with Reston, January 8, 1964, Tape WH6401.09, Citation #1273 and LBJ Conversation with Dean Rusk, January 18, 1964, Tape WH6401.16, Citation #1414, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>; “Johnson-de Gaulle Meeting,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1964.

²³ Robert Thompson, “President Determined to Dodge ‘Tourist’ Tag,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1964.

²⁴ LBJ conversation with Richard Russell, January 8, 1964, Tape WH6401.09, #1257, *Presidential Recording Digital Edition*. <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

²⁵ LBJ conversation with Dean Rusk, December 6, 1963, Tape K6312.04, PNO 18, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>. Johnson’s suggestion to invite Lopez Mateos probably stemmed from the fact

evinced interest in correspondence sometimes. For example, in trying to decide how to respond to King Hassan of Morocco, one staffer on the National Security Council reported that the State Department “was initially afraid of involving the President in substantive correspondence, but as I understand it he welcomes chances for an occasional exchange of this kind—especially on a subject as dear to his heart as food. This seems tailor—made for a semi-substantive answer, and I just couldn’t see wasting a letter on this subject.”²⁶

But Johnson’s personal diplomacy style was most evident in his heavy use of the telephone and his Texas ranch. More so than previous presidents, LBJ used the telephone to communicate with his foreign counterparts. According to Elmer Plischke, he “launched the era of telephonic summitry,” and foreign leaders recognized this.²⁷ When in June 1964 word got back to Johnson that French President Charles de Gaulle wanted improved communication, the possibility of an LBJ phone call came up. Bundy told the president, “I think that the old boy is using the telephone because he thinks *you* want to. He’s never been fond of the telephone... And in fact, the legend is he never uses it.”²⁸ But this move toward “telephone summitry” was not a development that all looked kindly on. Johnson’s opponent in the 1964 presidential election Barry Goldwater took him to task for it. Deriding the practice, Goldwater said the “implications

that, as a Texan and someone who taught young Mexican-Americans in his youth, he was comfortable with Mexicans and felt he understood them. See Tulchin, “The Promise of Progress: U.S. Relations with Latin America During the Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson,” in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World*, 224.

²⁶ Memorandum, Hal Saunders to Walt Rostow, August 11, 1966, Folder: Morocco—King Hassan Correspondence; Box 40; National Security File (hereafter NSF)-Special Heads of State Correspondence File; LBJL.

²⁷ Elmer Plischke, *Diplomat in Chief: The President at the Summit* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 53-54. Overall, Plischke gave LBJ a positive assessment as diplomat in chief. See Plischke, “Lyndon Johnson as Diplomat in Chief,” *Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Uses of Power*, Bernard J. Firestone and Robert C. Vogt, eds. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 257-286.

²⁸ LBJ Conversation with McGeorge Bundy, June 2, 1964, Tape WH6406.01, Citation #3610, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>. As Bundy told LBJ, de Gaulle must “have read in the papers that that’s [telephone] the only way you do business, which is, of course, nonsense.” In this instance the idea of a phone call did not “appeal” to Johnson. There was the language barrier, but it did not make sense the president said, “without any real reason... without any real... single thing to call up” about. See LBJ Conversation with McGeorge Bundy, June 1, 1964, Tape WH6406.01, Citation #3601, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

of such a 'person-to-person' approach are, to say the least, frightening." Noting that LBJ did this while in the Senate, he said it is no surprise he was doing it as president. But foreign matters where more crucial than domestic ones and should not be trusted to the "personal whims" of one man. "Telephone summits," argued Goldwater, are "not the kind of presidential activity that inspires confidence."²⁹

The other feature of LBJ's personal diplomacy, his Texas ranch, served multiple purposes. First, he was simply more comfortable there and relished the informal atmosphere it offered. Indeed, that is where he chose to host his first summit with a foreign leader.³⁰ But the use of the ranch was also about public relations, as it allowed him to present a certain image to the public, both domestic and foreign. As one historian of LBJ's "Texas White House" writes,

To Europeans especially, and foreign visitors in general, the ranch served as a symbol of this mythically genuine America, where people were 'just plain folk' and a handshake was as good as a written contract. It was as if the world of the Western movie had come to life. The conviviality of the Johnson barbecues and the manufactured ambience of authenticity created a seductive environment that disarmed even the most suspicious of visitors. In this setting, Johnson could work his personal magic and could utilize the charisma that underlay his political career with a style and comfort level that he simply did not possess in the nation's capital. In the setting at the ranch, under the tents from which the aroma of barbecued pork and beef emanated, Johnson seemed at home, genuine in a manner foreign to the Washington, D.C., environment. He was a real American in the real America—a seductive concept for Europeans familiar with American mythology as well as for national leaders from elsewhere around the globe.³¹

²⁹ Barry Goldwater, "Up to the Summit—By Telephone," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1965.

³⁰ In December 1963, Johnson hosted West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard at the ranch. But McGeorge Bundy had doubts about the wisdom of this. He would have preferred Camp David. He felt that "this amiable and courtly jester [LBJ] is going to create a situation that everybody will regret a little bit." And since Lady Bird would have the added duties as host, she would not be able "to keep him [LBJ] behaving," and "she is the only one who can do that." In the end, however, the visit went well. The talks with Erhard "increase the confidence of this country in the ability of the new President to carry on personal diplomacy with a high degree of skill and sophistication," a *Washington Post* editorial stated. See, Robert David Johnson and David Shreve, eds., *The Presidential Recordings of Lyndon B. Johnson: The Kennedy Assassination of the Transfer of Power, November 1963-January 1964, Vol. Two* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 416; "The Erhard Visit," *Washington Post*, December 31, 1963.

³¹ Hal K. Rothman, *LBJ's Texas White House: "Our Heart's Home"* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 167.

While the use of the ranch was a calculated ploy, it is also a bit ironic. For a president insecure about perceptions of his sophistication and knowledge of foreign policy, going to the ranch and playing up the Texan image seems like an odd choice. And for at least some foreign leaders, the informal atmosphere of the ranch did not agree with them. In January 1965, Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson came to the ranch and arrived in a formal black suit. Johnson, however, greeted him dressed like a cowboy. Rather than wide-ranging, free flowing conversations, the president took Pearson—with the press in tow—on a tour of the ranch. During the visit, “the president dispensed drinks liberally and swore loudly,” and dinner was “hurried and informal.” The Canadian prime minister, to say the least, was not impressed.³²

This side of Johnson was well known to domestic politicians. But many questioned—and as Pearson’s experience showed for good reason—how well LBJ’s style would translate to the international stage. Known as the “Johnson treatment,” the president would flatter, pressure, and backslap mercilessly in an attempt to get what he wanted. “When Johnson wanted to persuade you of something, when you got the Johnson treatment,” executive editor of the *Washington Post* Benjamin Bradlee mused, “you really felt as if a St. Bernard had licked your face for an hour, had pawed you all over... And of course he was a great actor. At the same time he was trying to persuade you of something, sometimes something that he knew and I knew was not so, and there would be just a trace of a smile on his face. It was just a miraculous performance.”³³ The “treatment” could feel like a force of nature, but LBJ was quite strategic in its deployment. His efforts to convince were planned well in advance.³⁴

³² Greg Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963-1968* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 127.

³³ Merle Miller, *Lyndon: An Oral Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 174.

³⁴ According to Doris Kearns Goodwin, “Johnson would practice his intended approach, often in the presence of one of his aides. He sorted out in rambling fashion the possible arguments pro and con, experimented with a variety of responses, and fashioned a detailed mental script from which he would speak—in a manner designed to seem wholly spontaneous—when the meeting took place.” See Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 123.

While successful domestically, how would world leaders respond? Would they “really [be] susceptible to the kind of eyeball-to-eyeball, arm-around-the-shoulder manipulation that works so well with businessman and senators from the Midwest?” asked the foreign affairs correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*.³⁵ In most cases the answer was no. The Johnson treatment did not work nearly as well internationally as it did domestically. Writing in the mid-1960s, journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak believed that LBJ’s first use of the Johnson treatment with a foreign leader was “a failure” and that this “was the rule, not the exception.” According to the duo, the troubles of the international sphere “were seldom susceptible to solution at the head-of-government level. With all the power of the presidency at his disposal, Johnson was unable to tame the world as he had tamed Congress.”³⁶

Emblematic of this was Johnson’s relations with French President Charles de Gaulle. The two men met privately during Kennedy’s funeral, and of the multiple leaders the president was to see, Bundy recommended he see de Gaulle first since the Frenchman was a senior statesman and “very protocol-aire.”³⁷ During the Kennedy years, relations with France had been delicate, as de Gaulle was increasingly assertive and critical of the United States and determined to act independently. But some saw the Frenchman’s attendance of JFK’s funeral as a sign that maybe he wanted to repair relations. But this was not to be. Evans and Novak reported that LBJ felt his meeting with de Gaulle went well and the two men got along.³⁸ De Gaulle, on the other hand, called the American president a “cowboy-radical” and a “sergeant who’s been crowned.”³⁹

³⁵ Ernest Conine, “Will Johnson Formula Work on World Stage?,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1965.

³⁶ Evans and Novak, *Exercise of Power*, 386, 387. Secretary of State Rusk did recall, however, that “in general the President got along very well with foreign leaders.” Dean Rusk Oral History Interview I, 7/28/69, LBJ Library, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/rusk/rusk01.pdf>.

³⁷ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 36.

³⁸ Evans and Novak, *Exercise of Power*, 386-387.

³⁹ As quoted in Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 29.

Johnson never personally softened the French president, but it is unlikely that anyone could have. And LBJ never thought he was going to magically change de Gaulle's positions. Speaking to West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, the president said he "had known De Gaulle since 1960 and had no illusions about his flexibility."⁴⁰ Indeed, the French president would continuously criticize U.S. policy during the Johnson years, and despite the image of LBJ as unhinged and uncouth, he decided not to "indulge in petty bickering."⁴¹ He realized that responding to every French attack, especially in a vindictive manner, would just make matters worse and further harm the Western alliance. Instead he tried to ignore de Gaulle. "I am not going to fuss at him or fuss over him," LBJ said.⁴²

Despite personal bitterness, Johnson worked with the French leader in areas where he could. He did the same with other leaders he had poor personal relationships with like British Prime Minister Wilson and Canadian Prime Minister Pearson.⁴³ And this gets at the heart of Johnson's approach. "President Johnson would not let us criticize any foreign leader by name," Secretary of State Rusk recalled, "whether it was [Nikita] Khrushchev, Charles de Gaulle, or Mao Zedong, not wishing to inflame difficult relations with personal invective. LBJ wasn't responding to my coaching; he probably learned that in the Senate."⁴⁴ Rather for Johnson, what was more important than the personal was the political. According to him, if he understood one

⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Johnson and Erhard, "De Gaulle and Relations with France," December 28, 1963, doc. 249, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961-1963, Volume XV: Berlin Crisis, 1962-1963 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1994), 648.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 23.

⁴² Memorandum for the Record, "President Johnson's Private Talks with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, December 28-29, 1963," December 29, 1963, Folder: Germany, Erhard Visit, 12/63 [2 of 3]; Box 190: Europe and USSR, Germany; NSF-Country File; LBJL.

⁴³ See Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the World," in *A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson*, Mitchell Lerner, ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 497; Jonathan Colman, *A Special Relationship: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Anglo-American Relations "at the Summit" 1964-1968* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies*.

⁴⁴ Rusk, *As I Saw It*, 358.

thing it was power, “where to look for it, and how to use it.”⁴⁵ He believed “the behavior of world leaders was influenced by the same grammar of power; whatever their countries’ sizes or shapes, they shared a common concern with questions of rulership [sic]: which groups to rely on, which advisers to rely on, and how to conduct themselves amid the complex intrigues of politics.”⁴⁶

“Personal Presidential Diplomacy Has Been a Crucial Element”: Managing Global Crises

“Cyprus, unhappily, along with Vietnam and Panama, is my husband’s diet these days,” Lady Bird wrote in her diary in January 1964.⁴⁷ After a brief lull since assuming office in November, Johnson would face challenges throughout the globe. First was Panama, where a dispute over displaying the American flag in the Canal Zone led to riots. The police in the Canal Zone were unable to control the protesters, and Panamanian forces did little to help. Thus it fell to U.S. military troops stationed in the Canal Zone to maintain security. Rioting turned to shooting, resulting in four American soldiers and twenty Panamanians dead. Panama quickly broke diplomatic relations. ““Get me the President of Panama—what’s his name—on the phone,”” Johnson told an aide. The aide, however, doubted the wisdom of this, since diplomatic relations had been severed. ““You can’t do that. It isn’t protocol,”” the aide said. But Johnson was not deterred. ““Why the hell can’t I?”” the president asked. ““Come on, now, get him on the phone.””⁴⁸ In Johnson’s call to President Robert Chiari, he pushed the Panamanian leader to calm the situation and help end the violence. But Chiari was resistant, and according to LBJ, sought to use the violence as leverage to get treaty revisions. Johnson, however, would not consider any

⁴⁵ As quoted in Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), xx.

⁴⁶ Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 195.

⁴⁷ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 191.

⁴⁸ As quoted in Bell, *The Johnson Treatment*, 102.

revisions until the situation calmed. “I was cold and hard and tough as hell,” he told Senator Richard Russell.⁴⁹

But the president’s tough talk with Chiari did not solve the problem. An international crisis may have lead to personal diplomacy, but personal diplomacy could not end it. Ten days after talking to the Panama president Johnson said, “Things are going like hell...we’re in trouble.”⁵⁰ Though the violence died down, Panama still demanded a revision of the canal treaty. It made a formal request for the Organization of American States to hear charges of aggression against the United States, and Chiari continued to warn that unless there was a new treaty there would be future riots “and it will be worse every time.”⁵¹ But Johnson, in an election year, was determined to project strength and not yield to pressure to negotiate. “We’re not giving them a damn thing,” he told Russell almost two weeks after the riots broke out.⁵²

“Suddenly, sooner than he or anyone else expected, the great men of the world and their problems are crowding into Washington again,” Max Frankel of the *New York Times* wrote. “Sooner than he wished, Mr. Johnson, has found that he must conduct foreign policy, or at least set the pace, because the world plays on apace.”⁵³ Eventually the situation in Panama died down. In April the two nations resumed diplomatic relations and negotiations quietly took place on a new agreement for the Canal Zone.⁵⁴ This would be the first of many global headaches for

⁴⁹ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 156.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 169. Johnson also mentioned trouble in Indonesia, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The last two of which recently experienced coups and eventually would join to form Tanzania.

⁵¹ Tad Szulc, “Panama Carries Dispute on Canal to O.A.S. Council: Calls for Meeting to Weigh Charge of U.S. Aggression—Mediation Talks Fail,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1964; Associated Press, “Panama Chief Sees New Riots Against U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 24, 1964.

⁵² Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 174.

⁵³ Max Frankel, “Foreign Policy Again Takes Front Seat: Johnson’s Effort to Concentrate on the Domestic Problems Is Thwarted by Crisis in Panama,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1964.

⁵⁴ For LBJ’s account of the situation, see Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 180-184. Michael Latham criticizes Johnson for seeing the riots in Panama in terms of the Cold War, and thus failing to see the merit in Panamanian protests. But as he points out, once order was restored, Johnson did negotiate. See Michael E. Latham, “Imperial Legacy and Cold War Credibility: Lyndon Johnson and the Panama Crisis,” *Peace & Change* 27 (October 2002): 499-527. For a more positive assessment of Johnson’s management of the situation in Panama, see Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Exception

Johnson. But as president, international crises come with the job. And how the White House occupant handles flare-ups around the world is seen as a measure of his global leadership and can define a presidency.

During the Johnson years, Cyprus was an international problem the United States would rather have stayed away from. The American public was not informed on the situation and not pushing for action, and however the Administration handled it, it was bound to alienate either Greece or Turkey, or possibly both.⁵⁵ Both were members of NATO, thus the spiraling crisis in Cyprus had ramifications beyond the small island itself.⁵⁶ “Cyprus was about to demonstrate that what had been for a thousand years only a Mediterranean trouble spot, reserved for Mediterraneans [sic],” foreign affairs correspondent Philip Geyelin wrote, “could suddenly erupt into a matter of crucial concern to the United States, requiring urgent U.S. action.”⁵⁷

Originally the Johnson Administration hoped Britain would take the lead. Cyprus had been a British colony, given independence only in 1960. The island was predominately Greek, but had a sizeable Turkish population as well. In November 1963, the president of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios III, proposed to alter the Cypriot constitution. While supported by the Greek majority, the Turkish minority felt threatened. After fighting broke out in late December, Britain, Turkey, and Greece held a conference in January 1964. At the outset Johnson did not seem particularly interested in the issue, apart from public relation aspects.⁵⁸

to the Rule? The Johnson Administration and the Panama Canal,” in *Looking Back at LBJ*, Mitchell Lerner, ed. (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 20-52.

⁵⁵ H.W. Brands, “America Enters the Cyprus Tangle, 1964,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 1987): 349-351.

⁵⁶ As LBJ told the Turkish prime minister, “It would have been easy for us to say that this was not our affair. But the consequences for peace and for our NATO allies are so great that we have felt compelled to try to be of assistance where the parties primarily concerned seem unable to find a solution among themselves.” See Telegram, Department of State, Rusk to Ankara, August 16, 1964, Folder: Turkey—Presidential Correspondence [4 of 4]; Box 54; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

⁵⁷ Geyelin, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the World*, 72.

⁵⁸ LBJ Conversation with Dean Rusk (joined by Mac Kilduff), December 25, 1963, Tape K6312.17, PNO 14, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

But as efforts to resolve the crisis faltered, Cyprus increasingly occupied the president's time. Even more so once Britain informed the Administration that it would no longer take the lead in keeping peace on the island. Johnson was not pleased. "Goddamn them," he snapped. "I'm ashamed of them." Lamenting British decline he continued, they "might as well not be British anymore if they can't handle Cyprus," "they might as well be another colony."⁵⁹ With Britain unable or unwilling, either a NATO peacekeeping force had to be sent in or the issue would go to the UN. The UN option was not appealing, as it would give communist nations a chance to meddle in something the Administration considered a NATO issue. Though the Administration reluctantly agreed to a NATO force, Makarios opposed it, preferring the UN option instead. A UN force arrived in March 1964, but this was only a temporary solution. The Administration continued the search for a permanent settlement, and this led to presidential personal diplomacy.⁶⁰

In February, Johnson called the situation in Cyprus "the most dangerous thing since the Cuban missiles."⁶¹ The following month, however, the situation seemed to have calmed. "Cyprus is still tense but quiet," Rusk told the president. "I think it is under reasonable control."⁶² But by

⁵⁹ LBJ Conversation with Robert Komer, January 25, 1964, Tape WH6401.21, Citation #1547; LBJ Conversation with George Ball, January 25, 1964, Tape WH6401.21, Citation #1543, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁶⁰ Even prior to this moment, the Administration had tried to use presidential diplomacy to influence the situation. Writing to Makarios, Johnson said, "I have been deeply concerned by the precarious situation that has been developing in Cyprus. I have taken a personal interest in the preparation of a proposal to forestall catastrophic happenings and provide a mechanism for developing a political solution...I urge you strongly to support this proposal." But Makarios rejected it, and LBJ was not happy. Particularly because his message requesting Makarios' cooperation was supposed to be a verbal message, not a written communication. "I told the Secretary...I didn't want to write a letter because I didn't want him turning me down and say, 'Here's my plea, and here's my answer...he's leaked it. Now what do we do?'" See Telegram, Department of State, Rusk to Nicosia, February 2, 1964, Folder: Cyprus—Makarios Correspondence; Box 12; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL; LBJ Conversation with George Ball, February 3, 1964, Tape WH6402.03, Citation #1831, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁶¹ LBJ Conversation with Oren Harris, February 17, 1964, Tape WH6402.17, Citation #2104, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁶² LBJ Conversation with Dean Rusk, March 21, 1964, Tape WH6403.13, Citations #2582 and #2583, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

June, conditions had once again deteriorated as a Turkish Cypriot leader considered declaring an independent state on the island with military help from Turkey. The fear of a Turkish invasion prompted the Administration to send a presidential letter to Turkey's prime minister, Ismet Inonu, which Under Secretary of State George Ball later called "the diplomatic equivalent of an atomic bomb."⁶³ In blunt language, Johnson laid out the consequences if Turkey invaded. He told Inonu that military action in Cyprus "gravely concerned" him and would harm Turkey's relations with NATO, the UN, and the United States. With the possibility of "such far-reaching consequences," Johnson asked the Turkish prime minister to halt any invasion until the two of them "had the fullest and frankest consultation."⁶⁴

The letter had the desired effect—Turkey stood down—but it wounded ties between the two countries. "Your message, both in wording and content," Inonu wrote to Johnson, "has been disappointing." The Turkish prime minister had "sincere hope that...the general tone" of the president's letter was "due to the haste" and pressure in which it was drafted.⁶⁵ Inonu and Johnson would have a chance to discuss their disagreements in person weeks later when the prime minister, along with the Greek prime minister, came to visit the president in the same week.

But LBJ was hesitant to become personally involved. "I think that we got in trouble the other night when we suggested to him [Inonu]...I'd be glad to see him," the president told Rusk. "When I got home and thought about it a little bit, I thought, 'Now, what in the hell's Lyndon Johnson doing inviting this big mess right in his lap?...I have no solution. I can't propose

⁶³ George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1982), 350.

⁶⁴ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey, June 5, 1964, doc. 54, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XVI: Cyprus, Greece, Turkey* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2000), 107, 110.

⁶⁵ Telegram, Department of State, Ankara to Rusk, June 13, 1964, Folder: Turkey—Presidential Correspondence [4 of 4]; Box 54; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL. For Johnson's letter and how the Turks interpreted and responded to it, see Nasuh Uslu, *The Cyprus Question As an Issue of Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish-American Relations, 1959-2003* (New York: Nova Science, 2003), 45-53.

anything. He'd come over here looking for heaven, and he'd find hell." Though he did not know what he could achieve, in the end, meeting face-to-face with the president seemed the best option to help control an explosive situation. "We were absolutely desperate," Johnson acknowledged, "and I let it [the invitation to visit] go."⁶⁶

As NSC staffer Robert Komer noted, the aim of the visits was "to convince our two reluctant dragons to play," and according to Rusk, the visits gave Johnson "the opportunity to seize the initiative at the outset to shake both leaders off their fixed positions and move them toward negotiation."⁶⁷ The Administration was not going to propose their own plan, rather it wanted both sides to agree to secret, direct talks overseen by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

Inonu visited first. "This will be the easier half of your chore," Komer told the president. In part this was because the Turkish prime minister, in George Ball's words, was "desperate." On Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot position continued to crumble, which meant Turkey's "only real card" was military action, but the United States and UN adamantly opposed this. Thus, as Komer noted, "our job is to convince Inonu that it would be folly to play this card."⁶⁸

Johnson was successful with the Turkish prime minister, as he agreed to secret talks.⁶⁹ But then came the hard part. Greek Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou was a "far tougher nut to crack," and getting him on board with secret talks "will be no mean trick" advisers cautioned

⁶⁶ LBJ Conversation with Dean Rusk, June 9, 1964, Tape WH6406.05, Citations #3664 and #3665, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁶⁷ Komer to McGeorge Bundy, June 18, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [2 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]; Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL; Memorandum, Rusk to Johnson, "Cyprus—Your Discussion with the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Greece," June 22-25, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [2 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]; Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁶⁸ Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, June 20, 1964, Folder: Turkey, Inonu Visit, 6/22-23/64 [1 of 3]; Box 157: Turkey; NSF—Country File; LBJL; Memorandum, Ball to Johnson, "Talking Points for the Inonu and Papandreou Visits," June 19, 1964, Folder: Turkey, Inonu Visit, 6/22-23/64 [1 of 3]; Box 157: Turkey; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, "Cyprus," June 23, 1964, doc. 73, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XVI*, 148-151.

Johnson.⁷⁰ Indeed, Papandreou did not seem worried about his meeting with the president. He felt the Greek position was strong, and as the CIA reported, he “has great faith in the power of words, as well as in his ability to use them.” The prime minister was confident he could “talk us into buying his views,” Komer told Johnson.⁷¹ The key, then, was for the president to force his will on Papandreou and persuade him. Though LBJ was armed with various arguments and not above using scare tactics, Komer said, “I am convinced that it will be your [LBJ] own personal impact which will be determining here. This man thinks he’s going to snow you, which makes it all the more important you sell him.”⁷²

But Johnson’s salesmanship came up short. In their talks Papandreou resisted the U.S. proposal. Greece and Turkey’s views were so far apart, he argued, that an exchange of views “at the present time would lead to war.”⁷³ Rather, he wanted to continue working through the UN. After the visit the CIA reported that the prime minister was “disappointed and ‘a little angry’ over the outcome of his talks.” The lack of an American proposal, other than simply have the two sides get together and talk, bothered him.⁷⁴ Despite Papandreou’s lack of enthusiasm for American led negotiations, however, Dean Acheson did become involved. Those in charge of the

⁷⁰ Memorandum, Ball to Johnson, “Talking Points for the Inonu and Papandreou Visits,” June 19, 1964, Folder: Turkey, Inonu Visit, 6/22-23/64 [1 of 3]; Box 157: Turkey; NSF—Country File; LBJL; Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, June 23, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [1 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]: Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁷¹ CIA Cable, “Papandreou’s and Sossidis’ Comments on Papandreou’s and Inonu’s Visits to the United States,” June 17, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [2 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]: Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL; Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, June 23, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [1 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]: Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁷² Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, June 23, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [1 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]: Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation, “Cyprus Problem,” June 24, 1964, doc. 74, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XVI*, 154.

⁷⁴ CIA Cable, “Reactions of Prime Minister Papandreou to His Talks With President Lyndon Johnson,” June 27, 1964, Folder: Greece, Papandreou Visit, 6/23-24/64 [1 of 2]; Box 127 [2 of 2]: Greece; NSF—Country File; LBJL. LBJ acknowledged the difficult talks he and Papandreou had. Writing to the prime minister after he said, “I want to tell you again how glad I am that we had an opportunity to visit together and to exchange views on the critical problem of Cyprus. I know that the course of the discussion was not altogether easy for either of us, but I am sure that it is of great importance for those of us who bear the responsibility for government within the Western Alliance to talk honestly together on such grave matters.” See Telegram, Department of State, Rusk to Athens, July 1, 1964, Folder: Greece, Presidential Correspondence; Box 19; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

official UN mediation asked for an unofficial American representative to meet with both sides. That U.S. official was Acheson, who became the key figure in the talks.⁷⁵

In the end, the former secretary of state's mediation proved unsuccessful. Turkey was willing to go along with his ideas, but Greece, as well as Cyprus, was not. By August, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was telling the president, "the Cyprus situation, you probably are aware of, is blowing up."⁷⁶ Johnson came to see Greece as the main obstacle. He eventually lost control, and in undiplomatic language told the Greek ambassador, "America is an elephant. Cyprus is a flea. Greece is a flea. If these two fellows [Makarios and Papandreou] continue itching the elephant, they may just get whacked by the elephant's tail, whacked good." And Johnson was adamant that this message be delivered to the Greek prime minister, telling the ambassador, "Don't forget to tell old Papa-what's-his-name what I told you—you hear?"⁷⁷ Fortunately for LBJ, the worst-case scenario of a Turkish invasion never occurred—at least on his watch. Turkey would take military action in Cyprus in 1974, creating a division of the island that continues to this day. Thus, Johnson's diplomacy did just enough to prevent greater hostilities, yet failed to come up with a long-term solution.

The Administration had a similar experience in Yemen. As the previous chapter noted, in 1962 a civil war divided the nation and resulted in a proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Kennedy had tried personal diplomacy to ameliorate the situation, and Johnson followed suit. Indeed, mere weeks after Kennedy's assassination, Rostow advised LBJ to send Egyptian

⁷⁵ Brands, "America Enters the Cyprus Tangle," 356.

⁷⁶ LBJ Conversation with Robert McNamara, August 9, 1964, Conversation WH6408-14-4832, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁷⁷ As quoted in Lawrence S. Whittner, *American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 303. As George Ball noted, Johnson "liked Prime Minister Inonu, with whom he could talk straight forwardly. If the Greek leader had show anything like the same understanding, serious progress could have been made." Regarding Makarios and the troubles he caused the Administration, Ball mused that the Cypriot leader "must be cheating about his age; No one could acquire that so much guile in only fifty-one years." See Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, 344, 355.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Saudi Crown Prince Faisal (who was the real center of power in the kingdom and would become king the following year) messages urging both to show restraint in Yemen. To the crown prince a letter was proposed. "Such a letter from you," Rostow told the president, "may be the key to persuading Faysal [sic], and forestalling any ugly crisis at the end of the year." Nasser was to receive an oral message, "designed to remind him too that you, like President Kennedy, are personally interested in Yemen." Such messages were seen as key to the Administration's efforts in Yemen. "This personal Presidential diplomacy has been a crucial element in enabling us to control the Yemen crisis," Rostow noted, "such evidence of your own determination to continue weighing in will have a major calming effect."⁷⁸

Throughout his term Johnson would continue to communicate with both Faisal and Nasser. The dynamics with each man, however, were different. Whereas Faisal headed a U.S. ally, Nasser did not. Johnson tried to continue JFK's more conciliatory policy toward the Egyptian president, but Yemen, Egypt's acquisition of increasing amounts of Soviet arms, and LBJ's personal affinity for Israel and dislike of Nasser hindered this approach.⁷⁹ The Administration came to have very little faith in him. Nasser "has not performed in Yemen," Rusk

⁷⁸ Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, December 12, 1963, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Correspondence Vol. 1 [2 of 2]; Box 48; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

⁷⁹ The outlook of Johnson could be summed up by a comment from one of his aides, John Roche: "I confess that I look on the Israelis as Texans and Nasser as Santa Ana." In his memoir Johnson said that Nasser "had been trying to dominate the Arab world" since he came to power rather than "improving the lot of his own people." There was no love lost between the two leaders. In one burst of anger, after Egyptian students burned down a U.S. Information Agency library in Cairo in December 1964, LBJ said Nasser could "go to hell." And for his part Nasser said, "We are not going to accept gangsterism by cowboys." But the Administration did make some attempts to have LBJ personally connect with Nasser, such as having the president meet with his daughter and son-in-law on their U.S. honeymoon, sending a personal message on the birth of his grandson, and a note of condolence when his father died. Such attempts at personal diplomacy, it was hoped, might "help to soften somewhat Nasser's suspicions of us," and make him doubt "whether you're [LBJ] personally committed to his downfall as some of his people tell him," Rostow advised the president. See Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 31; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 290-291; Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, "Letter from Nasser," October 13, 1966, Folder: United Arab Republic—Presidential Correspondence [2 of 2]; Box 55; NSF-Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL; Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, "Oral Condolences to Nasser," October 4, 1968, Memorandum, Benjamin H. Read to Rostow, "Condolences on Death of President Nasser's Father," October 3, 1968, Folder: United Arab Republic—Presidential Correspondence [1 of 2]; Box 55; NSF-Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

told Johnson in April 1964. “He is undermining us in the wheel of space and he is pitching this arms race into the Near East.”⁸⁰

Yet, though on better terms with Faisal, it did not mean the Administration had an easy task, as it had the burden of trying to prevent a wider conflict while also reassuring an ally. The president’s early letter to Faisal received a positive response. The crown prince said he hoped that the “frank rapport” he had with Kennedy would continue with Johnson, as this would not only strengthen ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia, but also take relations to “new heights.” Regarding Yemen, Faisal agreed to extend a disengagement accord for two months.⁸¹ But as is the general pattern in such personal diplomacy, LBJ needed to frequently reassure Faisal. “Our oil-rich friend has been very cooperative,” Komer told the president, “but gets periodically nervous about whether we’re still interested in him and whether Khrushchev and Nasser aren’t in cahoots.” The U.S. ambassador in Saudi Arabia had been “pleading” for the president to calm the Saudi leader, and since the United States did not give much aid to Saudi Arabia, “your personal relationship with Faysal [sic] is our best instrument of policy,” Komer advised Johnson, who approved a letter.⁸²

In September 1964, Faisal and Nasser met face-to-face and were able to agree to a framework for a settlement in Yemen. The accord, however, never came into fruition, and within less than a year the two sides were again on the brink of hostilities. Faisal and Nasser met again, and again came to an agreement. After the two Arab leaders’ first deal, the Administration’s position was to let the parties involved come to a solution on their own. Instead of direct U.S.

⁸⁰ LBJ Conversation with Dean Rusk, April 9, 1964, Tape WH6404.05, Citation #2941, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

⁸¹ Telegram from the Embassy in Saudi Arabia to the Department of State, January 12, 1964, doc. 221, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI: Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2000), 424-426.

⁸² Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, June 13, 1964, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Correspondence Vol. 1 [2 of 2]; Box 48; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

involvement, the Administration pushed both sides to resolve the situation peacefully and let the people of Yemen decide their own future. After the second agreement between Faisal and Nasser, Johnson sent the now Saudi king a message of encouragement. Noting the “great pleasure” that news of the accord gave him, the president extended his “warmest congratulations” and “sincerest hopes” that this most recent understanding would end the conflict.⁸³

Johnson’s hopes of a permanent settlement, however, proved illusory. By 1966, the Yemen situation remained unsettled and hostilities between Saudi Arabia and Egypt endured. In February the State Department again urged a letter of reassurance to the king. Trying to balance its desire for a resolution but yet not get too involved, the letter was “carefully drafted...to skirt the prickly Yemen issue, but gently plug for a statesmanlike political compromise.”⁸⁴ In June, Faisal traveled to the United States to meet with the president. It was a delicate task for the Administration. “King Faisal’s visit will depend—more than usual—as much on the tone you set as on the substance,” Rostow told Johnson. The king had many worries on his mind, and was concerned about U.S. policy and possible “Zionist influence.” He feared communist incursions into the Middle East, and was worried about American attempts to reach out to Nasser, believing that the Administration wanted to make him their “chosen instrument” in the region, which only amplified his resentment of the Egyptian leader. It was the president’s job to reassure Faisal on all these fronts.⁸⁵

⁸³ Letter, Johnson to Faisal, August 31, 1965, Folder: Saudi Arabia, Presidential Correspondence [4 of 4]; Box 48; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

⁸⁴ Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, February 24, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Correspondence Vol. 1 [2 of 2]; Box 48; NSF—Special Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

⁸⁵ Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, June 18, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Trip to US 6/21-7/1/66 [1 of 2]; Box 155: Saudi Arabia; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

The task was made more complicated by differing views over how much ceremony to show the king. Though it “had been exploring ways of stepping up the dignity of state visits,” the State Department did not think that Faisal’s visit was a good place to start. “A big show for Faisal might intensify his struggle with Cairo and worsen our own poor relations with Nasser,” Rostow told Johnson. Though the king was more modern than his predecessors—which was not saying much—Saudi Arabia was “still a mighty backward place,” and additionally, “he has not worked for a Yemen settlement with 100% good faith.”⁸⁶ While State wanted to keep things relatively low-key, some on the NSC, however, thought a bit differently: “He fears that the US somehow will let him down during his visit. We therefore must treat him with due respect. The parade and reception must go on!”⁸⁷

Overall, the Administration’s objective was to reassure Faisal of American support and avoid greater fissures in the Middle East. To do this the president had to perform a balancing act. He needed to make the king feel he was “his friend without thinking he has a blank check to pick a fight with Nasser.”⁸⁸ In a private hour and twenty minute meeting with just Faisal and an interpreter, Johnson followed that advice and skillfully showed understanding and sympathy for

⁸⁶ Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, May 30, 1966, “Raising the Level of State Visits: The Upcoming Case of King Faisal,” May 30, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Trip to US 6/21-7/1/66 [2 of 2]; Box 155: Saudi Arabia; NSF—Country File; LBJL. This notion of Saudi Arabia being a backward place manifested itself when the Administration was deciding what kind of event to hold. When the State Department recommended a “mixed affair” that would include men and women, a suggestion promoted by the Saudi ambassador and his wife, Faisal was willing to have women there—as long as they were not Saudi women. Thinking that it would be awkward to have American women present but not Saudi women, the event was turned into a stag dinner instead. Mrs. Al-Sowayei, the Saudi ambassador’s wife, was “sore and talking,” Rostow reported. And he noted that the whole episode was evidence of a struggle between liberal and conservative factions in Saudi Arabia. See Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, June 14, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Trip to US 6/21-7/1/66 [1 of 2]; Box 155: Saudi Arabia; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁸⁷ To Rostow, “Re Faisal’s Visit,” June 13, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Trip to US 6/21-7/1/66 [2 of 2]; Box 155: Saudi Arabia; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

⁸⁸ Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, June 20, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI*. Attached to the memo was advice from the U.S. ambassador in Riyadh Herman Eilts. He told LBJ that when talking with the king, “it may be helpful to know that he reacts positively to warmth, candor and confidence. A good way to get him to unbend is to ask his views. He usually gives them frankly, even in dissent. Where he agrees, his word is his bond...Above all, the King is a good friend. He would like to be reassured that his friendship is appreciated.”

the king's troubles. When the two joined their advisers after their talks, the president said "they had a delightful talk together...he did not know when he had so enjoyed such a visit and that he and the King had established real rapport."⁸⁹ While partly LBJ bluster, Faisal was apparently satisfied with his visit. The U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia reported that the king "expressed...deep appreciation for the President's warm reception which very much impressed him."⁹⁰

Like with Cyprus, the situation in Yemen was never satisfactorily resolved during Johnson's time in office. Outright war between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, however, did not occur. But that had as much to do with other events as Johnson's diplomacy. In the aftermath of the Six Day War in 1967, Egypt withdrew its forces, removing a major source of tension between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Fighting would continue in Yemen until 1970, when both sides agreed to end hostilities. The role presidential personal diplomacy had in preventing direct conflict between Egypt and Saudi Arabia is unclear, but Johnson's urgings most likely gave both sides pause before escalating. And whether or not personal diplomacy had a major impact in Cyprus or Yemen is, in this instance, beside the point. The Johnson Administration felt compelled to prevent those situations from further deterioration, and believed that the president's direct engagement with his counterparts was the best way to achieve that.

"The More the Soviet Leaders and I Understood Each Other's Thinking, the Better It Would Be For All Concerned": Cold War Personal Diplomacy

Within days of taking office, Johnson sent a letter to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Meeting with King Faisal, June 21, 1966, doc. 276, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI*, 528. For LBJ and Faisal's private talks, see Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Meeting with King Faisal, June 21, 1966, doc. 275, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXI*, 523-527.

⁹⁰ Memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, "Faisal—completely relaxed," June 25, 1966, Folder: Saudi Arabia, King Faisal Trip to US 6/21-7/1/66 [1 of 2]; Box 155: Saudi Arabia; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

As he recalled, the aim of the letter, and subsequent ones, was “extending the hand of peace.”⁹¹ The dangers and pressures of the Cold War made such overtures seem necessary. “I was totally convinced...that the more the Soviet leaders and I understood each other’s thinking, the better it would be for all concerned,” Johnson wrote in his memoir.⁹² He believed that personal diplomacy was the best way to prevent Khrushchev misjudging him and possibly increasing tensions, something he felt had happened to Kennedy. Ironically, this had also resulted from personal diplomacy after JFK met the Soviet leader in Vienna in 1961. But unlike his predecessor, Johnson would not meet with Khrushchev anytime soon. Early in 1964 there was talk of a meeting between the two leaders, and though the president thought such a summit would be beneficial, he was not prepared to leave the country his first year in office. Instead, he engaged in a regular correspondence with Khrushchev where they exchanged views on various issues. By the fall of 1964, Johnson felt that “we were beginning to get our separate viewpoints across.”⁹³ Then in October there was a shakeup of Soviet leadership and Khrushchev was replaced. “All the careful work, the exchanges of letters, and the gradual understanding of Khrushchev’s thinking and reactions had been undone,” Johnson lamented. “I knew I would have to start all over again and get to know the new man, or men, who decided Kremlin policy.”⁹⁴

Johnson’s outlook was not unique. Cold War presidents felt the need to engage with their Soviet counterparts. Especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the world came uncomfortably close to nuclear war, presidents believed that communication and better understanding was key to avoiding such future danger. Thus the installation of the “hot line,”

⁹¹ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 25.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 468.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 469.

allowing the leaders of the United States and Soviet Union to quickly communicate during a crisis. Also, fears of nuclear warfare led the American public, as well as people all over the world, to desire close contact between American presidents and Soviet leadership. Whatever the reality, U.S.-Soviet summits appeared to signal decreasing tension.

By personally promoting peace a president could receive positive press and be portrayed as a statesman as well. Conversely, if things went poorly, the president could be attacked as either weak or inept at diplomacy. Presidents also had to worry about public disillusionment if highly publicized summit meetings did not produce concrete achievements. “It seemed inevitable,” Johnson recalled, “that any meeting between leaders of the two most powerful nations would automatically raise unrealistic expectations of major accomplishments.”⁹⁵

At a press conference less than a month after taking office, a reporter asked Johnson his thoughts on an early meeting with Khrushchev. The president did not foreclose the option. “I am ready and willing to meet with any of the world leaders at any time there is an indication a meeting would be fruitful and productive,” he replied.⁹⁶ As noted, however, he was not really ready to meet with the Soviet leader at this time, but he was interested in a correspondence. Once Khrushchev left the Soviet scene, Johnson continued his personal diplomacy with his replacement Alexei Kosygin. The private messages between the president and Soviet leaders were dubbed a “pen pal” correspondence. According to one NSC staffer, the value of such exchanges was “psychological as well as political,” and especially important “during times of crisis.”⁹⁷ Others were not always as keen on the pen pal channel. Llewellyn “Tommy”

⁹⁵ Ibid., 468.

⁹⁶ “The President’s News Conference,” December 18, 1963, *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (hereafter *PP*), Lyndon B. Johnson: 1963-1964, Vol. 1, November 22, 1963 to June 30, 1964 (Washington, D.C.: GPO), 65.

⁹⁷ David Klein to Bundy, “Another Try at Pen Pals,” June 21, 1965, Folder: Pen Pal Correspondence Kosygin; Box 8; NSF—Head of State Correspondence; LBJL. Such messages were outside normal diplomatic channels and therefore not formal documents. The format provided the opportunity for a freer exchange of ideas, and the content

Thompson, U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, had “reservations” about it, believing that too many of the issues discussed were routine and better handled through regular diplomatic channels. The White House, however, did not necessarily share these concerns, and sought to make Thompson more amenable.⁹⁸

As messages went back and forth between the White House and the Kremlin, discussions continued over a possible summit, and publically Johnson discussed the issue. In his 1965 State of the Union address he said, “I hope the new Soviet leaders can visit America so they can learn about our country at firsthand.”⁹⁹ He followed this up a month later, again stating his desire for Soviet leaders to come to the United States: “I have reason to believe that the Soviet leadership would welcome my visit to their country—as I would be very glad to do. I am hopeful that before the year is out this exchange of visits between us may occur. As I have said so often before, the longest journey begins with a single step—and I believe that such visits would reassure an anxious world that our two nations are each striving toward the goal of peace.”¹⁰⁰

Behind the scenes wrangling occurred over whether Johnson should go to the Soviet Union, or should Soviet leaders come to the United States. The Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, thought protocol might dictate that Johnson go the Soviet Union, since a Soviet leader had come to the United States in the late 1950s, but no president had gone to the Soviet Union. In talks with the ambassador, Bundy said protocol was not important in this instance, and urged Dobrynin to “impress upon his government the sincerity” of the president’s desire that Soviet leaders come to the United States. Bundy furthered the case for a U.S. summit by noting that if

of the messages were not widely shared outside the White House. For example, one NSC staffer suggested that pen pal messages only be shared with eight other individuals outside the White House, including the Secretaries of State and Defense, as well as the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union. See Memorandum, Spurgeon Keeny to Rostow, May 3, 1966, Folder: Kosygin [1 of 7]; Box 10; NSF—Walt Rostow; LBJL.

⁹⁸ David Klein to Bundy, “Talk with Ambassador Thompson about Pen Pals,” March 3, 1965, Folder: Pen Pal Correspondence Kosygin; Box 8; NSF—Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

⁹⁹ “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 4, 1965, *PP: 1965, Vol. 1*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ “Remarks Upon Receiving the Anti-Defamation League Award,” February 3, 1965, *Ibid.*, 129.

LBJ went to the Soviet Union, he would have to travel to Europe first to confer with allies.¹⁰¹

About a month after talks between Bundy and Dobrynin, Ambassador Thompson reported that the Soviets seemed willing to come to the United States first, but they wanted a signal that the president would make a return visit.¹⁰² But, like with so much of Johnson's foreign policy agenda, Vietnam intruded and prevented an early meeting. When LBJ began bombing North Vietnam in February 1965 it coincided with a Kosygin visit to Hanoi, much to the chagrin of the Soviets, who then became cool to the idea of a meeting at the highest-level.¹⁰³

It would take until 1967 for Johnson to meet with a Soviet leader. And that meeting itself was not planned, but the result of a local conflict that became a Cold War confrontation. In June 1967, war between Israel and her Arab neighbors, most prominently Egypt, broke out. In the month leading up to hostilities the Johnson Administration tried to calm the situation, sending presidential communications to both Egyptian President Nasser and Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. "I am following very closely the tense situation," Johnson wrote Eshkol on May 17. "I would like to emphasize in the strongest terms the need to avoid any action on your side which would add further violence and tension in your area."¹⁰⁴ But in the days after the message the situation continued to deteriorate, and as it appeared that Israel was going to take military action against Egypt, Johnson sent another message to the prime minister urging him not to initiate

¹⁰¹ Memorandum, Bundy to Johnson, "Conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin," January 5, 1965, Folder: Pen Pal Correspondence Kosygin; Box 8; NSF—Head of State Correspondence; LBJL. On this need to consult with allies, journalist Philip Geyelin wrote, "As one long-time intimate of the President put it then, 'This is not a man [LBJ] who would go off on a foreign adventure until he has the heartland in good shape'; by 'heartland' he meant the allies." See Geyelin, *Lyndon B. Johnson and the World*, 86.

¹⁰² Memorandum, Llewellyn Thompson to Bundy, February 1, 1965, Folder: Pen Pal Correspondence Kosygin; Box 8; NSF—Head of State Correspondence; LBJL.

¹⁰³ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, May 17, 1967, doc. 8, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIX, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2004), 10. For Johnson's recollection of his prewar diplomacy, see Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 289-297.

hostilities.¹⁰⁵ As a result of the president's message and assurances of support, Eshkol said that Israel would refrain from taking action—at least temporarily. “I feel I must make it clear in all candour,” the prime minister warned, “that the continuation of this position for any considerable time is out of the question.”¹⁰⁶ Time would run out less than a week later.

To Nasser, Johnson implored, “Right now, of course, your task and mine is not to look back, but to rescue the Middle East—and the whole human community—from a war I believe no one wants.”¹⁰⁷ The Administration felt that this kind of presidential communication with the Egyptian president was important. “Nasser feels cut off from the United States,” Rostow said. “He is an informal rather than formal man, and State Department communications are, for him, no substitute for informal, high-level—Presidential letters and emissaries.”¹⁰⁸ Overall, Johnson and Nasser were far apart on their views, and Rostow considered the Egyptian president's response to LBJ's message “quite uncompromising.” But he was open to a dialogue in order to combat what he believed was the false characterization of his positions.¹⁰⁹

Despite Administration efforts, war broke out when Israel preemptively attacked Egypt on June 5. Within six days the fighting was over and Israel had thoroughly defeated its Arab neighbors, but not before the United States and Soviet Union had some tense moments. The Six Day War was the first time that the “hot line” between the United States and Soviet Union was

¹⁰⁵ Telegram from Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, May 27, 1967, doc. 86, *Ibid.*, 162-164.

¹⁰⁶ Diplomatic Note From the Israeli Ambassador (Harman) to Secretary of State Rusk, May 30, 1967, doc. 102, *Ibid.*, 187-188.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic, May 22, 1967, doc. 34, *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, May 23, 1967, doc. 42, *Ibid.*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁹ Nasser wrote to Johnson, “I am convinced that any joint endeavor on our part to establish communication of thought, might at least contribute to dissipate part of the artificial clouds intended to depict the exercise of right as a sin and the right of defense as aggression.” See Telegram From the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State, June 2, 1967, doc. 134, *Ibid.*, 254, note 1.

used.¹¹⁰ From June 5 to June 10, Johnson and Kosygin exchanged twenty messages over it.¹¹¹

While there was agreement that hostilities should end, when it came down to choosing sides the two diverged. The Administration backed Israel, the Soviets the Arab states. When Israel appeared to be violating a UN ceasefire, the Soviets threatened unilateral intervention. “A very crucial moment has now arrived,” Kosygin told Johnson over the hot line, “which forces us, if military actions are not stopped in the next few hours, to adopt an independent decision. We are ready to do this.” Kosygin knew Soviet action would bring the two nations into “a clash, which will lead to a grave catastrophe,” but if Israel did not comply, “necessary action will be taken, including military.”¹¹²

This message created a situation of the “utmost gravity,” according to Ambassador Thompson. CIA director Richard Helms remembered, “the atmosphere was tense” in the Situation Room, with everyone talking “in the lowest voices I had ever heard in a meeting of that kind.”¹¹³ Johnson carefully worded his response. “I knew my message must be temperate and factual,” he recalled.¹¹⁴ In his reply he sought to assuage Soviet concerns, saying his Administration thought Israel’s compliance extremely important, and it had already conveyed this message and received a reply that Israel was going to abide by the ceasefire.¹¹⁵ To the relief of the White House the situation calmed, and the threat of Soviet intervention passed as the fighting stopped.

¹¹⁰ According to Johnson, the hot line had been used only to send test messages and New Year’s greeting, but had yet been used to communicate in a crisis—its intended purpose. See Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 287.

¹¹¹ “Washington-Moscow ‘Hot-Line’ Exchange,” Folder: USSR Washington-Moscow “Hot-Line” Exchange, June 5-10, 1967; Box 8; NSF—Head of State Correspondence File; LBJL. According to Ambassador Thompson, “the Russians made quite a point that the President be physically present at our end of the hot line before they would start the exchange. They asked more than once when he would be there.” See Memorandum of Conversation, “The Hot Line Exchanges,” November 4, 1968, doc. 245, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIX*, 411.

¹¹² Message From Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, June 10, 1967, doc. 243, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIX*, 409.

¹¹³ Memorandum of Conversation, “The Hot Line Exchanges,” November 4, 1968, doc. 245, *Ibid.*, 414; Memorandum for the Record, “Hot Line Meeting June 10, 1967,” October 22, 1968, doc. 244, *Ibid.*, 410.

¹¹⁴ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 302.

¹¹⁵ Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin, June 10, 1967, doc. 246, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIX*, 414.

“The hot line proved a powerful tool,” Johnson recalled, “not merely, or even mainly, because communications were so rapid.” Rather, “the overriding importance of the hot line was that it engaged immediately the heads of government and their top advisers, forcing prompt attention and decisions.” Like personal diplomacy in general, this could be a double-edged sword. “There was unusual value in this,” Johnson noted, “but also danger. We had to weigh carefully every word and phrase.”¹¹⁶ Kosygin also found great value in their hot line experience, stating that they “had accomplished more on that one day [the first day of the Six Day War] than others could accomplish in three years.”¹¹⁷

The end of shooting in the Middle East did not mean the end of Johnson’s engagement with Kosygin. About a week after the ceasefire took hold, the Soviet premier came to New York to address an emergency session of the UN General Assembly (called to discuss the recent Middle East conflict), which he did June 19. With the Soviet leader in the United States, the question on everyone’s mind was whether the president would meet with him. Johnson’s key advisers seemed of one mind on the question. Defense Secretary McNamara favored a meeting, telling the president that “at a minimum you would take from the meeting an appraisal of Kosygin which should enable you to better predict his behavior and he, in turn, would better understand your character and the resolve which you approach our commitments in Vietnam.”¹¹⁸ Rostow also approved. “I am confident,” he told Johnson, “that your net impact on Kosygin (and through him on his colleagues) will be positive...Kosygin should feel both the steel and compassion; the determination and flexibility; and, above all, your willingness to treat the Soviet Union as one of the two older responsible children in the human family if they will so

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 303.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, “Middle East, NPT, Cuban Subversion, Viet-nam,” June 25, 1967, doc. 235, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV, Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2001), 555.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 221, *Ibid.*, 498.

behave.”¹¹⁹ McGeorge Bundy, now a special adviser to the president, concurred. A meeting would allow Johnson to get “a measure” of the Soviet leader, but more importantly “Kosygin will get a measure of you,” he told the president. “You really do speak, on topics like Vietnam, wider contact, and the Middle East itself, in tones which are significantly different from those of your Secretary of State.”¹²⁰

The Administration believed that the Soviets had a similar motivation for a summit. “There is surely a great drive to see first-hand what makes Lyndon Baines Johnson tick,” the president’s senior adviser on Soviet and Eastern European affairs noted. Also, the Administration thought the Soviets were after the prestige that a summit meeting with the American president could provide. They were “still Number 2,” which “must have been painfully obvious in Moscow” after their Arab clients were soundly defeated in the Six Day War. A summit would allow the Soviets to feel and be perceived as equals.¹²¹

If there was consensus that Johnson should meet with Kosygin and that it would allow both leaders to take measure of the other, there was also agreement that nothing substantial would really come from a summit. “Very little of substance can come from the meeting, and it may even lead to a hard-nose standoff,” Bundy said. And McNamara believed “the chances are less than even” that progress would be made on major issues like Vietnam and arms control.¹²² Whatever the possible benefits, however, the Administration felt that Johnson could not avoid a meeting. The reason? Fear of the domestic repercussions. The American public expected it, and

¹¹⁹ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 223, *Ibid.*, 500.

¹²⁰ Memorandum From the President’s Special Consultant (Bundy) to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 222, *Ibid.*, 499.

¹²¹ Memorandum, Nathaniel Davis to Rostow, “Two Summits and Niagara as the President’s Guest,” June 24, 1967, Folder: USSR, HOLLYBRUSH 6/67, President’s Mtg w/ Chairman Kosygin II; Box 230: Europe and USSR, USSR; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

¹²² Memorandum From the President’s Special Consultant (Bundy) to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 222; Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 221, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 498, 499.

if one did not take place, the president would pay a political price. McNamara, Bundy, and Rostow all concurred on this point as well. “The American public expects that you will meet with Kosygin,” the defense secretary told the president, “and unless the failure to meet is clearly his, the domestic and international price to you of a failure to meet could be substantial.” Bundy said, “If you do not meet Kosygin, who has come as far as New York, the continuing noises (press and politicians) will be awful.” And looking ahead to the election in 1968, Rostow advised Johnson, “at home it will cover your flank to the left and among the columnists. If you don’t do it, they will blame every difficulty that follows on the lack of a meeting. The Republicans will run on: I will go to Moscow.”¹²³ Indeed, as Johnson recalled, after Kosygin announced his trip, “pressures increased on me, from Senators and others, to work out a meeting.”¹²⁴

With the Administration decided on a summit the question then became, where would the two leaders meet? Johnson made it clear that Kosygin was welcome to come to Washington, but the Soviet premier thought the president should come to New York. Neither wanted to be seen as deferring and paying homage to the other. After the defeat of their Arab clients, some Johnson advisers saw the Soviets in a weaker position vis-à-vis the United States, thus advised “let Kosygin come to us,” warning that the Administration should “not give the impression that we desperately want a ‘Summit.’ If we do, the Russians will simply up the ante.”¹²⁵ With neither leader willing to be publically seen as conceding on location, plans shifted to finding a spot halfway between New York and Washington. In conversations with Kosygin at the UN,

¹²³ Memorandum From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 221; Memorandum From the President’s Special Consultant (Bundy) to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 222; Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, June 21, 1967, doc. 223, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 498, 499, 500.

¹²⁴ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 481. Johnson added that domestic pressure aside, he “shared the belief that a frank exchange of views might help clear the air on several questions and might even pave the way for solution of serious problems.”

¹²⁵ Memorandum, John P. Roche to Johnson, June 19, 1967, Folder: USSR, HOLLYBRUSH 6/67, President’s Mtg w/ Chairman Kosygin II; Box 230: Europe and USSR, USSR; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

Secretary of State Rusk proposed meeting at MacGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. But this was a non-starter for the Soviet leader. He was worried about public opinion. If he met with the president on a U.S. military base, “people would wonder what we [U.S.] were trying to demonstrate... whether we had wanted to show him our guns or rockets.”¹²⁶ Eventually both sides agreed to meet at a neutral site in Glassboro, New Jersey. “After dancing around at a distance for almost a week,” the *Washington Post* editorialized, there was finally a “conclusion to what was becoming an awkward and apparently endless minuet.”¹²⁷

At Glassboro there was no fixed agenda, but discussion centered on the Middle East, Vietnam, and arms control, as well as a general discussion of U.S.-Soviet relations. In their tête-à-tête, Kosygin told Johnson “that there was a great deal of clarification needed in order to understand each other’s actions... The direction that US policy was taking was not clear,” and he hoped that their talks would help make American intentions plain. The president agreed with the need for better understanding.¹²⁸ After this first meeting Johnson reported “he got no positive reaction” from the Soviet leader, however, “Kosygin [was] friendly, jolly and warm.”¹²⁹ But the president did want to make progress on issues, particularly arms control negotiations, which he

¹²⁶ Telegram From Secretary of Rusk to the Department of State, June 22, 1967, doc. 227, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 511. The day before Rusk’s talks with Kosygin, an NSC staffer suggested to Rostow Independence Hall in Philadelphia as a possible meeting place. Stating that the location was about halfway between New York and Washington, he said that location would allow the Soviet leader to “honor our shrine of Independence, commemorating our victory over the then ‘imperialists.’ LBJ also could go to honor our independence shrine a few days ahead” of the Fourth of July. The staffer further suggested that maybe the two leaders could hold talks in the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed, which “would have a ceremonial purpose acceptable to both and would be a justification enough in the event that nothing substantive came of it.” Memorandum, Howard Wriggins to Rostow, “A Place for LBJ and K to Meet—Independence Hall, Philadelphia, June 21, 1967, Folder: USSR, HOLLYBRUSH 6/67, President’s Mtg w/ Chairman Kosygin II; Box 230: Europe and USSR, USSR; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

¹²⁷ “The Summit Minuet,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 1967.

¹²⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, June 23, 1967, doc. 229, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 514.

¹²⁹ Record of the President’s Debriefing, doc. 230, *Ibid.*, 528. Kosygin did, however, take the opportunity to complain about the U.S. bombing of Hanoi in 1965 that coincided with his visit there. But overall, cordiality characterized the entire summit, and Johnson displayed some of his personal style. Reporting on the Texas-type barbecue that was served at the gathering, the *New York Times* stated that the talks were “informal [and] folksy, typical of the President and typical of the way he likes to conduct even the highest-level discussions.” See Robert B. Semple, Jr., “Texas Diplomacy Arrives in Jersey: Outdoor Barbecue Is Part of Folksy Johnson Repertory,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1967.

repeatedly tried to engage Kosygin on. The Soviet premier, however, demurred, which Johnson attributed to his political situation back home, as he did not have authorization from other Kremlin leaders to engage with the president.¹³⁰ But the war in Vietnam also hindered LBJ's attempts to connect with Kosygin. As the Soviet leader told the president, he "failed to see true possibilities" for arms control talks "while the Viet Nam war continues and while the Middle East situation remains unsettled."¹³¹

During talks Johnson also recommended that U.S.-Soviet summits become institutionalized. Suggesting meetings should take place every year, he proposed that they "could agree now to set aside a week every year during which all problems would be discussed." Kosygin did not commit himself. Rather he noted that they had the hot line for necessary discussions. Johnson concurred, but noted that yearly meetings would allow for a regular overview of relations, rather than only during crises.¹³²

When it was all over, Johnson recalled having "mixed feelings." While the two leaders failed to reach any agreement that would ameliorate major world problems, he had "hope" that there was better understanding.¹³³ "The world is very small and very dangerous," the president remarked upon returning to the White House. But he believed that his talks with Kosygin "have

¹³⁰ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 484.

¹³¹ Paper Prepared by the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Read), February 21, 1968, doc. 238, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 566.

¹³² Memorandum of Conversation, "Middle East, NPT, Cuban Subversion, Viet-nam," June 25, 1967, doc. 234, *Ibid.*, 555. If this proposal had been accepted it would have increased personal diplomacy not just with the Soviets, but allies as well, who worried what the president and Soviet premier were discussing. During the Glassboro meeting LBJ was advised to send messages to the leaders of Britain, West Germany, and Italy to keep them informed. "All three are certainly on pins and needles about a two-man summit and will be most grateful for such a note, even if it contains no detail," Johnson adviser Francis Bator wrote. See Bator via Rostow to Marvin Watson for the President, June 24, 1967, Folder: USSR, HOLLYBRUSH 6/67, President's Mtg w/ Chairman Kosygin II; Box 230: Europe and USSR, USSR; NSF—Country File; LBJL.

¹³³ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 485.

made it a little smaller still, but also a little less dangerous.”¹³⁴ Johnson was giving voice to the value that many saw in personal diplomacy. In the post-WWII international system, where crises awaited just around the corner, personally engaging Soviet leaders—it was hoped—might have a calming effect.

If Johnson was slightly disappointed about the outcome of his talks with Kosygin, he must have been pleased with the majority of press coverage. Despite scant results, the meeting was cordial and produced a positive atmosphere, and to many it showed that Johnson could be an effective diplomat, something he was often criticized for. “Glassboro may well make it clear,” the *New York Times* wrote, “that Mr. Johnson can handle himself and the nation’s affairs in direct confrontation with major foreign leaders.” And this had an impact beyond just foreign policy. “The domestic political implications are striking,” the *New York Times* continued. Noting that one of Johnson’s major weaknesses was the perception that “he is neither a man of peace nor well-versed in the subtleties of foreign affairs,” the summit helped improve this image. Vietnam was still an albatross that hung on the president, but if relations with the Soviets improved as a result of his diplomacy it might make the conflict seem less dire and take the peace issue away from Republicans in 1968.¹³⁵ Indeed, in the wake of Johnson’s handling of the Six Day War and the summit, pollster Louis Harris found his approval rating jumped eleven points to 58%. Additionally, 67% gave him a positive assessment for his role in “working for peace in the world,” and he held a 12% edge over potential Republican challengers George Romney and Richard Nixon.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ “The President’s Remarks Upon Arrival at the White House Following the Glassboro Meeting With Chairman Kosygin,” June 25, 1967, *PP: 1967, Vol. 1, January 1 to June 30, 1967* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), 652. Johnson’s remarks were broadcast nationwide on radio and television.

¹³⁵ Tom Wicker, “In The Nation: Glassboro and 1968,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1967.

¹³⁶ Louis Harris, “Dramatic Johnson Comeback Traced to His Peace Efforts,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1967. Despite Johnson’s improved numbers on the issue of overall peace, only 35% thought that the Glassboro summit would actually bring the world closer to peace. Fifty-one percent said it would not make a difference. When Richard

“I Would Not Want to Rule Out the Possibility of a Meeting at the Top Level”: LBJ’s Last Gasp

“With America’s sons in the fields far away...and the world’s hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe I should devote an hour or day of my time to any personal partisan cause,” Johnson told the nation on March 31, 1968. “Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.”¹³⁷ With those words it became starkly clear that Vietnam had destroyed Johnson’s presidency. But if LBJ was a lame duck in 1968, somebody forgot to tell him. Despite a low approval rating, he had visions of one last grand summit with Kosygin. In July 1968, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was signed by the United States, Soviet Union, Britain, and forty other nations. The NPT was designed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, with signatories (excluding those already with nuclear weapons) pledging not to develop them. Johnson hoped to follow up this landmark agreement with a conference of non-nuclear nations so they could discuss the consequences of the treaty. Before that meeting, however, the president thought he and Kosygin should meet to show “that the two of us are seriously engaged in the matter of offensive and defensive strategic missiles.”¹³⁸

But Johnson’s dream of a summit would be crushed by the worsening situation in Czechoslovakia. In early 1968, a reform minded government led by Alexander Dubcek came to power. The moves of the new government caused alarm in Moscow, and as the tension

Nixon became president and began to contemplate his own summit with the Soviets, he was thinking of how the summit itself would be more important than the actual arms control agreement that led to the summit. “While SALT [strategic arms limitation talks] means a hell of a lot to the sophisticates,” Nixon told his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, “the summit’s going to be the focus. People think of summits—like that silly Glassboro thing, remember, shot Johnson up ten points in the polls for a month.” See Nixon Conversation with Henry Kissinger, April 14, 1971, Conversation 248-016 (*PRDE* Excerpt A), *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition*, <http://prde.ei.virginia.edu>.

¹³⁷ “The President’s Address to the Nation Announcing Steps To Limit the War in Vietnam and Reporting His Decision Not To Seek Reelection,” March 31, 1968, *PP: 1968-1969, Vol. I, January 1 to June 30, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1970), 476.

¹³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary of State Rusk and the Soviet Ambassador (Dobrynin), July 1, 1968, doc. 278, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 655.

increased, some in the Administration had second thoughts about a summit. “I don’t believe I’d go near Kosygin during the time that Czechoslovakia is still hot,” Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford told the president. “You could get caught up in that and I’m just afraid it would be difficult for you to extricate yourself. You could have a talk with Kosygin and the day you talked with him Soviet troops could move on Czechoslovakia or the day after you left, troops could move in...they’d be tied together in some way.”¹³⁹

But even as the situation in Czechoslovakia deteriorated, Johnson still pushed for a summit. The Soviets were open to the idea, with Ambassador Dobrynin reporting that his government had a “positive attitude” toward potential talks.¹⁴⁰ On August 20, the Administration was on the verge of formally announcing a summit.¹⁴¹ Then came news the Soviets had invaded Czechoslovakia. The planned meeting was now in jeopardy. The Soviets appeared to separate the issues of the invasion from the prospects of a summit, but it was not that easy for the Administration.¹⁴² If Johnson met with Soviet leaders he would be seen as condoning and sanctioning Kremlin aggression.¹⁴³ A couple weeks after the invasion the president confirmed what many suspected. ““The developments of the last few days,”” he said, meant that a summit

¹³⁹ Record of Meeting, July 29, 1968, doc. 282, Ibid., 666.

¹⁴⁰ Telegram From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, August 19, 1968, doc. 286, Ibid., 681.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, August 20, 1968, doc. 288, Ibid., 683-686.

¹⁴² Telegram From the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council (Smith) to President Johnson in Texas, August 28, 1968, doc. 291, Ibid., 690-691.

¹⁴³ As the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Charles Bohlen told Dean Rusk, “Any such meeting at this time would have nothing in my opinion but bad effect for the U.S. and its general position in the world...It is difficult to see anything that could be constructively accomplished by a meeting at this juncture. It would certainly confirm the Soviets in the belief that they can virtually do almost anything in the world and still have ‘business as usual’ with the U.S.” See Memorandum From the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Bohlen) to Secretary of State Rusk, October 15, 1968, doc. 311, Ibid., 738.

was not “in the offing at this moment.”¹⁴⁴ Just like world crises could lead to personal diplomacy, they could also prevent it.

But summit talk did not die. The secretary general of the UN, U Thant, also pushed for one. He wanted a meeting of leaders from the “Big Four”—the United States, Soviet Union, Britain, and France. Rather than see the crisis in Czechoslovakia as a reason for the president and Soviet premier not to meet, he believed the opposite. “Hard-liners and Hawks in many countries...derive from the experience of Czechoslovakia encouragement and nourishment for their position,” he argued, talks at the highest-level were needed to continue down the path of détente.¹⁴⁵ No Big Four summit was held, but the fact that there was even discussion of it demonstrates the pressure and urgency that Cold War crises gave to personal diplomacy.

For its part, the Administration gave mixed signals about a Soviet summit. In early October, Secretary of State Rusk said that a meeting between Johnson and Soviet leaders was most likely not going to happen because of the “very difficult” atmosphere in the wake the invasion.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, however, the press believed that Johnson was still very much open to a summit, which “would help Mr. Johnson replace the ‘war’ image that has marred his Presidency and allow him, his intimates say, to leave the international stage as a ‘peacemaker.’”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, by December Rusk had changed his tune, stating on CBS’s “Face the

¹⁴⁴ Carroll Kilpatrick, “No Summit, President Indicates,” *Washington Post*, September 7, 1968. In some ways Johnson’s attempts at “bridge building” in Eastern Europe, a series of small steps intended to lay the cultural and economic groundwork for larger gains in the region, was in part responsible for the invasion. The success of bridge building inspired Czech leaders and worried Soviet officials, thus prompting military action. See Mitchell Lerner, “Trying to Find the Guy Who Invited Them’: Lyndon Johnson, Bridge Building, and the End of the Prague Spring,” *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 77-103.

¹⁴⁵ Early W. Foell, “Thant Urges 2-Stage Summit Meeting of Big Four at U.N.,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1968.

¹⁴⁶ Robert H. Estabrook, “Rusk Says Soviets Dim Summit Hope,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 1968.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Welles, “Johnson Still Considering Parley With Top Russians,” *New York Times*, November 11, 1968.

Nation” that though no exact plans existed, ““I would not want to rule out the possibility of a meeting at the top level.””¹⁴⁸

“Moscow is clearly ready to go—and eager,” Rostow said in mid-November, and Johnson was eager as well.¹⁴⁹ In two months time, however, Richard Nixon would be sworn in as the nation’s thirty-seventh president. But this would not stop LBJ. After reflecting on the issue Johnson told Nixon, “I should proceed.” Talks on strategic missiles was something the United States had been striving to get the Soviets to commit to for close to a decade, he told the president-elect, and now that they were ready, there should be no further delay. LBJ noted that the Soviets were also concerned that the NPT was losing momentum and further action was necessary to get more nations on board. And as a final incentive to get Nixon’s support, the president told his successor that the beginning of missile talks would most likely lead to “good behavior in Europe,” which would carry over into the first months of Nixon’s term.¹⁵⁰

Everyone recognized that for the outgoing president to conduct such major talks with only months left in his term was extraordinary. C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* called the idea of a last-minute summit “lunacy.” The only thing it would accomplish, he argued, was “a propaganda appearance of condoning Czechoslovakia’s rape. It could conceivably give the Kremlin just the needed fillip to avoid being dragged down by its mounting economic crisis.” The editorial board for his paper, however, thought that despite Johnson’s lame duck status, “the world can only benefit by having talks begin as soon as possible.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Chalmers M. Roberts, “Summit Is Hinted By Rusk: LBJ, Kosygin Might Discuss Missile Curb,” *Washington Post*, December 2, 1968.

¹⁴⁹ Information Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson,” November 14, 1968, doc. 318, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 754.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum From President Johnson to President-elect Nixon, November 25, 1968, doc. 322, *Ibid.*, 761-762.

¹⁵¹ C. L. Sulzberger, “Foreign Affairs: Footnotes to Folly,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1968; “Opening the Missile Talks,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1968.

If there was a summit, Johnson told Nixon he was more than welcome to accompany him. But the president-elect was cool to the idea, and in general did not want to be constrained by negotiations of the outgoing president.¹⁵² And even some in the Administration were not sure it was a good idea. “While [I] appreciate [the] President’s desire to advance [the] cause of peace before leaving office,” Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson wrote, “I confess I am skeptical that much can be achieved.”¹⁵³ By mid-December it seemed that both the Soviets and Johnson had second thoughts.¹⁵⁴ Both sides realized that LBJ’s time was quickly coming to an end, and with Nixon not enthusiastic about the prospects of a summit prior to his inauguration, the Soviets thought it best to wait.

Conclusion

The fact that Johnson did not have a lame duck summit with Soviet leadership is not surprising. What is amazing, however, is that the Administration even considered it. That such a major initiative would be contemplated with mere months left in office gives testament to Johnson’s deep desire to have a legacy defining encounter with the Soviets.¹⁵⁵ But it also

¹⁵² It was reported that privately Nixon called Johnson’s desire for a summit “‘most unwise.’” Before the election, however, Nixon was keen to visit the Soviet Union according to Ambassador Dobrynin. As Rusk recounted his talks with Dobrynin: “He added, *very much off the record*, that Mr. Nixon has approached the Soviet Government on three occasions about a visit to Moscow following the Republican Convention. He said that they had simply not replied to the first two inquiries but now have a third inquiry in front of them which they are thinking about. I told him that I was not in a position at this moment to offer any advice on that subject but did point to the habit of many candidates to want to make a ‘grand tour’ of foreign capitals and that this has presented problems for busy leaders of other Governments.” See Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Johnson’s ‘Summit Bug’ Worries Nixon, Who Has His Own Ideas,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1968; Chalmers M. Roberts, “Prospects Diminishing For LBJ-Kosygin Talks,” *Washington Post*, December 14, 1968; Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary of State Rusk and the Soviet Ambassador (Dobrynin), July 1, 1968, doc. 278, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 656-657.

¹⁵³ Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, November 29, 1968, doc. 327, *Ibid.*, 777.

¹⁵⁴ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, December 11, 1968, doc. 330, *Ibid.*, 780-781.

¹⁵⁵ For Johnson’s desire for a summit for domestic political reasons, see Jeremi Suri, “Lyndon Johnson and the Global Disruptions of 1968,” in *Looking Back at LBJ*, 65-69. John Prado, however, takes the opposite view, arguing that contemplating a summit in 1968, “Johnson concerned himself with the substance, the need, not his own

encapsulates the theme of this chapter. In the second half of the twentieth century, where the next international crisis was always lurking around the corner, and issues of war and peace dominated, there was the feeling that personal diplomacy was necessary—even if it was at the end of a presidency.

In a Gallup poll conducted in the first part of August 1968, LBJ's approval rating was 35%.¹⁵⁶ This was the period when the Administration was finalizing plans for a Johnson-Kosygin meeting. Despite a majority of Americans disapproving of the president, a poll in October showed 57% favored a summit with the Soviets.¹⁵⁷ That was an astounding amount considering a month earlier barely a third of those polled approved of the president, yet they favored him engaging in high stakes negotiations. And this was *after* the Soviets went into Czechoslovakia.

What accounts for these seemingly contradictory results? Johnson's approval rating did improve in September—rising to 42%—but that was hardly overwhelming support.¹⁵⁸ No, what made a summit seem like a good idea to many Americans and Johnson himself were the imperatives of the international system. As Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin told the Administration, “There is no doubt that for the leaders of the two greatest states of the world there is [a lot] to exchange opinions about—in the field of relations directly between our two countries as well as in the field of pending big international problems. And there has piled up quite a few of such problems.”¹⁵⁹ Nuclear arms, the Middle East, and Vietnam were a few such

popularity.” See John Prado, “Prague Spring and SALT,” *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson*, H.W. Brands, ed. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 32.

¹⁵⁶ Gallup Poll, August 7-12, 1968, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

¹⁵⁷ Harris Survey, October 1968, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

¹⁵⁸ Gallup Poll, September 26-October 1, 1968, iPoll Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

¹⁵⁹ Telegram From the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, August 19, 1968, doc. 286, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Vol. XIV*, 681.

issues that the two sides sought to deal with. The urgency of confronting such issues weighed on the Administration and helps explain why it would push for a summit with so little time left.

In resigning himself to the fact that there would be no Johnson-Kosygin parley, Rostow told the president, “It may also be a decision we shall regret more than any other in the years ahead. Nuclear agreements are always marginal and tough. If we do not hold the meeting, the new administration may let the NPT and missiles slip in priority. Time will pass. Men and situations will change. And mankind may move down the wrong fork in the road for what will, with hindsight, look like relatively trivial reasons.” Upon reading the memo, Johnson wrote at the bottom, “I agree,” and made a line connecting to “we shall regret more,” which he circled.¹⁶⁰

In April 1964, LBJ complained that domestic doubts about his leadership ability (because he was a southerner) would affect his ability to lead abroad. Critics question “whether I can bring ‘em together on these important issues of the day, whether it’s poverty or whatnot,” the president lamented. “I don’t know whether I can lead the world and people like the Prime Minister of Canada, like the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the Chancellor of Germany and Mr. Khrushchev if my own people feel this way about me.”¹⁶¹ For Johnson it would be a vicious cycle. Foreign affairs—Vietnam in particular—sapped his ability to govern at home. His weakened domestic position, in turn, crippled his ability to lead abroad.

“His days are so full of trouble,” Lady Bird told her diary in May 1965.¹⁶² From the agony of Vietnam, to flare-ups in Panama, Cyprus, the Middle East, and the Dominican Republic—not to mention protests and riots at home—Johnson had a never-ending series of problems to deal with. But this was not unique to LBJ. All modern presidents faced international

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, December 11, 1968, doc. 330, *Ibid.*, 780-781. For Johnson’s handwriting, see note 4.

¹⁶¹ Beschloss, *Taking Charge*, 310.

¹⁶² Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 322.

and domestic crises. Some may have been luckier than others, but trouble always loomed. And when it was a global emergency, presidents in the second half of the twentieth century often used personal diplomacy. During the Cold War in particular, when world crises were a way of life, it often fell to the president—as the leader of the world’s dominant power—to mediate, lower tensions, and prevent a wider conflict. Sometimes this was successful, other times not. As this chapter has shown, Johnson was frequently unsuccessful in his personal diplomacy, and he was often not keen about engaging with his foreign counterparts. But despite the poor track record and his frequent aversion, he used personal diplomacy because of the pressures placed on him by international events, something other modern presidents would do as well. The odds of success may have been slim, but it was often seen as the best option to manage an increasingly dangerous and complex world.

CHAPTER 5

“ANOTHER SENSATION...MR. NIXON IS IN THE PROCESS OF TAKING HIS PLACE AMONG THE GREAT PRESIDENTS OF THE U.S.”: RICHARD NIXON AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

“An election loss,” Richard Nixon told Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, “was really more painful than a physical wound in war. The latter wounds the body—the other wounds the spirit.”¹ Having felt the sting of electoral defeat before, Nixon was determined not to suffer that fate again in 1972. To achieve victory he sought to leverage every available resource—whether legal or not. Domestically this led to abuses like Watergate. Internationally it played a role in Nixon’s historic trips to China and the Soviet Union.

Driven by a realist outlook, a perspective he shared with his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, Nixon sought to avoid idealistic policy and focus on what he deemed the national interest. Weakened by Vietnam as other nations grew in strength, the United States was no longer the dominant power it once was. The bipolarity of the global arena that had existed since the end of World War II was breaking down. The nation’s overwhelming dominance had diminished, and Nixon and Kissinger sought a way to move forward and stabilize America’s global position, thus their pursuit of détente with the Soviets, rapprochement with China, and ending the Vietnam War.

But these moves were not made out of desperation. In absolute terms, American power—economic, military, and technological—was still supreme. To stunt the relative decline of U.S. power, however, Nixon and Kissinger sought new approaches. For them, the various policies and actions they took were interconnected. They believed success in one area would lead to improvement in another. Rapprochement with China would strengthen America’s position

¹ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 573.

against the Soviet Union, and détente with the Soviets would enhance America's posture in relation to China. Improved relations with both communist powers would then help in Vietnam, and ending the conflict in Southeast Asia would further relations with both communist powers. Nixon and Kissinger were confident their efforts would enhance America's strategic position, and the nation would emerge from this tumultuous period stronger with its dominance intact.²

To further this agenda, Nixon engaged in personal diplomacy with Chinese and Soviet leaders. When Nixon traveled to Moscow and Beijing in 1972, part of his goal was to establish a productive working relationship with Soviet and Chinese leaders that would hopefully advance his strategy. At the same time, however, interacting with his communist counterparts bolstered his reelection bid. While forming personal ties with Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Leonid Brezhnev mattered, the spectacle of traveling to meet them was also crucial. It has been said that diplomacy is a type of "theater," and if so, personal diplomacy between world leaders is diplomatic drama at the highest-level. For Nixon, China and the Soviet Union became a stage and its leaders props in a theatrical performance where he was the star and the audience the American voting public.³

Presidents would rarely admit the extent to which domestic politics influence their foreign policy. That would appear self-serving and opportunistic. But all presidents are politicians. They want to be held in high public esteem, be reelected, and leave a positive legacy. Thus, domestic political concerns cannot help but creep into a president's calculations.⁴ Using

² Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4-8.

³ For this notion of diplomacy as performance, see Raymond Cohen, *Theatre of Power: The Art of Diplomatic Signalling* (London: Longman, 1987). For Nixon's use of diplomacy for image building and domestic gain, see David Greenberg, "Nixon as Statesman: The Failed Campaign," in *Nixon in the World*, 45-66.

⁴ For a survey of how foreign affairs featured in presidential elections from 1940-1960, see Robert A. Divine, *Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections, Volume 1, 1940-1968; Volume 2, 1952-1960* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974). See also Melvin Small, *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on Foreign Policy, 1789-1994* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Thomas Alan Schwartz,

Nixon's journeys to China and the Soviet Union, this chapter illustrates how presidents sought to use personal diplomacy for domestic political gain. This influenced a president's decision to engage in the practice as well as how it was carried out.

Nixon and the "Omnipresent Eye"

Readers of the *Los Angeles Times*, the leading paper in Richard Nixon's home of southern California, had mixed opinions on the president's journey to China in February 1972:

"Literally millions of Americans were thrilled to watch on television the arrival of Air Force One in Peking [Beijing] and hear The Star Spangled Banner and later America the Beautiful... What we are really seeing is history being made."

"Oh yes, China looks good on television and written up in the papers, but remember this; it's all show! Put on not so much for President Nixon, but for us here at home. Don't be fooled!"⁵

Despite the different outlooks, the writers of the two statements had one thing in common: they both recognized the important role television played in the trip. Though one optimistic and the other cynical, the centrality of the images and publicity of Nixon's visit to China was evident to both—and for good reason.

While all presidents have been interested in generating good press and presenting a certain image, modern holders of the office have become much more fixated on it, especially with the rise of television. Ronald Reagan is often seen as the paragon of presidential image making and communication with the public. Yet the "Great Communicator" did not give many press conferences, nor was he usually in situations where he spoke extemporaneously. Rather,

"Henry, ... Winning an Election Is Terribly Important": Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 2009): 173-190 and "Henry Kissinger: Realism, Domestic Politics, and the Struggle Against Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 1 (March 2011): 121-141. For the role of domestic politics in Nixon's approach to Vietnam, see Ken Hughes, *Fatal Politics: The Nixon Tapes, the Vietnam War, and the Casualties of Reelection* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

⁵ "Letters to The Times: The President's Trip to Communist China," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1972.

Reagan and his staff carefully choreographed almost all aspects of relations with the media and public. The Administration worked tirelessly to set and promote the narrative it wanted television and newspapers to cover. Even more important than the words the Administration used were the images it produced. Of particular benefit were images of presidential travel. Writing during Reagan's presidency, journalist and astute political observer Hedrick Smith stated the Administration "created a storybook presidency, using the pageantry of travels to hook the networks and captivate the popular imagination. They projected Reagan as the living symbol of nationhood. And there was a payoff for policy: The more Reagan wrapped himself in the flag, the harder it became for mere mortal politicians to challenge him, the more impossible he was to defeat come reelection, the more worthy he seemed of trust and latitude on policy."⁶

While the Reagan Administration perfected techniques for dealing with the press, much of what it did was taken from Nixon's days in office. Indeed, many of those who directed Reagan's public relations also worked for Nixon, and his Administration was just as obsessed with controlling its image as Reagan's was.⁷ In both domestic and foreign policy, Nixon sought to generate positive coverage. His mistrust and hatred of the media—which he viewed as anti-Nixon and tainted by a liberal bias—prompted him to further attempt to manage his image. David Gergen, a Nixon speechwriter and then White House communications director under Reagan, recalled how rigorously the Nixon Administration sought to control and promote its agenda to the public:

Before any public event was put on his [Nixon's] schedule, you had to know what the headline out of the event was going to be, what the picture was going to be, and what the lead paragraph would be. You had to think of it in those terms, and if you couldn't justify it, it didn't go on the [president's] schedule. So you learned to think that a president communicates through the media, through the press, and not directly. One of Nixon's rules about television was that it was very important that the White House determine

⁶ Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 414.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 399.

what the line coming out from the president was and not let the networks determine that, not let New York edit you. You had to learn how to do the editing yourself.⁸

Nixon was helped and encouraged in this by his Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman. Before coming into Nixon's service Haldeman worked in advertising, thus he was already familiar with promoting an agenda and selling an image. In particular, he was an advocate of television. During the 1968 election, Haldeman advised Nixon on new ways to use the medium, stating that the time had come in "political campaigning—its techniques and strategies—to move out of the dark ages and into the brave new world of the omnipresent eye."⁹ This was a piece of advice Nixon took to heart, and was key to his summits in China and the Soviet Union.

Personal Diplomacy's Political Benefits

It is somewhat ironic that Nixon, an introverted and at times socially awkward man, would rely so heavily on personal contact with foreign leaders. Even with his own advisers and staff he shunned face-to-face interactions.¹⁰ Nixon's fascination with foreign affairs partially explains his willingness to engage with world leaders, but he also saw it as a tool to advance American interests. "I have learned that there is an intangible factor which does affect the relations between nations," Nixon said. "When there is trust between men who are leaders of

⁸ Ibid., 401.

⁹ As quoted in Nixon, *Memoirs*, 303.

¹⁰ Peter Rodman, a staffer on the National Security Council, recalled, "Nixon was a very introverted person, who didn't like a lot of people streaming in and out of the Oval Office...[he] was not like most politicians who loved to have people floating around. Access to the Oval Office was very controlled." In communicating with most his staff Nixon preferred written memos rather than personal interactions. Kissinger was one of the few who had direct access. Chief of Staff Haldeman and John Ehrlichman (first White House Counsel and then chief domestic policy adviser) also had direct access, and they often acted as gatekeepers for Nixon. Together, they were nicknamed the "Berlin Wall" for their efforts to keep people away from the president. See Peter W. Rodman, interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, May 22, 1994, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mfdip.2004rod01>.

nations, there is a better chance to settle differences than when there is no trust.”¹¹ However, he realized leader-to-leader contacts had limits and did not see them as a panacea.

When Nixon became president in 1969 he already had a wealth of personal diplomacy experience. As Dwight Eisenhower’s vice president he went abroad seven times, visiting fifty-four countries and meeting with numerous world leaders.¹² But being the first vice president to travel abroad widely was not without hazards. In 1958, Nixon went on a goodwill tour of Latin America. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had encouraged the trip and told the VP that he was “confident...[the] trip would be of great benefit in the conduct of our relations with all countries in the area.”¹³ Dulles was wrong. At multiple stops, Nixon encountered protests, some merely verbal, others violent. The vice president’s arrival in Caracas, Venezuela was the most threatening, as angry mobs at first taunted and spat at Nixon and his wife, then attacked the car they were in. Smashing windows with rocks and pipes, the violent crowd attempted to overturn the vehicle.¹⁴ But if Nixon was in physical danger, his political prospects received a boost, as Eisenhower publically praised his vice president’s “courage, patience and calmness,” which had brought Nixon “new respect and admiration in our country.”¹⁵

¹¹ “The President’s News Conference,” March 4, 1969, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (hereafter *PP*), *Richard Nixon: 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 1971), 180. Nixon’s fascination with other world figures is evident by a book he wrote on leadership that included personal anecdotes and impressions of a handful of foreign leaders he met during his lifetime. Choosing which leaders to include was difficult for Nixon, as he immodestly—if accurately—stated that he “had known every major postwar leader except Stalin.” Adding, “of all the books I have written, *Leaders* is probably my favorite.” See Richard Nixon, *Leaders: Profiles and Reminiscence of Men Who Have Shaped the Modern World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 2.

¹² John C. Baumgartner, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 32, 121.

¹³ Letter, Dulles to Nixon, March 6, 1958, doc. 42, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1958-1960, *Volume V: American Republics* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991), 223.

¹⁴ For a description of events and how the trip influenced U.S. policy, see Marvin R. Zahniser and W. Michael Weis, “A Diplomatic Pearl Harbor? Richard Nixon’s Goodwill Mission to Latin America in 1958,” *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 2 (April 1989): 163-190. For Nixon’s own account of events, see Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 183-234.

¹⁵ Message From the President to the Vice President, May 9, 1958, doc. 45, *FRUS, 1958-1960, Volume V*, 225. Nixon returned home to a hero’s welcome. Eisenhower greeted Nixon at the airport, as did the entire Cabinet, a large Congressional delegation, and most of the Latin American ambassadors in Washington. Thousands of others came out as well. Nixon’s return was a mini-holiday in Washington. The Eisenhower Administration told the heads

His most celebrated journey as vice president was his 1959 trip to the Soviet Union. Nixon went to attend the opening of an American cultural exhibit, as well as to tour the communist nation and holds talks with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. But with the election year of 1960 less than six months away, there was more involved for Nixon personally. “Mr. Nixon’s trip behind the Iron Curtain has, as everyone knows, been planned and prepared as a triple wager,” prominent journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann wrote. “It is a flyer in propaganda, a flyer in diplomacy, and a flyer in his own personal presidential politics.”¹⁶

As the highest-ranking American official to visit the Soviet Union since Franklin Roosevelt attended the Yalta Conference in 1945, interest in the trip was immense. Throughout, Nixon received mostly positive press coverage. Even before departure newspapers were writing about his extensive preparation and his plans to talk “tough” with Khrushchev.¹⁷ Once face-to-face with the Soviet leader, Nixon generated even more headlines. In what became known as the “Kitchen Debate,” the two men engaged in a spirited discussion about the merits of their countries’ systems of government. The debate made front-page news across the globe.¹⁸

of federal government departments that they could release their employees from work so they could go to Nixon’s arrival. See Connie Feeley, “Thousands to Acclaim Nixons’ Return Today,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 1958; Don Shannon, “Capital Plans Big Nixon Welcome: President, Cabinet and Leaders in Congress Will Join in Fete,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1958.

¹⁶ Walter Lippmann, “Nixon in Russia,” *Washington Post*, July 28, 1959. Indeed, as Paul Butler, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, complained, “Nixon’s goodwill tours are nothing more than cleverly concealed propaganda campaigns designed to keep him on Page 1 of the newspapers as a preliminary to the 1960 Presidential campaign.” See Robert Blanchard, “Butler Sees Nixon’s Tours as ‘Propaganda’: Democratic Leaders Says They Are Designed to Keep Vice President’s Name on Page 1,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1958.

¹⁷ “Reckoning With His Host, Nixon Is Packing Proverbs,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1959; Robert Hartmann, “Nixon Plans Tough Talk in Visit to Moscow: Will Meet Premier Privately,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1959; Roscoe Drummond, “Nixon’s New Mission...He’ll Be Ready for K.’s Arguments,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 1959.

¹⁸ For example, see Willard Edwards, “Khrushchev, Nixon Debate: Here Is What They Told Each Other,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 25, 1959; Harrison E. Salisbury, “Nixon and Khrushchev Argue in Public as U.S. Exhibit Opens; Accuse Each Other of Threats,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1959. In both Britain and France the debate was also front-page news. While the British press was critical of both Nixon and Khrushchev’s behavior, the French commended the vice president. See “British Press Is Critical,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1959; “Paris Reaction Is Favorable,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1959. For Nixon’s recollections of his interactions with Khrushchev, see Nixon, *Six Crises*, 235-292.

As Americans read about the debate and saw photographs from the exchange, it was discovered that television cameras had also recorded sixteen and a half minutes of the clash, which was promptly aired on the three television networks of the day (ABC, CBS, NBC).¹⁹ Thus the nation was greatly exposed to Nixon's trip. But according to an informal survey by its correspondents across the nation, the *New York Times* reported that Americans had mixed opinions on the exchange.²⁰ If the public was divided, influential Republicans like Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen and many political commentators in the press were not. They praised Nixon and recognized how the trip had boosted his political fortunes.²¹ In the end, though, it was not enough to get him elected president in 1960. Still over a year from election day, his Soviet sojourn showed the electoral limits of personal diplomacy, as well as the American public's short memories.

Despite losing the presidency, the appeal of foreign travel, meeting with world leaders, and the opportunity for image building it provided, stayed with Nixon. After losing his bid for governor of California in 1962, he spent the next five years rehabilitating his image, and a large part of that effort was journeys abroad. During his years in the so-called political "wilderness," Nixon was a frequent traveler. In 1967 alone he visited Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, meeting with foreign leaders at each stop. These trips allowed him to portray himself as a statesman. "As part of his effort to develop a less partisan image, Mr. Nixon has

¹⁹ "U.S. Television Network Tapes Moscow Debate," *New York Times*, July 25, 1959; Richard F. Shepard, "Debate Goes on TV Over Soviet Protest," *New York Times*, July 26, 1959; Jack Gould, "TV: Debate in Moscow: Taped Exchange Between Nixon and Khrushchev Personalizes History," *New York Times*, July 27, 1959.

²⁰ "Moscow Debate Stirs U.S. Public: Reaction of Men in Street to Khrushchev-Nixon Exchange Is Divided," *New York Times*, July 27, 1959.

²¹ There was no shortage of positive assessments of Nixon's trip. For example, see United Press International, "Moscow Trip Boosts Nixon, Dirksen Says," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 27, 1959; James Reston, "Nixon Visit Assessed: Advantages of First Phase of Soviet Trip Found to Outnumber the Disadvantages," *New York Times*, July 27, 1959; James Reston, "Nixon's Political Coup: His Soviet Tour Viewed as Perfect Way To Open Campaign for U.S. Presidency," *New York Times*, July 30, 1959; Alan L. Otten, "Nixon in Russia: The Vice President Has Held His Own In Verbal Clashing With Mr. Khrushchev," *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 1959; George E. Sokolsky, "Nixon's Value," *Washington Post*, July 31, 1959.

minimized his party appearances,” one newspaper wrote. “Each of his four foreign tours since the first of the year has kept him out of the country two to three weeks. These trips...refreshed his acquaintance with crucial foreign policy areas. In the months ahead he will be able to sprinkle his speeches with remarks such as ‘when I was in Indonesia last April...’ or ‘as President de Gaulle told me in June...’”²²

Considering his travels and meetings with foreign leaders did not lead to victory in 1960, how much the statesman image helped Nixon in 1968 is unclear. But what is not debatable is that once president he sought to make his mark in the global arena, and as he moved to reorient American foreign policy, personal diplomacy was part of that mission.²³ During his first year in office Nixon told his staff he wanted to communicate with various foreign leaders on a regular basis. “Sometime ago I suggested that I would like to start a practice of writing a letter from time to time to some of the major leaders we have met on our trips abroad or on their visits here,” he wrote to Henry Kissinger. “I still think this would be a very good idea and while nothing should be planned on an urgent basis I think we ought to talk about it and work out a plan. For example, a letter to the Pope, to Brandt, perhaps Pompidou [sic], etc. on various subjects in which they would be interested and which would serve our purposes might be extremely helpful.”²⁴ To that end, White House staff prepared a list of possible leaders for Nixon to correspond with, which

²² Alan L. Otten, “Nixon’s New Course: Former Vice President Shifts Approach in Bid For GOP Nomination,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 1967. See also Walter Trohan, “Report From Washington: G.O.P. Leaders Weigh Nixon’s Tour of Europe,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1967; Thomas J. Foley, “Nixon Seeking Image as Tough Statesman: Fields Questions on Foreign Problems With Ease in Philadelphia Appearance,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1967.

²³ Even during the campaign Nixon made his interests in personal diplomacy and summitry known. See James Reston, “Mr. Nixon Looks Beyond the Election Campaign,” *New York Times*, September 25 1968; Ernest Conline, “Nixon Too, Has ‘Summit Itch,’” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1968.

²⁴ Memorandum, Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger, November 24, 1969, Folder 9: Pakistan, A.M. Yahya Khan corres. 1969-1970; Box 759: Netherlands Prince Bernhard Corres. To Pakistan Yahya Khan 1971; Presidential Correspondence; National Security Council Files (hereafter NSC)-Presidential Correspondence; Richard Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter RNL).

Nixon then edited.²⁵ He also was eager for face-to-face interactions. A month into office he went on a tour of Europe, visiting five countries and the Vatican. Five months later he went to Asia, going to six nations, five for state visits.

The early trip to Europe was an attempt to reset relations after years of concern about American reliability and the feeling of neglect. Nixon was the first U.S. president to visit the continent in five and half years. The trip offered a chance to meet and develop rapport with European leaders and discuss pressing issues. But it was also a symbolic move meant to convey that the United States valued its Western allies and cared about their concerns. “You go to discuss, not to propose or negotiate,” Secretary of State William Rogers told the president. The response from Europe was extremely positive. As Rogers noted, “Europeans have been impressed by the timing of the trip (five weeks after your inauguration), its working nature, its wide-open agenda, its precedence over summitry with the Soviets, and the spirit in which you come to listen rather than to lecture.”²⁶ The early timing of the visit and the trip’s agenda were all about creating goodwill, giving the impression of harmonious ties between the United States and its European allies.

Domestically the trip operated similarly. As much as the visit to Europe was designed to reassure Western allies, it was also meant to demonstrate to the American people Nixon’s global priorities. By going to Europe so soon after inauguration he signaled to the nation that the Continent was important to his foreign policy and that he was committed to alleviating past

²⁵ Memorandum, H.R. Haldeman to Kissinger, November 7, 1969, Folder 3: 1969-1974 Presidential Correspondence with Key Foreign Leaders [Oct. 69-May 73]; Box 766: Viet-nam Vice President Ky to Yugoslavia Pres. Tito corres.; NSC-Presidential Correspondence; RNL. The first list presented to Nixon contained seventeen heads of state and government. After reviewing it, Nixon wanted to add more leaders who he had previously met, as well as remove the three African leaders on the list.

²⁶ Memorandum, Rogers to Nixon, “Subject: Your Trip to Europe—Scope Paper,” n.d., Folder 5: President Nixon’s Trip to Europe, Feb.-Mar. 1969—The President—General Background Papers; Box 443: President Nixon’s Trip to Europe, Feb-Mar 1969, White House Italy to President Nixon’s Trip to Europe, Feb.-Mar. 1969, the President Italy; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL.

irritants. With almost two hundred news people traveling with the president, the trip also generated extensive press coverage, much of it positive.²⁷ Prior to the trip the State Department found opinion in the American press overwhelmingly favorable, and once it began, all three of the television networks had “special coverage.”²⁸ For example, NBC’s morning show devoted thirty minutes each day to the president’s journey, and the station’s nightly news show was extended from thirty minutes to an hour.²⁹ Throughout the trip, Americans woke to headlines extolling the president.³⁰

As the Nixon Administration stated at the outset, there would be no agreements or major announcements. Rather, the president was simply there to listen and hear the views and concerns of his European allies. For some the lack of tangible results made the trip seem like a diplomatic dud, but Nixon accomplished his goals. He restored a spirit of cooperation and goodwill, and in the process garnered constant press coverage. Once back in the United States he continued to occupy the media spotlight with a nationally televised address. He spoke for five minutes about his European travels before answering reporters’ questions for fifty minutes. Nixon’s remarks, the longest presidential press conference ever televised, were on each of the networks as well as numerous other independent stations. According to one estimate, the president reached as many as seventy-five million Americans. And they witnessed what most agreed was an exceptional performance. Speaking without notes, Nixon handled a total of twenty-six questions with ease

²⁷ “Trip Tests President’s Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 1969.

²⁸ “Advance Comment on Pres. Nixon’s Trip,” Department of State, February 14, 1969, Folder 2: Presidential Trip—(Planning) Europe, Feb. 23-Mar. 2 Vol. I [2 of 4]; Box 444: Presidential Trip—(Planning) Europe, Feb. 23-Mar. 2, 1969 Vol. 1 [1 of 4] to Presidential Trip—(Planning) Europe, Feb. 23-Mar. 2, 1969 Vol. I [4 of 4]; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL.

²⁹ NBC also had a seventy-six person crew to cover Nixon’s journey and CBS interrupted its normal programming for a mid-day special report on the trip. See “The President in Europe: TV Highlights,” *Washington Post*, February 24, 1969; “President’s Tour to Get TV Coverage,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1969; “TV Highlights,” *Washington Post*, February 27, 1969.

³⁰ For example, see Max Frankel, “To Europeans, a Modest Stance: Nixon’s Unassertive Manner Impresses His Hosts on Trip,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1969; Henry Gemmill, “Nixon, in a Thundering Berlin, Reception, Displays Tough Side of His European Policy,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 1969; Robert Young, “Nixon Cheered By Thousands in W. Berlin,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 28, 1969.

and aplomb. The *New York Times* wrote that he was “impressive in scope and grasp...it was a *tour de force*.” The *Los Angeles Times* echoed those sentiments: “The American public had seldom been so impressed...[Nixon] emerged as a vitally healthy world leader in complete command of the situation.”³¹ All this positive press had an effect on the American people too. Asked by Gallup how important the trip was for developing good relations between the United States and Western Europe, 37% of respondents said very important and 32% fairly important. Only 17% said the trip was not at all or not very important.³²

As his post-trip news conference illustrated, Nixon used television to great effect. During his European stops he showed skill in cultivating the camera as well. As one reporter noted, “Nixon proved an adept television performer. He is always aware of cameras and microphones and openly plays to them. His microphone technique is almost flawless.” And because of “a kind of circular illogic that a person’s merely being on TV makes that person important,” the Administration seemed to be using television “to stress to each citizen that Mr. Nixon, elected by a small margin, is now the President of the United States.”³³

Overall, the European trip demonstrated two aspects of how Nixon would conduct foreign policy, both of which would be on display in his trips to China and the Soviet Union. First, his Administration would rely on “electronic statecraft” to get its message across and project its desired image. Second, in carrying out foreign policy and electronic statecraft, interactions with foreign leaders would play an important role. “His visits to the West European

³¹ Don Oberdorfer, “Nixon Reviews World Scene with Deft, Direct Remarks,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1969; Lawrence Laurent, “Two Looks at Nixon’s TV Report,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1969; “Mr. Nixon on Foreign Policy...,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1969; “Presidency: Nixon’s Report,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1969.

³² Gallup Poll, May 1-May 6, 1969, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

³³ Laurent, “Two Looks at Nixon’s TV Report,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1969.

capitals,” a reporter noted, “offered all the proof that is needed that the American people have a new President who relishes personal diplomacy and feels at home abroad.”³⁴

Nixon followed up his European trip with a tour of Asia a few months later that also included stops in Romania and Britain. The trip did not garner quite the same amount of press, but it still worked to Nixon’s political advantage. At the trip’s outset it was noted by a State Department official that the goal was to “cut substance to retain the atmosphere.” Some criticized this, arguing that if there was no substance, why go at all? They saw it as simply a “public relations exercise,” a way for Nixon to deflect from domestic problems.³⁵ But even if issues of substance were lacking, these critics failed to notice what Nixon still sought to achieve. First, his visit to the region, particularly Vietnam, was meant to reassure Asian allies about the new White House occupant. “Your visit,” Kissinger told Nixon, “will serve as a very visible demonstration of your continuing interest in, commitment to, and support for the South Vietnamese people and their government. Your personal contact with the South Vietnamese leaders should spur their morale and initiative.”³⁶

Comparing Nixon’s trip to the region to those taken by his predecessor Lyndon Johnson, journalist Stanley Karnow (who ended up on Nixon’s enemies list) wrote, “During his several journeys to the Far East, Mr. Johnson barnstormed the region like a Texas politician, inviting camel-drivers to Washington, whooping rebel yells in the Taj Mahal...Mr. Johnson’s gaudy antics were, in a sense, a projection of his old-fashioned, frontiersman’s belief that Americans

³⁴ Oberdorfer, “Nixon Reviews World Scene with Deft, Direct Remarks,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1969; Robert J. Donovan, “Nixon’s Trip Shows Promise of New Diplomatic Era in West,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1969.

³⁵ Robert Keatley, “Nixon’s Journey: President Will Stress More Limited US. Role In Asia After Vietnam,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 1969; Max Frankel, “President’s Task in Asia: He Seeks to Enunciate New Desire For More Modest U.S. Role,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1969; Robert B. Semple Jr, “Nixon, in Rumania, Stresses Desire for World Peace: President Proclaims U.S. Is Willing to Coexist With the Communist Bloc,” *New York Times*, August, 3, 1969.

³⁶ Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, “Your Visit to Vietnam: Conversation with President Thieu,” undated, Folder 6: Meeting Memos [July 1969]; Box 452: Foreign Official Correspondence to President-Elect Nixon-Secret Appendix to Meeting Memos; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL

can do anything anywhere.” In contrast, Nixon “behaved as soberly as a corporation executive, avoiding flamboyant oratory and creating the impression that even his ambiguous statements were carefully calculated.”³⁷ While this kind of behavior did not grab headlines, it did send a signal, though subtle and symbolic, of Nixon’s professed desire for a more modest role in the region.

By contrast, the stop in Romania on the way back to Washington was raucous. Not since Franklin Roosevelt had an American president visited a communist nation, and it was the first state visit by a president to a communist nation ever. Nixon received a boisterous welcome with hundreds of thousands, possibly up to a million Romanians turning out to welcome him. Unlike his Asian stops, Nixon spoke effusively and the atmosphere was jovial. “President Nixon scored one of the greatest personal triumphs of his career,” noted one paper.³⁸

Though the Asian trip as a whole did not produce images of wild celebration like in Romania, it was still deemed a success and received ample coverage. All three of the television networks, as well as major radio networks, had live coverage of Nixon’s arrival home at Andrews Air Force Base, where on a rain soaked night thousands, led by the vice president and numerous members of Congress, greeted him.³⁹ There was no repeat of his address to the nation like after the European trip, but Nixon’s second international trip of his presidency was praised

³⁷ Stanley Karnow, “Styles of Touring Presidents Reflect Change in Asia Policy,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 1969.

³⁸ Stuart H. Loory, “Romania Personal Triumph For Nixon: People Cheer Wildly as President Pays Visit to Communist Nation,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1969; Don Oberdorfer, “Huge Crowds Greet Nixon in Rumania: 900,000 Clap, Chant and Cheer,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 1969.

³⁹ “Networks Will Carry Nixon Arrival Tonight,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1969; Robert Young, “Nixon in Washington After Circling Globe: Asserts World Can Live in Peace,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 4, 1969; “Nixon, Returning, Hails Friendship He Found On Trip: Tells Crowd at Airport That ‘the Spirit of Apollo’ Can Bring Peace to World,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1969.

by members of Congress from both parties and received positive coverage. But this would pale to what Nixon achieved in China.⁴⁰

“The Drama and Color of This State Visit Will Surpass All Your Others”: Nixon Goes to China

During the first two years of Nixon’s presidency his approval rating was usually in the high fifties and low sixties. It is hard to say with precision the role his early forays into personal diplomacy played, but a poll taken as he departed for Europe and one about a week after his return showed a six percent increase in approval, from 60% to 66%.⁴¹ But by June 1971 any boost from the European trip was long gone. Only 48% of Americans now approved of Nixon’s job performance.⁴² Faced with a worsening economic situation as inflation and unemployment rose, the president became increasingly unpopular. And his failure to not only end the Vietnam War, but also his escalation of it into Cambodia and Laos, generated widespread protests and spelled trouble for his reelection bid in 1972.

To combat the growing economic discontent, Nixon reversed previously long held convictions. His New Economic Policy (NEP) instituted price and wage controls, allowed a floating exchange rate, and stopped the convertibility of the dollar to gold. These were all policies he had once opposed, and they effectively ended the Bretton Woods system that had been in place since the end of WWII. European allies were not pleased with this unilateral

⁴⁰ Glen Elsasser, “Congress Leaders Praise World Tour by Nixon,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1969; Robert J. Donovan, “Nixon Journey a Watershed of Asian History,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1969; “Nixon’s Successful Trip,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1969. Nixon also received good press internationally. “With few exceptions,” Kissinger told Nixon, media reaction globally “confirms the outstanding success you achieved.” See Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, “World-wide Reaction to Your Trip,” August 4, 1969, Folder 5: President’s Trip 22 July-3 August 69, Miscellaneous Planning [Belgium, England, Romania, General] [2 of 2]; Box 461: [No Title] [Part I] to President’s Trip July 22-August 3, Miscellaneous Planning [2 of 2]; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL

⁴¹ Gallup Poll, February 20-February 25, 1969 and March 12-March 17, 1969, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

⁴² Gallup Poll, June 25-June 28, 1971, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

change in the global economic order, but Nixon was more concerned about the domestic impact than the international one. The moves proved popular, and though economic troubles eventually returned, in the short term the NEP worked and boosted Nixon's reelection prospects.⁴³

In the realm of foreign policy he also went against his previous reputation and positions. As a young congressman he made his name as the coldest of cold warriors. During campaigns for the House and Senate he attacked his opponents by implying they secretly held radical views or were closet communists. Once in Congress, Nixon rose to fame as a member of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1948 he led HUAC's investigation of Alger Hiss, a former State Department employee accused of being a communist spy. Though never admitting to espionage, uncovered documents seemed to suggest that he was spy, or at the very least had contact with communists, something he had denied. In the end Hiss was convicted of perjury, and as a result of the intense media spotlight on the HUAC hearings Nixon became a national figure.

By the time he assumed the presidency he was calmer and more restrained, but still viewed as staunchly anti-communist. But a world in flux and the need to preserve America's global influence required a new approach. Rather than be guided by an ideological hatred of communism, Nixon and Kissinger's realist outlook led them to focus on issues of power and security. From this perspective it did not matter if a country was "good" or "evil." If engaging with a nation advanced American interests they went ahead, regardless of ideological compatibility or moral implications. And both felt that interaction with communist foes in Beijing and Moscow better-served American interests than continued hostility.

⁴³ See Luke A. Nichter, *Richard Nixon and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36-102.

Nixon previewed his thinking on China in a 1967 article in *Foreign Affairs*. “Any American policy toward Asia must come urgently to grips with the reality of China,” he wrote. While recognizing the danger China presented, he argued that the United States needed to differentiate between “long-range and short-range policies, and fashioning short-range programs so as to advance our long-range goals... Taking the long view, we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations.”⁴⁴ Once in office Nixon’s Administration moved in this direction. In a major speech months after inauguration, his secretary of state said the United States was open to improved relations and would work to make this happen. This was accompanied by other moves, such as stopping aggressive naval action regularly conducted near the Chinese coast and easing travel restrictions to China. The Administration also sought to establish a secret backchannel through intermediaries like Pakistan’s leader Yahya Khan.⁴⁵

While some were aware of Nixon’s approach, most Americans were not well informed on the nuances of his thought and certainly did not expect the dramatic moves he made. His unexpected initiative with China stunned Americans. The thought of the avid anti-communist Nixon going to Beijing and smiling alongside Chinese leaders, who Americans had been told since 1949 were the enemy, was surreal. As one stunned conservative journalist stated, Nixon ““would toast Alger Hiss tonight, if he could find him.””⁴⁶

In implementing rapprochement with China, personal diplomacy played an important role. It not only furthered diplomatic objectives, but also boosted Nixon’s reelection bid. Even before 1972 the president’s aides were pondering how to leverage foreign affairs for electoral

⁴⁴ Richard Nixon, “Asia After Viet Nam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (October 1967), 121.

⁴⁵ Margaret Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed The World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 163-165. For a complete account of Nixon’s rapprochement with China, see Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012). For the Pakistani backchannel, see F.S. Aijazuddin, *From a Head, Through a Head, To a Head: The Secret Channel between the US and China through Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ As quoted in Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 243.

advantage. In February 1971, Dwight Chapin, a special assistant to the president who headed Nixon's advance team for the China trip, recommended that over the next twenty months the Administration spend over a third of its time emphasizing foreign policy, and a key component of that plan was to highlight Nixon's interactions with foreign leaders. Regarding state visits, Chapin noted that the focus should be on Nixon as a world leader, his vast knowledge of global issues, the respect shown him by foreign counterparts, and his image as a statesman. And to further these aims, he suggested the Administration strive for greater television coverage of state visits.⁴⁷

With the media in general, Chapin saw it as a tool to be harnessed to get the Administration's message to the public. In particular to "use [it] to build [a] Presidential image of capability, strength, leadership, and command."⁴⁸ Entering 1972 the Administration continued on this theme, as Nixon planned to stake a shot at a second term on foreign relations. "International affairs is *our* issue," Nixon told an aide in the fall of 1971.⁴⁹ Nixon's Chief of State H.R. Haldeman concurred: "The President should become known next year as 'Mr. Peace.'" And he would become the peace candidate by making progress in Vietnam and improving relations with China and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

By the spring of 1971, enough progress had been made through the secret Pakistani backchannel that a high-level meeting between American and Chinese officials was desirable. Chinese premier Zhou Enlai suggested that a special envoy, or even Nixon himself, should visit Beijing to discuss issues between the two sides.⁵¹ The president quickly accepted the proposal.

⁴⁷ Memorandum, Dwight L. Chapin to H.R. Haldeman, "Schedule Planning," February 1, 1971, document no. CK3100697245, Declassified Documents Reference System (hereafter DDRS).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ As quoted in Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 246.

⁵⁰ As quoted in Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: Volume 2, The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 478.

⁵¹ For the shift in China's policy from one of hostility to rapprochement with the United States, see Jian Chen,

Before he visited, however, he wanted to lay the groundwork with a preliminary meeting between Kissinger and Chinese officials. Nixon insisted that any such gathering had to be covert. In replying to Zhou's suggestion, the president wanted it to be clearly "*understood that this first meeting between Dr. Kissinger and high officials of the People's Republic of China be strictly secret.*"⁵²

Nixon had a well-known penchant for secrecy. But unlike in other instances where it was often unnecessary, it made sense with China. As Kissinger later recalled, if his visit had been made public, the Administration would have been "caught between those who wanted a catalogue of concessions and others who wanted guarantees of our intransigence."⁵³

Internationally, other nations opposed to an improved U.S.-China relationship might have tried to undermine the visit, and perhaps most importantly, announcing the visit ahead of time would have given domestic opponents time to mobilize. By the early 1970s the once influential "China lobby" had lost some of its prominence, but there were still vocal members who could raise trouble for Nixon. And while relations with China seemed to be on the upswing, there was no guarantee of success. Nixon and Kissinger had no idea what to expect. "It is difficult to recapture now the sense of mutual ignorance of the United States and China in those days," Kissinger remembered. "We had no contact of any sort with the Chinese leadership...we had no idea what we would find in Peking [Beijing]."⁵⁴ Taking such a dramatic diplomatic initiative and in the end

Mao's China & The Cold War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 238-276; Kuisong Yang and Yafeng Xia, "Vacillating between Revolution and Détente: Mao's Changing Psyche and Policy toward the United States, 1969-1976," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 395-423.

⁵² Message, Nixon to Zhou, via Hilaly, May 10, 1971, Doc. 23, National Security Archive (hereafter NSA) Electronic Briefing Book, No. 66, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-23.pdf>. Emphasis in original. For Nixon's secrecy in foreign affairs, see William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

⁵³ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1979), 725. Though Kissinger stated that the Chinese came around to the Administration's view on the importance of secrecy, they never fully understood why Nixon was so adamant about it. See Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 174.

⁵⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 725.

getting nothing tangible—or worse being embarrassed—was a gamble Nixon was willing to take, but he hoped to minimize the risk by keeping it secret.

In July 1971, Kissinger left for China. Again relying on Pakistan, he feigned illness while visiting the country, and once out of the press spotlight was secretly shuttled into China. Once there he met extensively with Zhou, discussing issues between their nations and the details for Nixon's trip. When the visit was over Kissinger was jubilant. Though recognizing the difficulties ahead, he told Nixon that the "visit was a very moving experience" and the "intensity and sweep of our talks combined to make an indelible impression on me." Kissinger was confident that the foundation had been set for Nixon and Mao "to turn a page in history."⁵⁵ And turning a page in history was what Nixon was after, to both secure a place among the pantheon of great presidents, and also the more immediate need of reelection.

Once Kissinger returned home, Nixon told an unsuspecting world on live television about the clandestine trip and that he would visit China the following year. The world was stunned. Nixon's statement was brief, but he emphasized that the key feature of his China initiative was peace. Implicitly he conveyed that he was the conduit of that peace. "I will undertake," he said, "what I deeply hope will become a journey for peace, peace not just for our generation but for future generations on this earth we share together."⁵⁶

Such a development was guaranteed to dominate the news cycle, but the Administration sought to maximize coverage. In conversations with Zhou, Kissinger pushed for the announcement of Nixon's trip (which occurred simultaneously in China) to be made July 15, a Thursday evening. This was less than five days after their talks, and Zhou thought that the

⁵⁵ Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, "My Talks With Chou En-lai," July 14, doc. 144, 1971, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII: China, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2006), 454.

⁵⁶ "Remarks to the Nation Announcing Acceptance of an Invitation to Visit the People's Republic of China," July 15, 1971, *PP, Richard Nixon: 1971* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1972), 820.

fifteenth might be too soon, not allowing enough time to fully brief Nixon and prepare for the announcement. Kissinger's mind, however, was on something else. "The weekly news magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* are printed on Friday and Saturday," he said, "therefore, if the announcement is made on Thursday night, they can do a better job of reporting it than if it were Friday night." Though not a sticking point, he went on to tell the Chinese premier that a Thursday announcement would mean not only better coverage in the news magazines, but also in the Sunday newspapers. "In America they are very big," he said, "they are printed on Friday and Saturday, and therefore if the announcement is Friday evening they wouldn't be able to give any analysis on Sunday."⁵⁷ To Kissinger and Nixon's delight, Zhou consented.

Within a month of announcing the trip, Nixon's political fortunes quickly improved. A June Gallup poll showed him trailing his presumed Democratic opponent in the 1972 election, Edmund Muskie, 41-39 percent. In August he was on top 42-36.⁵⁸ And not wanting another American politician to steal his thunder, Nixon made it clear he expected China to restrict American political visitors until after his trip.⁵⁹

As the Administration planned for the historic journey, a top concern was how to portray it back home. When Alexander Haig, Kissinger's deputy, went to China in January 1972 to finalize arrangements, he stressed this point to the Chinese. Lamenting domestic forces—both on the left and right—that opposed the China initiative and hoped it failed, Haig stated that the Administration was "concerned about making President Nixon's visit a success not only in reality but also in the appearance of the visit itself." He told the Chinese that there could be no

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Zhou, July 11, 1971, Doc. 38, NSA Electronic Briefing Book, No. 66, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/ch-38.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Bundy, *Tangled Web*, 240-241.

⁵⁹ Memorandum, "Meeting Between President, Dr. Kissinger and General Haig," July 1, 1971, doc. 137, *FRUS, 1969-1976 Vol. XVII: China, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2006), 356.

public embarrassment to the president, and that “it is in our mutual interest that the visit reinforce President Nixon’s image as a world leader.”⁶⁰

This emphasis on the visit’s atmospherics and promotion of Nixon as a world leader was somewhat baffling to the Chinese. “The image of a man,” Zhou told Haig, “depends on his own deeds and not on any other factors.”⁶¹ But for the Administration image was key, particularly the image of leadership and peace. Deeds were great, but unless those deeds were promoted and shaped into a positive narrative there was little public benefit. After unveiling the NEP and the China announcement, the president told close advisers, “What the people want is the appearance of action.” As his Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman recorded in his diary, Nixon wanted to focus not so much on concrete issues, but rather on notions of “leadership: boldness, courage, etcetera,” and play that into “the President as the world leader for peace[,] the biggest leader in the world.”⁶²

Thus, the Nixon Administration made the trip to China a grand production, providing the American public with political and diplomatic theater at the highest level.⁶³ The maximization of media coverage, particularly television exposure, was at the center of the Administration’s detailed planning. It was keen to schedule events so they could be shown in primetime back in the United States. Nixon himself was anxious about his arrival and departure. As Haldeman recorded in his diary, Nixon was concerned that his arrival “be handled flawlessly since that will

⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Haig and Zhou, January 3, 1971, Doc. 24, NSA Electronic Briefing Book, No. 70, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc24.pdf>.

⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Haig and Zhou, January 7, 1971, Doc. 25, NSA Electronic Briefing Book, No. 70, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc25.pdf>. Haig reiterated this message to the American advance team. Weeks before Nixon’s trip he said, “the whole tone of our relationships with China are going to evolve from the atmospherics.” See Anne Collins Walker, *China Calls: Paving the Way for Nixon’s Historic Journey to China* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1992), 9.

⁶² H.R. Haldeman Diaries, August 16, 1971, Nixon Library, <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/haldeman-diaries/37-hrhd-audiotape-ac12b-19710816-pa.pdf>

⁶³ For more on how the Nixon Administration portrayed the China trip, see Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From “Red Menace” to “Tacit Ally”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 206-221.

be the key picture of the whole trip.” Indeed, the advance team worked out every detail, such as the optimal spot on the runway to land in order to get the best angle for photos. Of equal interest to Nixon was his return home. “He definitely does not want to arrive in Washington at noon,” Haldeman noted, “but rather at 9:00 at night to make prime time television.”⁶⁴

Initially Zhou mentioned that possibly ten American journalists could accompany Nixon on his trip, but the Administration got permission to bring closer to ninety.⁶⁵ It received over two thousand press applications, and Nixon—who favored television over print—personally chose the journalists. With so many members of the press, abundant coverage was certain. “The drama and color of this state visit,” Kissinger told Nixon, “will surpass all your others.”⁶⁶ From his arrival, to his meeting with Mao, to the lavish opening banquet, to his visit to the Great Wall, Nixon dominated American media.⁶⁷ In a Gallup poll taken days after the visit, 97% of Americans said they had heard or read about the trip.⁶⁸

The images of Nixon shaking hands with Mao, along with the rest of the photos and television footage, have become iconic in the annals of American diplomatic history. Nixon no doubt relished the historic nature of the trip and what it could do for his presidential ranking, but his immediate goal was to influence Americans of the 1970s. And while atmospherics and image making were key, issues of substance were discussed as well, the most important being Taiwan.

In the Shanghai Communiqué the two nations papered over differences, but according to

⁶⁴ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1994), 412; Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 152; Haldeman Diaries, February 15, 1971, Nixon Library, <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/haldeman-diaries/37-hrhd-audiotape-ac19a-19210215-pa.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 151.

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, “Your Encounter with the Chinese,” February 5, 1972, Doc. 27, NSA Electronic Briefing Book, No. 70, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB70/doc27.pdf>.

⁶⁷ All three of the networks carried Nixon’s arrival live. ABC’s coverage was 50 minutes, CBS a little over an hour, and NBC almost an hour and a half. See Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=658981>; <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=833630>; <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=822753>.

⁶⁸ Gallup Poll, March 3-March 5, 1972, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

Kissinger, “the basic theme of the Nixon trip—and the Shanghai Communiqué—was to put off the issue of Taiwan for the future, to enable the two nations to close the gulf of twenty years.”⁶⁹

While Kissinger was nervous about press reaction to the document and its tepid defense of Taiwan, the public did not care. If Nixon hoped to be the peace candidate in 1972 he was well on his way. After the trip, Gallup asked how effective the president’s journey to China would be in terms of improving world peace. Fifty-percent said fairly effective, 16% very effective.⁷⁰

In the aftermath the State Department reported that the visit “seized and held top or prominent television, radio and newspaper attention in countries around the world...No other international political event has commanded such overwhelming treatment, much of it instantaneous thanks to satellite relay of live television.” Some compared Nixon’s journey to the moon landing, both “venture[s] into the unknown,” and “like a moon flight,” the department noted, “the voyage to China was a media phenomenon, tightly scripted and edited by time and technology, of a new kind scarcely imaginable before the age of television and communications satellites.”⁷¹ Having already gone to the diplomatic equivalent of the moon, one might have thought Nixon satisfied. The peace candidate, however, was not yet finished using personal diplomacy to burnish his image.

“Few Soothsayers Would Have Dared to Predict”: The Moscow Summit

While diplomacy with China was new terrain, dealing with the Soviets was well trod—if hazardous—ground. The United States had little to no contact with China for over two decades,

⁶⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1074. For a discussion of the Shanghai Communiqué, see Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 300-311.

⁷⁰ Gallup Poll, March 3-March 5, 1972, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>.

⁷¹ U.S. Information Agency, Department of State, “Foreign Media Treatment of President Nixon’s Visit to China: Summary as of February 28, 1972,” Folder 3: China Trip-February—March 1972 [Part 1]; Box 501: China Trip-January 1972 [Part 1] to China Trip-February-March 1972 [Part 2]; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL.

but frequently communicated with the Soviet Union. For Nixon, it was important that a meeting at the highest-level produce tangible results. If he met with Soviet leaders and nothing was accomplished, or even worse tensions were raised, the public would become disillusioned and political opponents would pounce. “I am greatly concerned,” Nixon told his ambassador to the Soviet Union, “about the adverse effects of a meeting that ends in deadlock even if it is surrounded by agreeable social functions. In this respect, top level meetings between US and Soviet leaders are different from other top level meetings.”⁷² Thus, whereas a more symbolic encounter lacking in concrete results was acceptable for a China summit, a U.S.-Soviet gathering had to produce something substantial.

To achieve a significant, tangible outcome, Nixon demanded extensive preparations. He believed that in the past the United States too often “attempted to settle things in a fit of enthusiasm, relying on personal diplomacy,” only to have a temporary uptick in relations followed by a crisis. Though the press would have applauded an early summit, Nixon calculated he could achieve greater success—both geopolitically and with the media—if a summit was well prepared and produced a major agreement.⁷³ To lay the groundwork for such a meeting, as well as discuss the various issues between the two nations, Nixon directed Kissinger to engage in backchannel discussions with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.

The Administration saw the lessening of tensions with the Soviets as an important step in ending the Vietnam War. As relations improved, it was thought the Soviets would aid the United States as it tried to extricate itself from Southeast Asia. There were other issues to discuss as

⁷² Memorandum, Kissinger to Jacob D. Beam, “Instructions for Your Oral Presentation to Kosygin,” March 26, 1969, Folder 7: 1969-1974 USSR Premier Alexi Kosygin Corres. [Jan 69-Jul 72] (3 of 3); Box 765: United Kingdom Prime Minister Wilson Corres. 1974 to Venezuela President Caldera 1972; NSC-Presidential Correspondence; RNL.

⁷³ Letter, Nixon to Melvin Laird, February 4, 1969, doc. 10, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume I: Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2003), 56; Editorial Note, doc. 11, *FRUS 1969-1972, Vol. I*, 61-62.

well, such as arms control. However, neither the Soviets nor Nixon wanted to be seen as desperate for a summit. In Nixon's first years in office the Soviets floated the idea of a meeting multiple times, only to have the United States reject it. In the view of Nixon and Kissinger, the Soviets overestimated how much the president wanted a summit, and they tried to extract numerous concessions simply for agreeing to meet.⁷⁴ As reelection neared, however, the Administration became more eager for a summit.

The path to a meeting was not smooth. On the critical issue of Vietnam, the Soviets were no help. But the two sides were able to make progress on arms control. By the spring of 1971, there was a "conceptual breakthrough" in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), as well as negotiations over anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems. News of this development received top billing on all three television networks. Eric Sevareid of CBS explicitly said that Nixon's reelection chances got a boost from the announcement.⁷⁵ However, the two sides still could not agree on a date for a summit. From the Administration's perspective, the Kremlin was dithering.⁷⁶ But once news broke of Nixon's planned journey to China, the Soviets quickly agreed to a date for their own summit. Dobrynin tried to persuade Kissinger to have the president visit Moscow before he went to Beijing, but the national security adviser refused. The order of the visits would be in the order they were agreed to.⁷⁷

For the Soviets, news of U.S.-China rapprochement was worrisome. Once allies, by the 1970s the two communist powers were adversaries. And as their months long border skirmish in

⁷⁴ Gordon R. Weilhmiller, *U.S.-Soviet Summits: An Account of East-West Diplomacy at the Top, 1955-1985* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 54-57.

⁷⁵ CBS Evening News, May 20, 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=216895>.

⁷⁶ As Kissinger recalled, shortly before he left for China Dobrynin "continued his cat-and-mouse game about a Moscow summit," wrongly assuming that the U.S. was increasingly anxious for a summit meeting. But Soviet dithering simplified Kissinger's mission to China, where he was free to arrange Nixon's visit to Beijing first, then Moscow. See Kissinger, *White House Years*, 731, 737.

⁷⁷ Editorial Note, doc. 94, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. I*, 327-328.

1969 made evident, the threat of a Sino-Soviet war was real. Kissinger tried to assure Dobrynin that improved American-Chinese relations were not aimed at the Soviet Union, but in reality the division between the Soviet Union and China served American purposes. In the Administration's thinking, if China and the Soviet Union feared that the other had closer ties to the United States than themselves, it would make them more amenable to American concerns.⁷⁸ Summit meetings helped in this, allowing the United States to demonstrate friendship toward one side, while making the other somewhat uncomfortable at the possibility of collusion against them.

After struggling to get to the summit, Vietnam almost derailed it. In April 1972, Kissinger went on a secret, pre-summit meeting to Moscow to finalize details for the president's trip. But weeks before he left to meet with the Soviets, North Vietnam launched a large-scale military operation against the South, the so-called Easter Offensive. In the middle of an election year, Nixon could not have a setback in Southeast Asia. Kissinger failed to get Soviet help in lessening the North's offensive, leading the president to respond with a massive bombing campaign and the mining of Haiphong harbor. There was concern that such drastic actions might cause the Soviets to cancel the summit. But Nixon believed cancellation would be less harmful politically than a defeat in Vietnam. "The summit isn't worth a damn if the price for it is losing in Vietnam," Nixon stated. "My instinct tells me that the country can take losing the summit, but it can't take losing the war."⁷⁹ It was a gamble, but it paid off. Though some attacked Nixon's escalation, it did halt the North's advance, and the Soviets went ahead with the summit.

In his ever raging battle with the press, Nixon suggested to adviser and political strategist Chuck Colson that he and his staff look into what the media had recently said about the upcoming summit, and those who had predicted that Nixon's actions in Vietnam were its death

⁷⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 712.

⁷⁹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, 602.

knell should be pressured to apologize and admit they were wrong. He also thought Colson should look into what presidential candidates might have said, and if they made dire predictions about the Soviet response, they too should be compelled to recognize their error.⁸⁰

As noted, it was important to Nixon that a meeting with the Soviets produce results, and though it took almost three and a half years to get to a summit, the wait was worth it. Months before the gathering, the president told a Soviet official he believed his talks with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev “could be the most important heads-of-government meetings in this century.”⁸¹ Though Nixon indulged in hyperbole, he and Brezhnev did sign two arms control agreements—an ABM treaty and a SALT accord. A variety of other agreements dealing with environmental protection, medical science and public health, and cooperation in space, science, and technology were also concluded. Perhaps more important than those accords was the “Basic Principles,” which defined relations between the United States and Soviet Union. For the Soviets this was particularly significant, as they believed it signaled that the Americans now viewed them as equals. To top everything off, Nixon became the first American president to speak on Soviet television.⁸²

The trip and agreements not only furthered geopolitical goals, but domestic ones as well. Shortly before the trip, pollster Louis Harris found a large part of the president’s improved standing with voters was his initiatives with America’s communist foes. “In a period marked by little confidence in political leadership of nearly any stripe,” Harris wrote, “Nixon’s

⁸⁰ Memorandum, Nixon to Colson, May 15, 1972, document no. CK3100539138, DDRS.

⁸¹ Memorandum for the President’s File, “The President’s Meeting with Soviet Minister of Agriculture Vladimir Matskevich,” December 9, 1971, doc. 23, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XIV: Soviet Union, October 1971-May 1972* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2006), 70. Kissinger echoed Nixon’s thoughts after he returned from his secret Moscow trip, telling the president that the summit “will dwarf all previous post-war summits in terms of concrete accomplishments and have a major international and domestic impact. Emphasis in original. See Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, April 24, 1972, doc. 169, *FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. XIV*, 644.

⁸² Weihmiller, *U.S.-Soviet Summits*, 65, 142; Theodore Shabad, “Nixon Talks on TV to Soviet People and Hails Accord: Says the Wartime Alliance Can Be Inspiration for Renewed Cooperation,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1972.

announcement of journeys to Moscow and Peking [Beijing] met with remarkable high acceptance from the American public.” Over 70% of Americans approved of the summits and almost 60% believed Nixon was “working for peace in the world.”⁸³

In both China and the Soviet Union Nixon maximized press coverage to project the image of leadership and peace to the American public.⁸⁴ As CBS proclaimed, the China trip was “a technicolor picture story,” and the Soviet summit a “political soap opera.”⁸⁵ By traveling to the capitals of America’s major communist adversaries, Nixon became the first American president to visit Beijing and Moscow. Combined with his reputation as a hardline anti-communist, along with an American public anxious for peace, the journeys were even more noteworthy and produced exuberant, effusive coverage. “The pencils raced. The flash bulbs popped. The cameras whirred,” reported one journalist as Nixon arrived at the Kremlin, “a moment in time that few soothsayers would have dared to predict was frozen in history.”⁸⁶

Upon returning home, Nixon flew dramatically by helicopter from Andrews Air Force Base to the Capitol where he delivered a thirty-five minute, nationally televised address to Congress. Only about half of Congress was present, but Nixon’s real audience was the American people. Playing on the theme of peace, he stated that for both the United States and Soviet Union there was “an overriding desire to achieve a more stable peace in the world,” and having

⁸³ Louis Harris, “Summit Vital to Nixon,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 18, 1972.

⁸⁴ Nixon was even more concerned about coverage for his own visit and hoped to quiet media speculation. “I believe that the expectations for the Moscow trip are being built up too much,” Nixon told Kissinger. The president worried that if the agreements reached at the summit did not match expectations there would “be no real news value to them.” Going forward, Nixon wanted the Administration to “put a lid on speculation” about what the summit might achieve. One can see this lowering of expectations in an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*. As the first working session of the summit began, the paper wrote, “The nearer Mr. Nixon has come to Moscow, the more modest have been the forecasts of his staff. Three weeks ago the White House said that secret exchanges had ‘substantially increased’ the possibility of early agreement on strategic arms....But last weekend there was acknowledgement of obstacles...and reporters were told that key agreements may not come until after the summit.” See Memorandum, Nixon to Kissinger, March 11, 1972, doc. 58, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XIV*, 199; “Mr. Nixon at the Summit,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1972.

⁸⁵ CBS Evening News, May 22, 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=223072>.

⁸⁶ Louise Hutchinson, “Red Carpet for Nixons; U.S. Flag Over Kremlin,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1972.

embarked on that course, “history now lays upon us a special obligation to see it through.”⁸⁷ And clearly the statesman best able to guide America down that path was Nixon.

Both summits, by improving relations with the two major communist powers, furthered Administration goals of stabilizing the international environment and strengthening America’s position in it. They were also personal successes for Nixon. Global reaction was extremely positive. As one Paris paper gushed after the announcement of the Soviet trip, ““ Another sensation...In fact, Mr. Nixon is in the process of taking his place among the great Presidents of the U.S.””⁸⁸ More important than world opinion was what Americans thought, and here too the president won lavish praise. America’s most trusted news anchor, CBS’s Walter Cronkite, applauded the agreements reached at the Moscow summit, saying they were “the personal accomplishment of President Nixon’s diplomacy.”⁸⁹ In the aftermath the president’s popularity rating hit a two-year high, rising from 53% two months before the trip to 61%, a greater boost than even his China voyage.⁹⁰

Nixon easily won reelection in 1972, beating George McGovern with 60.7% of the popular vote and 96.7% of electoral votes. Whether foreign policy and Nixon’s trips played the decisive role is unclear, but they were prominently highlighted in campaign ads. In one television commercial titled “Passport,” the narrator extolls Nixon’s numerous trips abroad and meetings with foreign leaders: “President Nixon’s travels represent a new foreign policy for the United States, a policy that calls for...peaceful negotiations with our enemies, all for a single purpose, world peace. But there are still places to go and friends to be won. That’s why we need President

⁸⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, “Nixon Flies Home and Tells Nation of Summit Gain: Says Talks Laid the Basis for a ‘New Relationship’ with Soviet Union,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1972.

⁸⁸ Memorandum, Henry Loomis to Alexander Haig, October 13, 1971, Folder 1: President’s Moscow Trip (1971) [Oct. 71-Jun 72] [1 of 2]; Box 474: President’s Moscow Trip (1971) to President’s Moscow Trip January-April (1972) [Part 2]; NSC-President’s Trip Files; RNL.

⁸⁹ CBS Evening News, May 29, 1972, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=223191>.

⁹⁰ George Gallup, “Nixon Popularity Hits 2-Year Peak on Soviet Trip,” *Washington Post*, June 4, 1972.

Nixon. Now more than ever.” Another ad featured a cheery song proclaiming “Nixon Now.” As a woman sings, “Reaching out across the sea/making friends where foes used to be/giving hope to humanity,” images flashed across the screen of Nixon with Mao and Brezhnev.⁹¹

Some did see the election being significantly influenced by the summits. Nixon’s adviser Chuck Colson believed ““RN’s election is in the hands of Peking [Beijing].”” Brezhnev told Haig that the Soviets “were doing everything to help the President get re-elected.”⁹² But regardless of what was actually on voters’ minds as they cast their ballot, the visits to Beijing and Moscow began the process of changing the public’s image of Nixon and provided very visible successes.

“A Pale Imitation”: The Limits of Personal Diplomacy

In 1973, Nixon would again meet Brezhnev, this time in the United States. After the drama and major achievements at the Moscow summit, Brezhnev’s American visit was lackluster by comparison and much less politically beneficial. “In 1972 your trip to Moscow took place on the crest of your successful China visit and firm stance in Vietnam,” the State Department told Nixon. “This year, our allies and the American public will be more prone to subject the results of your meetings with Brezhnev to skeptical examination, searching for signs of weakness on our part.”⁹³ Indeed, by this time SALT was under attack from conservatives and hardliners such as Washington Senator Henry Jackson. The fact that SALT allowed the Soviets to have a greater number of land based and submarine launched missiles was anathema to hawks.

⁹¹ “Passport” and “Nixon Now,” Committee to Re-elect the President, 1972, Museum of the Moving Image, *The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2012*, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1972/passport; www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1972/nixon-now.

⁹² As quoted in George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 791; Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Nixon and Haig, April 21, 1972, doc. 137, *FRUS, 1969-1972, Vol. XIV*, 512.

⁹³ Memorandum, Kenneth Rush to Nixon, “Brezhnev Visit to the United States,” June 12, 1973, Folder 5: Brezhnev’s Visit [May-July 19, 1973] [3 of 4]; Box 939: Background-Soviet Union [Feb.-March 1972] to [Brezhnev Visit Schedule] [May-July 1973]; NSC-VIP Visits; RNL.

In late 1972, Jackson secured passage of a resolution that required parity in any future arms control agreements. He also worked to hinder détente by holding up a trade agreement with the Soviets unless they allowed unlimited Jewish emigration. Nixon's attempts at a SALT II agreement became increasingly difficult.

But even if there were not dedicated opponents to détente, by 1973 Nixon was in trouble, as Watergate increasingly destroyed his presidency. As his domestic position crumbled and the Congressional investigation of Watergate intensified, Jackson publicly stated that the summit should be postponed. But as Kissinger recalled, that was not an option: "We had no choice except to pretend that our authority was unimpaired...we needed to project self-confidence no matter what we felt." The president also had a more "personal motive" for not wanting to postpone, according to Kissinger. "For him to concede that his ability to govern had been impaired would accelerate the assault on his Presidency. He could not bring himself to admit the growing disintegration of what he had striven all his life to achieve."⁹⁴

For Nixon, the summit produced mixed results. It did nothing for his approval ratings, and some feared a desperate president would "be under terrible pressure to report new and favorable turns in U.S.-Soviet relations if only to counteract the running horror of the Watergate headlines."⁹⁵ But at the same time, according to one survey, 78% of Americans approved of the summit, and most believed that the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting had furthered the cause of world peace.⁹⁶ And the meeting did give Nixon some respite from Watergate. The Congressional hearings were postponed for the week, allowing him to once again play the role of statesman.

Though agreements were signed and progress toward better relations made, the results failed to match those of the previous year, and in terms of drama it did not reach the same

⁹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1982), 289.

⁹⁵ John Chamberlain, "Nixon's Dilemma in Brezhnev Talks," *Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 1972.

⁹⁶ Louis Harris, "Majority See Summit as Breakthrough," *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1973.

heights. Both Nixon and Brezhnev put a positive spin on their conference, and White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler said the “summit meeting can be characterized as a meeting of accomplishment and not one of atmospherics.”⁹⁷ But even if substantial agreements had been reached and the summit been a greater spectacle, the public was no longer awestruck by Nixon meeting with a communist adversary. Rather it was captive to the unfolding constitutional crisis at home.⁹⁸

During his visit Brezhnev invited Nixon to again visit the Soviet Union the following year. If Watergate was a distraction in 1973 it was even more so in 1974. The summit “turned into a pale imitation of the first two,” Kissinger recalled.⁹⁹ Like the previous year, some believed the whole trip was designed simply to distract Americans from Watergate, and critics worried that a weakened president eager for success would make harmful concessions.¹⁰⁰ When Nixon arrived Brezhnev greeted him warmly at the airport. The president tried to play up their personal relationship and how vital it was to U.S.-Soviet relations. The lessening of tension and previous agreements “were possible because of a personal relationship that was established between the General Secretary and the President of the United States,” Nixon claimed in a toast. Adding, “because of our personal relationship, there is no question about our will to keep these agreements and to make more.”¹⁰¹ For those listening back home, the not so subtle message was

⁹⁷ Richard Reston, “Brezhnev to Tell Summit Gain in TV Speech Today: Soviet Leader, Nixon Voice Satisfaction With Progress as San Clemente Talks End,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1973.

⁹⁸ Richard Reston, “Impact of Nixon-Brezhnev Summit Appears Lost in Watergate Affair,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1973. As one reporter noted, Brezhnev was the first Soviet leader to visit the United States since Nikita Khrushchev had fourteen years earlier in 1959. Yet “it was if he had never been here,” as the visit got overwhelmed by Watergate. See Richard Reston, “Impact of Nixon-Brezhnev Summit Appears Lost in Watergate Affair,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1973.

⁹⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 300.

¹⁰⁰ Aldo, Beckman, “It’s perils v. promises in Moscow: President promises little, needs much,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1974.

¹⁰¹ Robert G. Kaiser and Peter Osnos, “Soviets Greet Nixon Warmly: Nixon Cites Ties With Soviet Leader,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1974. Interestingly, in the official Russian translation of Nixon’s toast, the word “personal” was dropped, leading some to believe that the Soviets tried to distance themselves from Nixon’s claims of close personal ties. See John Herbers, “Tass Deletion of a Word in Nixon Speech Disputed: ‘Personal,’ in

that if Nixon were no longer in power, the country would lose out on his close bond with Brezhnev, which could lead to increased hostilities with the Soviet Union.

The trip did produce some minor agreements, and looking back Kissinger believed that it was a beneficial meeting: “Not so earthshaking as on previous occasions but the sort of accords that showed that the superpowers took progress in their relationship seriously.”¹⁰² But it did not matter. Part of the problem was that expectations had been set so high from Nixon’s previous summits that anything less than a major accord was a letdown. More importantly, however, Watergate tainted every action the president took.

Conclusion

Brezhnev was the last foreign leader Nixon met with. A little over a month later he resigned. In the span of two years, he went from the height of his popularity to leaving the presidency in disgrace. It was the use of personal diplomacy that helped Nixon reach the pinnacle of success, but the role of statesman could not ultimately save him. Personal diplomacy can help domestically, but it cannot work miracles. Just as a president can use it for domestic gain, domestic troubles can hinder its effectiveness. “The strategy of the Nixon Administration presupposed a decisive President willing to stake American power to resist Soviet expansionism and ready to negotiate seriously if the Soviets would accept coexistence on this basis,” Kissinger recalled. But Nixon’s ability to perform the role of bold statesman was “destroyed by our domestic passion play.”¹⁰³

‘Personal Relationship’ Between President and Brezhnev, Is Lost in Official Translation,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1974.

¹⁰² Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1177.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 300.

By traveling abroad and interacting with Chinese and Soviet leaders, Nixon was able to further American interests while also creating media sensations. Geopolitical objectives drove Nixon's opening to China and pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union, and he believed that doing so put the United States in a better strategic position, helping preserve and further America's dominant place in the world order. Diplomacy at the highest-level helped further these moves, but it also presented political opportunities domestically. Nixon's pre-presidential career provided him with numerous examples of how foreign travel and interacting with world leaders could boost a politician's popularity and garner favorable press coverage. Thus in 1972 he was well attuned to how visits to Beijing and Moscow, and the media coverage they would receive, could influence the voting public. Images of the president acting as a statesman and promoting peace helped shift perceptions of him and improve his electoral prospects. As nationally syndicated columnist William White wrote,

The loner who always has been Richard Nixon has now toiled upward to his third summit within months—this one the summit of his power and influence and perhaps also of his popularity...the Nixon who has never doubted his personal capabilities now sees that he is also more than a merely tolerated President...Moscow has accomplished what Nixon's withdrawn personality could never accomplish on its own in signaling to the people the slogging, determined, utterly indomitable nature that underlies an outward absence of easy appeal to others.¹⁰⁴

Though an extreme case, Nixon's leveraging of personal diplomacy for domestic gain is not unique to him. Modern presidents have been attuned to the domestic political benefits of hosting foreign leaders at the White House or traveling abroad to confer with them.

Today, with an almost infinite number of television channels, the Internet, and social media, presidents have almost unlimited avenues to reach the public. However, this also means

¹⁰⁴ William S. White, "A Personal Triumph for the President," *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1972.

that presidents have more competition in getting their message across and controlling it.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the ability to use personal diplomacy for a domestic exposure has lessened since Nixon's time. The practice has also become so embedded in American political culture that Americans now often overlook the practice. Presidents, however, still seek every opportunity to burnish their image and influence public opinion. So while personal diplomacy may not be the domestic political tool it once was, it still plays a role, if only at the margins.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ For changes in traditional media that has made it more difficult for presidents to get coverage, as well as caused an increase in negative coverage, see Jeffrey E. Cohen, *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Political scientists have found that foreign travel and meeting with world leaders does usually boost a president's approval rating, though the increase is small and quickly diminishes. See Elmer Plischke, "The President's Image as Diplomat in Chief," *Review of Politics* 47, no. 4 (October 1985): 544-565; Robert E. Darcy and Alvin Richman, "Presidential Travel and Public Opinion," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 85-90; Dennis M. Simon and Charles W. Ostrom, Jr. "The Impact of Televised Speeches and Foreign Travel on Presidential Approval," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 58-82; Paul Brace and Barbara Hinckley, "Presidential Activities from Truman through Reagan: Timing and Impact," *Journal of Politics* 55, no. 2 (May 1993): 382-398; Agnes Simon, "The Political and Economic Consequences of the Summit Diplomatic Activity of the U.S. President," (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, July 2012).

CHAPTER 6

“THEY WILL WANT A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP”: JIMMY CARTER, FOREIGN LEADERS, AND THE DESIRE FOR PRESIDENTIAL TIME

A little less than a year before resigning from office, Richard Nixon hosted Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu at the White House. For Ceausescu, the visit was an opportunity to enhance his image as a statesman and promote his country, and it illustrated Romania's relative independence from Moscow. With this in mind, he hoped for a public demonstration showing his country had a special relationship with the United States. But this was something the Nixon Administration could not deliver. To compensate, American advisers told the president that Ceausescu would “attach particular importance to the quality of the personal relationship he will have established with you.”¹ By this point the two men had met multiple times. In 1969, Nixon went to Romania, becoming the first American president to visit a communist state since 1945. A year later, Ceausescu came to the United States, hoping, among other objectives, to deepen his connection with Nixon.² Before meeting the American president, the Romanian leader visited New York, California, and Detroit. Throughout his pre-White House journey, Ceausescu had nothing but positive things to say about America's leader, at one point stating that he was always welcomed in Romania, either as president or a private citizen.³

¹ Memorandum, Kenneth Rush to Richard Nixon, “Ceausescu Visit: Objectives and Perspectives,” November 30, 1973, Folder 4: Romania Pres. Ceausescu Visit, Dec. 1973; Box 936: Romanian Ceausescu Visit Oct. 1970 [1 of 3] to Romania Pres-Ceausescu Visit Dec. 1973 [2 of 2]; National Security Council Files (hereafter NSC)-VIP Visits; Richard Nixon Presidential Library (hereafter RNL).

² Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Nixon, “Your Meeting with Romania President Ceausescu, October 26,” n.d., Folder 2: Romania Ceausescu Visit, Oct. 70 [2 of 3]; Box 936: Romanian Ceausescu Visit Oct. 1970 [1 of 3] to Romania Pres-Ceausescu Visit Dec. 1973 [2 of 2]; NSC-VIP Visits; RNL.

³ Memorandum for the Record, Arthur T. Downey, “The California Visit of Romania President Ceausescu, October 14-17,” October 20, 1970, Folder 1: Romania, Ceausescu Visit Oct 70 [1 of 3]; Box 936: Romanian Ceausescu Visit Oct. 1970 [1 of 3] to Romania Pres-Ceausescu Visit Dec. 1973 [2 of 2]; NSC-VIP Visits; RNL.

For Ceausescu, personal and frequent contact with Nixon was a boon personally and for his country. Political and economic benefits, as well as increased prestige, made interaction with the American president worth pursuing. By the time Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, the Romanian leader was accustomed to close contact and wanted it to continue. A month after inauguration, Ceausescu sent a personal emissary to Washington whose objective was “to underline Romania’s interest in maintaining a close and expanding relationship with the United States,” according to Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher. As he told the president, part of the mission was “to convey President Ceausescu’s desire to establish with you the kind of personal relationship he had with Presidents Nixon and Ford.” Christopher also hypothesized that the Romanian emissary “may also be fishing for an invitation” for Ceausescu to visit.⁴

The Romanian leader was not alone in his desire for a close, personal relationship with American presidents. Many foreign leaders acted in a similar manner. Indonesian President Suharto, who, like Ceausescu, felt that he had a personal connection with Nixon and Ford, also sought to form close ties with Carter early in his presidency.⁵ But Suharto’s outreach was not successful, and it negatively affected U.S.-Indonesia relations. By Carter’s last year in office, the State Department warned that “Suharto and other Indonesian leaders [have] an impression that the U.S. is neglectful of Indonesia, possibly ill-willed toward Suharto’s continuance in power, and ungrateful for Indonesian support and cooperation on a range of issues important to us.” The number one reason given for the current state of relations was “insufficient personal contacts...including failure to invite President Suharto for a state visit during the past four years.” The State Department went on to note that “Suharto believe[d] he had a personal

⁴ Memorandum, Warren Christopher to Jimmy Carter, “Visit of Romanian Special Emissary Vasile Pungan,” February 21, 1977, NLC-6-66-627-8, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (hereafter JCL). While Ceausescu did not visit in 1977, in April the following year he came to the United States for a state visit.

⁵ Memorandum, Richard Holbrook to Cyrus Vance, “My Trip to East Asia,” April 21, 1977, NLC-26-39-5-4-1, JCL.

relationship with previous U.S. presidents, and his resentment over this perceived slight (plainly visible to his political constituency) has reinforced his reaction to other U.S. actions.”⁶

Here we see the consequences when American presidents did not reciprocate a foreign leader’s interest in personal contact. But presidents have a finite amount of time and an infinite number of things to do. And there are simply some foreign leaders presidents are more eager to interact with than others. For example, Carter was not thrilled about an upcoming meeting with New Zealand Prime Minister Robert Muldoon after some impertinent statements by the prime minister. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance inquired what Carter wanted to do, suggesting they could postpone the visit or downgrade its status. In the end the meeting went forward, but it was clear the president was not pleased. “He seems like an ass,” Carter wrote back to Vance, “But I’ll see him.”⁷

In the postwar period, as the American presidency became the key institution in the international arena, foreign leaders became increasingly interested in meeting with the holder of that office. For most of these global figures, no other person could deliver the economic, military, or political benefits that the occupant of the White House could. This forced presidents to engage with foreign leaders more than they might otherwise have, at times becoming almost overwhelmed. As one memo addressed to Carter from the vice president’s office noted, the list of potential visitors for the upcoming year “involve[d] too many proposed visits, including visits

⁶ Memorandum, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Mini-PRC Meeting on Indonesia,” August 25, 1980, NLC-132-83-12-8-2, JCL.

⁷ Memorandum, Vance to Carter, “Visit of Prime Minister Muldoon,” June 25, 1977, NLC-128-12-9-18-8, JCL. What had irritated the Administration was Muldoon’s comments that Carter’s human rights agenda was futile and not “morally credible” because of the selective way in which it was applied. See Associated Press, “Carter Rights Drive ‘Not Morally Credible,’” *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1977.

by leaders from nations whose relations with us are of such modest proportions that I question their being given priority over the domestic demands on your 1978 schedule.”⁸

Though probably sage advice, in the Cold War era the United States’ relations with very few areas of the world could be deemed of “modest proportions.” No longer were America’s foreign relations confined to a limited number of traditional partners. The country had interests in every corner of the globe, and foreign heads of state and government knew this. Some wanted to meet with the American president because of legitimate security or economic needs made acute by the Cold War. Others were more opportunistic, seeking to profit from America’s decades-long struggle against communism. Either way, presidents felt the need to personally interact, through invitations to visit the United States, trips abroad, or correspondence. This did not mean that presidents had no choice in the matter, they certainly did. But when approached by foreign leaders, either for frequent private correspondence or visits, they often went with more personally diplomacy rather than less. A president could refuse to engage in such activities, but he did so at his own peril. As Suharto illustrates, the Carter Administration’s lack of personal attention created friction in U.S.-Indonesia relations. In other contexts during the Cold War, a presidential rebuff of overtures by a neutral or nominally western aligned country could have led to flirtations with the Soviets. Refusing to personally engage with an ally could have led to public strains in relations, something anathema to Cold War leaders often focused on solidarity, or at least the perception of solidarity.

Using the Carter Administration, this chapter explores the way foreign leaders pushed presidents toward personal diplomacy in the second half of the twentieth century. From simpler aspirations of maneuvering for an invitation to visit, to larger goals of dramatic reorientation of

⁸ Memorandum, Walter Mondale to Carter, “Foreign Visit Schedule,” February 9, 1978, NLC-133-110-1-1-19-0, JCL.

relations between countries, foreign leaders sought out the American president. Sometimes these overtures were welcomed, sometimes not. And in instances when a president was eager to forge a personal relationship, the depth and scope of that connection and what it entailed could be greater than anticipated.

Why Not the Best?: Carter in Charge

When Jimmy Carter ran for president in 1976, his campaign slogan asked a simple question: “Why not the best?”⁹ Asking the question, however, proved much easier than delivering on its promise. His term started propitiously, but within less than a year his fortunes with the public began to decline. Carter’s approval rating, at or above sixty percent for most of his first year, would plummet into the thirties by the election of 1980.¹⁰ Like many of Carter’s domestic policies, his conduct of foreign affairs came under frequent attack. In the fall of 1977, his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski warned him of growing disillusionment among the public. While Brzezinski personally believed that Carter’s foreign policy was correct, he told the president, “I feel that we are confronting a growing domestic problem involving public perception of the general character of that policy. To put it simply and quite bluntly, it is seen as ‘soft.’”¹¹ Carter would never overcome this. Though accomplishments such as the Camp

⁹ During the election Carter released an autobiography by that title. See Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Erwin C. Hargrove, *The Effective Presidency: Lessons on Leadership from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 142-143.

¹¹ Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #37,” November 18, 1977, Folder 5; Box 41; Donated Historical Material-Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL. Months before Brzezinski’s memo, another presidential adviser, Henry Owen, wrote to Carter analyzing the Administration’s foreign policy in its first six months. Owen noted that the media’s coverage of the president’s foreign policy was “silly and superficial,” and advised that if Carter maintained his current course and continued to focus on “structural problems” rather than short term “superficial success,” “the press will admit by 1980 that your Administration has accomplished more than any President since Truman, who also focused on architectural improvements rather than cosmetic gestures.” Though Carter wrote “good” on the memo, sadly for him, Owen’s prediction was not even close to being accurate, as the “soft” image Brzezinski noted came to dominate. See Memorandum, Henry Owen to Carter, “Foreign Policy: The First Six Months,” August 26, 1977, NLC-133-105-3-2-2; JCL.

David Accords would boost his popularity somewhat, he could never shake the negative images that formed during his first year.¹²

But in the early days, when hopes were high, the Carter Administration had a myriad of international goals. It wanted to negotiate a new SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) agreement with the Soviet Union, transfer control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, normalize relations with China, negotiate a long-term peace agreement in the Middle East, and deal with apartheid in South Africa and majority rule in Rhodesia.¹³ For the Administration's foreign policy in general, personal diplomacy was recognized as a key component. Even before Carter assumed the presidency this was evident. In a report he received a little over a month before inauguration, he was told he would "inevitably have *direct* dealings with heads of foreign governments. They will not be satisfied dealing through your Secretary of State and will want a *personal* relationship."¹⁴

Once in office, the value of personal diplomacy was again emphasized. Prior to the 32nd

¹² For an examination of how the press covered the Carter Administration throughout its time in office, see Mark J. Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989). There is no lack of criticism of Carter's presidency. Indeed, even before he was out of office his former head speechwriter James Fallows wrote a critical article. On foreign affairs he wrote that "Carter was not only preoccupied by the serious international problems that lay before him; he—and those around him—became virtually transfixed by them," and in the process distracted Carter from pressing domestic issues. See James Fallows, "The Passionless Presidency: The Trouble With Jimmy Carter's Administration," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1979, 33-48. For critical scholarly works on Carter's foreign policy, see Donald Spencer, *The Carter Implosion: Jimmy Carter and the Amateur Style of Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Richard C. Thornton, *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991); Burton I. Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1993). For more positive accounts, see John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Robert Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

¹³ For an internal assessment and overview of the Carter Administration's foreign policy goals and vision for its years in office, see Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, "Four-Year Goals: Preliminary Statement," April 29, 1977, NLC-12-26-6-2-2; JCL.

¹⁴ Memorandum, David Aaron to Carter, "The National Security Council System," December 5, 1976, NLC-7-66-8-8-6; JCL. Emphasis in original. Regarding personal diplomacy, the memo went on to say, "You [Carter] have 'Cabinet' lines from the White House to several Chiefs of State (e.g. Britain, France, Japan, West Germany) which, with few exceptions, permit the most private direct communication. *It is important to establish personal contacts and channels with other world leaders before there are major crises or problems.* This will not only help you deal with the problems but, equally important, *relationships initiated by crises are always colored by the events that drive them—and often adversely.*" Emphasis in original.

United Nations General Assembly in 1977, the State Department urged Carter to do more than simply deliver a speech. While past presidents had rarely held bilateral meetings at the UN, Carter was urged to reconsider this precedent. As diplomatic progress was made in the Middle East and Rhodesia, the State Department argued that the “exercise of Presidential leadership through personal diplomacy could have a major impact on the thinking of world leaders assembled in New York.”¹⁵ Two years later, the Administration was still thinking of how to leverage the practice. “As I consider ways to increase the effectiveness of our diplomacy in [the] coming months,” Secretary of State Vance told Carter, “I am struck with the fact that there is often no more persuasive means at our disposal...than even brief visits with you. The extremely positive results coming out of your personal contacts with foreign leaders confirm the great utility of these meetings...personal diplomacy by you could make a significant difference” in many parts of the world. Vance, with Brzezinski concurring, proposed that the Administration arrange up to two foreign visitors per month. Though noting it would be an added burden on Carter’s time, Vance believed it “would be time well spent in furthering our foreign policy objectives.”¹⁶

Thus, Carter was actively engaged with foreign leaders from the beginning of his time in office. He met with them in the United States over thirty times his first year, a total that included hosting a state visit for the president of Mexico less than a month after inauguration. He went abroad less than four months into office, going to the United Kingdom and Switzerland where he met with fifteen heads of government.¹⁷ At the end of his first year he embarked on another

¹⁵ Memorandum, Vance to Carter, “Your Participation in the 32nd United Nations General Assembly,” June 17, 77, NLC-8-22-3-12-3; JCL; Memorandum, Peter Tarnoff to Brzezinski, “The President’s Participation in the 32nd General Assembly,” August 4, 1977, NLC-8-21-2-30-5; JCL.

¹⁶ Memorandum, Vance to Carter, “Foreign Visitors,” September 18, 1979, NLC-133-106-2-3-1; JCL; Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “Foreign Visitors,” September 24, 1979, NLC-133-106-2-3-1; JCL.

¹⁷ According Hedrick Smith of the *New York Times*, Carter’s first trip abroad was quite successful. He noted that the president had showed “his skill at personal diplomacy with some proud and touchy European leaders,” and that

foreign trip, during which he visited Poland, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Belgium.

By the end of his time in office, Carter had completed the most extraordinary display of presidential personally diplomacy ever. For two weeks he engaged the leaders of Egypt and Israel at the presidential retreat Camp David. Secluded from the outside world, Carter helped broker an agreement between those nations, something few had believed possible. While successful, the talks at Camp David were a huge gamble and occupied a significant amount of time, allowing critics to claim he was neglecting other aspects of his job. As his time in the White House came to an end, some critics of personal diplomacy talked of a “Nixon-Carter infatuation” with the practice.¹⁸ Indeed, Carter did spend large amounts of time engaged in personal diplomacy. As noted, the Administration often saw it as a positive and beneficial use of the president’s time. In a meeting with the South Korean foreign minister, Brzezinski boasted, “In the first 14 months of his [Carter’s] Presidency he met with 67 foreign leaders as opposed to 8 by President Truman and 22 by President Kennedy during a similar period.” Yet in that same conversation, the pitfalls of too much personal diplomacy were evident. Explaining why it was not currently possible to arrange a meeting between Carter and the South Korean president, Brzezinski noted that Carter had “already followed a very heavy foreign travel schedule which has compressed the time that he has devoted to Congressional legislation and given rise to criticism that he is neglecting domestic policy...The days at Camp David devoted solely to the Middle East have further exacerbated the situation.”¹⁹

probably the most important outcome of the trip was “Carter’s ability to prove himself and to establish healthy working relationships with experienced international leaders.” See Hedrick Smith, “Carter Achieved Success in London by Being a Realist,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1977.

¹⁸ J. Robert Schaetzel, “The Dreaded Diplomatic Disease: Reagan Should Shun Personal Approach, Let Experts Do Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1981.

¹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Brzezinski, Park Tong-chin, et al., September 29, 1978, document no. KO00272, Digital National Security Archive (hereafter DNSA).

As with other presidents, personal diplomacy held promise and peril for Jimmy Carter. His Administration's favorable predisposition toward engaging with world leaders was intensified by the fact that his foreign counterparts actively sought him out. The rest of the chapter examines how other heads of government pressed the American president to engage. As noted, sometimes this was welcomed, other times it was not. And even when welcomed, the intensity of that personal diplomacy could be more than ever imagined. Both of these factors were at play in Carter's interactions with Japan and Egypt.

"I Resent Their Taking Advantage of Us Like This": Fukuda and Ohira

In the aftermath of World War II, the relationship between the United States and Japan changed dramatically.²⁰ Defeated and broken after the war, by the start of Carter's presidency Japan was the third largest economy in the world and America's key Asian ally. The American-Japanese relationship, however, was not without tensions. Immediately following WWII, the United States occupied Japan and sought to restructure its government and people.²¹ A new constitution and land reform were part of the many changes brought by the United States, but the exact role of Japan in the emerging postwar order was not immediately clear. Rising conflict with the Soviets solved this dilemma, and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 cemented it: Japan would be a strategic Cold War military asset. In 1951, the two nations signed a security treaty, a key feature of which was U.S. rights to the Ryukyu Islands, an archipelago south of

²⁰ The following paragraphs briefly describing U.S.-Japan relations after World War II are taken from Frederick L. Shiels, *Tokyo and Washington: Dilemmas of a Mature Alliance* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1980), 65-92.

²¹ For the impact of the U.S. occupation on Japanese society, see John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999). For a history of U.S.-Japan relations that emphasizes the tensions in the relationship, see Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

mainland Japan that included key military bases at Okinawa.²² Though technically Japanese territory, the archipelago was under U.S. control.

Problems arose shortly after the security agreement went into effect. In 1953, there were significant disturbances on the northernmost island of the Ryukyus, and in 1955 controversy arose over the possibility of nuclear-armed missiles on America's island bases. Starting in 1958, the United States and Japan entered negotiations to revise the security treaty. After two years of difficult talks, they came to a new agreement that was more to Japan's liking, including a provision that required "prior consultation" before any nuclear weapons could be based on its territory. Yet not all Japanese supported the treaty, and the high-handed tactics used by the prime minister to assure passage provoked protests. Turmoil became so severe that a planned 1960 visit by Dwight Eisenhower was cancelled out of fear for his safety.

This inauspicious start to the 1960s to some degree foreshadowed the increased tension that arose later in the decade and continued into the early 1970s. Two decades after the end of WWII, the United States still had political control over Japanese territory, a potentially debilitating situation for U.S.-Japan relations according to Edwin Reischauer, the American ambassador at the time. Throughout the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations began exploring the reversion of Okinawa to Japan. The Nixon Administration continued this effort, but also provided numerous shocks to the American-Japanese relationship.²³ The announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969, which stressed greater military self-reliance, was an early indication that the Administration wanted its allies, including Japan, to take a greater role in their

²² The same day as the security treaty was signed by the United States and Japan, a peace treaty with Japan was signed by forty-eight nations (including the United States), officially ending WWII. Both treaties went into effect the following year.

²³ In 1969, Nixon and Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato agreed to the reversion of Okinawa back to Japan. A formal agreement was signed in 1971, and the following year Japan officially retook control. For an account of U.S.-Japan relations during the Nixon years, both its positive and negative aspects, see Timothy P. Maga, "'Golf ball diplomacy': Richard Nixon and Japan, 1969-1974," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 9, no. 1 (March 1998): 182-207.

own defense. In 1971, the Japanese were stunned by Nixon's announcement he was going to China. It was not so much the burgeoning reconciliation between former Cold War foes that shocked the Japanese as much as the fact that they were not consulted or told in advance. Nixon also devalued the dollar and instituted an import surcharge, moves that adversely affected the Japanese economy. These developments, combined with American withdrawal from Vietnam, sent the message that the United States could no longer be relied on.

Doubtful of American security commitments, by the 1970s Japan also began to fear economic reprisals and protectionism. During the previous decade Japan's economy had exploded: the 1960s saw ten percent annual growth and income double.²⁴ This robustness coincided with the economic decline of an overburdened America. By the late 1970s, the United States was mired in economic doldrums. High unemployment and rising inflation, or "stagflation," gripped the American economy. Combined with increasing energy costs and an ever-expanding trade deficit, the United States' economic position during the Carter years was feeble. Japan was often singled out among the countries the United States had a trade imbalance with, as it was the nation's largest trading partner. American officials constantly sought to even the balance of trade, while Japan sought to prevent any new trade restrictions or barriers from becoming law. Japanese officials often tried to appease the United States by pledging to voluntarily restrict exports on this or that product, but the imbalance was never satisfactorily resolved.

Despite these issues, the two nations were close allies, each dependent on the other in the realms of economics and security. Because of this interdependence, it was vital that irritants to

²⁴ For the influence of U.S. Cold War strategy and America's role in building the Japanese economy, see Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: The Cold War Context of Japan's Postwar Economic Revival, 1950-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

the relationship not become acute. When Carter took office in 1977, it was unclear the direction he would take U.S.-Japan relations, and the Japanese were eager to feel him out. In his approach toward Japan, like in other aspects of his foreign policy, Carter tried to move beyond the Cold War. Rather than focus on the island nation as a military installation projecting American power, he wanted to focus on issues such as energy, human rights, economics, and what a post-Vietnam Asia would look like.²⁵ Like many of Carter's initiatives, however, trouble loomed. Economic relations always remained a problem, and by the end of his term, confrontation with the Soviets had again taken center stage.²⁶ But at the outset Carter had larger aspirations, and despite not achieving them all, he elevated the importance of U.S.-Japan relations more than any previous president.

Months before taking office, a transition paper told Carter, "The importance of Japan...our most important Asian ally...cannot be overemphasized."²⁷ He was advised that while there were tensions in the relationship, no major bilateral issues existed, and even the issues that did exist were "in some ways more matters of style than of content and *it is the style of the relationship which requires early attention by a new President*, in order to set the proper tone or mood."²⁸ The best way to do this, it was argued, was a presidential visit to Japan, and if that was not possible, to have the Japanese prime minister visit the United States soon after taking office.

Since only one American president had visited Japan, experts believed a Carter trip to the island

²⁵ Timothy P. Maga, *Hands Across the Sea?: U.S.-Japan Relations, 1961-1981* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997), 141-142.

²⁶ For Carter's attempts to reorient American foreign policy but his ultimate reversal back to traditional Cold War strategy, see Jerel A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man Before His Time? The Emergence and Collapse of the First Post-Cold War Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 459-476; David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

²⁷ Memorandum, Jack Watson to Carter, "Options Papers for Foreign & Defense Policy," November 3, 1976, Folder: Transition: State and Defense Options Papers [2], 11/76; Box 41: Subject File, State Department Evening Reports, 11/80 through Transition: State and Defense Options Papers [3], 11/76; Plains File; JCL.

²⁸ Memorandum, Watson to Carter, "Options Papers for Foreign & Defense." Emphasis in original. The need for presidential involvement in the U.S.-Japan relationship was also told to Carter by his ambassador to Japan, Mike Mansfield. See Maga, *Hands Across the Sea?*, 124.

nation would be a highly visible way to show Japan that it was an equal and would be treated as such. While it downplayed the significance of disputes between the two nations, the transition report's suggestion about the personal nature of the relationship was accurate.

There would be no early presidential trip, but the Administration worked quickly to create a favorable impression and show the importance it placed on Japan. During the period between his election and inauguration, Carter made a well-received phone call to Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda in which he invited the prime minister to visit soon after inauguration.²⁹ Building on this, three days after taking office Carter sent his vice president, Walter Mondale, to consult with allies, which included Japan. Because the new president was such an unknown quantity, allied leaders welcomed the visit as a chance to learn more about the Administration's thinking, and as Mondale recognized, his trip could help to quickly set the right tone in relations.³⁰ While in Japan, the vice president pushed the country to increase imports and help reduce its trade surplus with the United States. He also sought to reassure it about possible troop withdrawals from South Korea. More significant was the message he brought of Japan's importance to the United States. Noting that there was "no nation with whom we [U.S.] share a broader range of interests," Mondale stated that Japan was "one of the cornerstones" of American foreign policy "and an indispensable prerequisite for any effort to manage international economic problems and to devise wise and equitable solutions for global problems."³¹

Having moved quickly to ease concerns, Carter's next step was to meet with the Japanese leader. In March 1977, Fukuda came to the White House. The Administration viewed the prime

²⁹ Reuters, "Carter Invites Fukuda to Talks," *Washington Post*, January 13, 1977.

³⁰ Bernard Weinraub, "Mondale, in Belgium, Affirms U.S. Links to Atlantic Alliance: He Says the Central Theme of Trip Is Economic—Seek Cooperation in Solving Common Problems," *New York Times*, January 24, 1977. For Mondale's stated goals of the trip and his report to Carter afterward, see Message, Mondale to Carter, "Visit to Europe and Japan," January 18, 1977, doc. 1, and Memorandum, Mondale to Carter, "Results of Visit to Europe and Japan," February 4, 1977, doc. 5, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume III: Foreign Economic Policy* (hereafter *FRUS*) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2013), 1-6, 15-23.

³¹ "Mondale, in Tokyo, Affirms U.S. Links With Japan," *New York Times*, January 31, 1977.

minister as primarily wanting to portray himself as a statesman who could effectively manage Japan's most important bilateral relationship. And Vance again made the point that "style" was key, noting that the prime minister's visit would build on the positive feelings engendered by Carter's pre-inauguration phone call.³²

It was clear that Fukuda wanted a meeting with the president, and because of his country's importance to U.S. interests, he got an early appointment. The prime minister also felt that he deserved an early meeting because not only was he pro-American, but on multiple issues he had steered Japanese policy closer to Administration preferences.³³ But a single meeting was insufficient, and Fukuda soon pushed for more time with the president. For example, shortly after their initial gathering, Carter and Fukuda saw each other again at an economic summit in London. Joined by five other world leaders, Carter and Fukuda would obviously interact at the summit, but the prime minister wanted to guarantee alone time with the president. About a week before the summit the Japanese ambassador requested that the president and prime minister have a thirty-minute meeting to discuss proliferation issues before the summit met in the plenary.³⁴ Soon after their time together in London, Fukuda's advisers tried to set up a private channel between the prime minister and Brzezinski. If Fukuda could not talk directly with Carter, the national security adviser, someone in the White House close to the president, was the next

³² Memorandum, Vance to Carter, "Official Visit by Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda," n.d., NLC-15-24-1-21-5; JCL. When Fukuda arrived, some considered him the best-prepared Japanese prime minister to ever meet with an American president. As for the meeting itself, it was noted that it was "the quietest" between the two nations' leaders in at least eight years. The shocks of the Nixon years appeared gone and there now seemed to be a "certain solidarity" to the U.S.-Japan relationship. See "Confident Visitor: Well-Briefed Japanese Leader Ready to Discuss Economic Issues With Carter," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1977; Richard Halloran, "U.S.-Japanese Leaders' Meeting Was Quietest in at Least 8 Years," *New York Times*, March 28, 1977.

³³ Joseph Kraft, "Japan's Hopes Are America's Interests," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1977.

³⁴ Memorandum, Henry Owen to Carter, "Prime Minister Fukuda," April 29, 1977, Folder: Japan, 1-4/77; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; National Security Affairs (hereafter NSA), Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

best thing.³⁵

“There is so much we can do together,” Fukuda wrote to Carter after the economic summit, “and I hope we can keep in close touch [with] each other.”³⁶ The prime minister was making his interest in a continuing relationship known, and Carter reciprocated, telling him a few months later, “If you have any thoughts you wish to convey to me...I hope you will feel free to utilize the telephone or the Cabinet line which provides a direct communication link between us.”³⁷ But sometimes correspondence and phone calls are inadequate. While good ways to keep in touch, nothing beats a face-to-face meeting, and as the Carter Administration began its second year in office, Fukuda sought another visit to the United States. With the two countries continuing to tussle over trade issues, he requested a meeting with the president. The prime minister was in a difficult spot. Though making some concessions, his actions did not go far enough for the United States. Low approval ratings in Japan combined with domestic pressure not to make any more concessions only exacerbated his troubles. Thus, Fukuda saw a meeting with the president as beneficial in two ways. First, a face-to-face encounter with Carter would allow him to present his country’s case directly and hopefully prevent any retaliatory measures by the United States. Second, a high-profile visit to the White House might help his sagging poll

³⁵ Memorandum, Mike Armacost to Brzezinski, “Direct Channel to Japanese Prime Minister’s Office,” May 16, 1977, Folder: Japan, 1-4/77; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

³⁶ Letter, Fukuda to Carter, May 23, 1977, Folder: Japan: Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, 2-12/77; Box 11: Japan through Kiribati; NSA, Brzezinski Material, President’s Correspondence With Foreign Leaders File; JCL.

³⁷ Letter, Carter to Fukuda, July 15, 1977, Folder: Japan: Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, 2-12/77; Box 11: Japan through Kiribati; NSA, Brzezinski Material, President’s Correspondence With Foreign Leaders File; JCL. Though drafted in the form of a letter, Brzezinski recommended that this particular message be sent through the “Cabinet line which provides a direct and private telecommunications link with the Prime Minister’s office.” He noted that the line was set up in 1972, but so far had only been used twice. Brzezinski does not explicitly state it, but using the Cabinet line demonstrated a type of closeness, making the message perhaps more personal, thus aiding in setting a positive tone in relations. See Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “Message to Prime Minister Fukuda,” July 15, 1977, Folder: Japan: Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, 2-12/77; Box 11: Japan through Kiribati; NSA, Brzezinski Material, President’s Correspondence With Foreign Leaders File; JCL.

numbers back home.³⁸

Though the Japanese privately asked for a visit, about a week later they also made their request publicly known, putting pressure on the Carter Administration to extend an invitation—which it did. While no doubt pleased to come to the White House a second time, Fukuda pushed Carter further. What the prime minister really wanted was a presidential visit to Japan. During their talks, he took the opportunity to press the issue. Mentioning how the president had been invited to visit and that such a trip would be “appreciated,” Fukuda wanted a firm date. Carter demurred, saying that though he wanted to go, he was not sure when that would be. Fukuda tried to pin him down, asking whether it would be in 1978 or 1979. “Please do not make me promise,” Carter responded, before moving on to a different topic.³⁹

While the prime minister hoped the visit would help clear up the issues between Japan and the United States, he was only partially pleased. Carter told reporters his meetings with Fukuda “went well,” but reports noted, “neither the Japanese nor the Americans were completely satisfied with the outcome.”⁴⁰ Though Fukuda agreed to take new measures to adjust the trade imbalance he was short on specifics. The United States also disappointed, agreeing to a new monetary accord, but not going so far as to intervene to prop up the dollar from further decline, which Japan desired. Fukuda would also be frustrated on the domestic side. If the visit gave him any political boost in Japan it was short-lived. By the end of the year he was voted out of office.

Though the prime minister did not get a clear commitment from Carter for the timing of a

³⁸ United Press International, “Fukuda Asks for Carter Meeting; Strauss in Tokyo to Seek Trade Pact,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1978; William Chapman, “Fukuda’s Journey to U.S. Linked to Domestic Politics,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 1978.

³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Carter, Fukuda, et al., “Summary of the President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Fukuda (Tete-a-Tete),” May 3, 1978, NLC-26-31-2-4-2; JCL.

⁴⁰ Clyde H. Farnsworth, “Carter and Fukuda Agree to Bolster Monetary Process: Accord Short of Japans Aims,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1978.

visit, the Administration did plan on a presidential trip to Japan.⁴¹ In the months following Fukuda's 1978 visit, Mike Mansfield, U.S. ambassador to Japan, noted that though there were some economic "strains," overall the "U.S.-Japan relationship remains good." Regarding Carter's journey to the island, he stressed its importance. "This will be a major event in U.S.-Japan relations," he told the president. "As only the second visit to Japan by an American President, it will have a significant impact on Japanese—and Asian—perceptions concerning the United States role in this region. In bilateral terms, the Summit will represent a rather dramatic reaffirmation by both sides of the importance we attach to the bilateral relationship." Showing America valued Japan as an ally and respected her as an equal took on added significance because the United States often asked much of the island nation. "They have leaned over backwards to remain cooperative on many fronts," Mansfield reported, noting that the Administration "could not necessarily talk the same way to some of our European allies and get away with it."⁴² The Japanese knew this too, which only added to their resentment of being treated like a second-class ally. In a relationship based so much on tone and style, high-level meetings with the president helped to at least give the impression of being on the same level as Europeans.

But the Carter Administration did not help itself in this regard when, in January 1979, the president met the leaders of Britain, France, and Germany on the French island of Guadeloupe. Japan's exclusion was no doubt a blow to its pride and increased its sensitivity to differential treatment. Soon after Guadeloupe it was made known that the Japanese prime minister, now Masayoshi Ohira, wanted to visit Carter. In February and March, Mansfield reported that the "one thing which clearly is very much on his [Ohira's] mind" was a trip to the United States. The

⁴¹ Carter did eventually go to Japan for a state visit in June 1979.

⁴² Memorandum, Mansfield to Carter and Mondale, "U.S.-Japan Relations—Update," October 21, 1978, Folder: Japan, 6-12/78; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

ambassador stated that though not imperative from the American perspective, for Ohira a meeting with Carter was critical because of the political attacks the prime minister was receiving for not promoting the American-Japanese connection more vigorously.⁴³ Like Fukuda, however, the desire for a visit was communicated not only privately but publicly as well, again forcing the Administration's hand.⁴⁴ "Now that Ohira has asked, the trip becomes necessary," one National Security Council staffer wrote. "The Japanese are still raw over Guadeloupe. To turn the Prime Minister down would rub salt in that wound, ruin his political standing, and add an irritant to our relationship that we cannot afford. What's worse, the world knows that Ohira has asked to come."⁴⁵

Mansfield was supportive of the visit, believing it would allow the United States to influence Japan in certain areas and strengthen relations "in a broader political and psychological sense" after recent rumblings about how the two nations were moving apart. Carter, however, was not pleased. Though perhaps thinking the visit could be beneficial, he did not appreciate the public manner in which the Japanese asked for the meeting. "This kind of thing should be worked out privately," Carter complained to Vance, "instead of following the Japanese policy of inviting themselves with a public announcement of unscheduled visits. I resent their taking advantage of us like this."⁴⁶ Carter's irritation was made known to the Japanese. He would see

⁴³ Mansfield to Vance, "Prime Minister's Desire to Visit Washington," February 20, 1979, Folder: Japan, 1-4/79; Box 41: Japan: 1-4/79 through Japan: 1-12/77; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL; Mansfield to Carter, March 1, 1979, Folder: Japan, 6-12/78; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

⁴⁴ For press coverage of Ohira's request, see Henry Scott-Stokes, "Ohira Defends Japan on Trade Record: Hopes to Visit Carter Soon," *New York Times*, February 23, 1979; William Chapman, "Ohira Expects Spring Parley With President," *Washington Post*, February 23, 1979.

⁴⁵ Memorandum, Nicholas Platt to Brzezinski, "Ohira Visit—Is this Trip Necessary?," February 23, 1979, Folder: Japan, 6-12/78; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

⁴⁶ Mansfield to Carter, March 1, 1979, Folder: Japan, 6-12/78; Box 40: Jamaica: 1/77-10/79 through Japan: 6/12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL. Carter's message to Vance was handwritten on the letter he received from Mansfield.

the prime minister, but only after the Administration let the president's "displeasure sink in."⁴⁷

Once the decision to host Ohira was made, the specific details of the visit had to be worked out. Again, the Japanese pushed the Carter Administration for more time with the president. In early April, as planning began for the following month's meeting, Mansfield reported that Japanese officials were arguing that it was crucial for Ohira to have two meetings with Carter separate from scheduled dinner. Relaying these concerns, Mansfield reported that they worried "the Japanese press would be prone to regard the absence of a second meeting as an indication that the first meeting had not gone well."⁴⁸ Almost three weeks later, Vance wrote to Carter about the importance the Japanese placed on multiple meetings. After talking with the foreign minister, the secretary of state told the president "he made a strong plea for two meetings... Their concern is partially over the amount of time available for getting acquainted and for substantive discussion. But the principal issue is one of face, that is, whether the holding of only a single meeting will be interpreted by the public as an indication of problems in the relationship or, since you had two meetings with Fukuda, a downgrading of Ohira. This is a peculiar—but—real problem for the Japanese."⁴⁹ Thus, the desire for an extra meeting operated on two levels. One was personal, the feeling that Ohira would be perceived as lacking the respect of the United States and therefore viewed as an ineffective steward of the American-Japanese relationship. The other was on a national level, the belief that the lack of two meetings, especially when other nations' leaders received that number, would show that the United States did not value its

⁴⁷ Note, David (Aaron?) to Rick (?), March 5, 1979, Folder: Japan: 1-3/79; Box 24: Japan: 3/77 through Japan: 1-3/79; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Brzezinski Office File, Country Chronological; JCL.

⁴⁸ Mansfield to Vance, April 3, 1979, Folder: Japan, Prime Minister Ohira, 4/30/79-5/6/79: Cables and Memos; Box 9: Japan through Jordan; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL.

⁴⁹ Memorandum, Vance to Carter, "Prime Minister Ohira's Visit," April 23, 1979, Folder: Japan, Prime Minister Ohira, 4/30/79-5/6/79: Cables and Memos; Box 9: Japan through Jordan; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL. Though the State Department recommended two meetings, the National Security Council did not, believing that doing so "purely for the sake of form is unacceptable trifling with the President's time." See Memorandum, Nick Platt to Brzezinski, "Meetings with Prime Minister Ohira, May 2, 1979," document no. CK3100514127, Declassified Documents Reference System (hereafter DDRS).

Japanese connection as much as it did ties with other countries.⁵⁰

In the end, Carter held two meetings, and though perturbed by the public manner in which the prime minister invited himself, the talks were positive. “I had what all of us agreed was one of the most productive diplomatic sessions of our administration,” Carter wrote in his diary.⁵¹ He was impressed with Ohira’s sincerity and determination to solve the trade imbalance, and the two leaders agreed on a new method to track progress toward this goal. Additionally, they planned to create a group of “wise men” from both countries to make policy recommendations and help solve irritants in the relationship. Some analysts saw that Carter’s meeting with Ohira indicated a new, “softer” approach toward Japan.⁵²

But the talks also suggested that the two leaders had a good personal relationship. Indeed, in November 1978 when Ohira defeated Fukuda for the prime minister’s office, Carter wrote in his diary that he favored Ohira, who he previously met in 1975. The president expanded on this relationship in his memoir writing, “We grew to be personal friends. We cooperated privately and effectively in alleviating special economic and defense problems between our two countries. Our families got along well, we discussed sensitive personal and political issues without restraint or embarrassment, and really enjoyed being together. Along with President Anwar Sadat of

⁵⁰ According to the State Department, Japan had in mind the visit of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Though realizing that Deng’s visit was a milestone in U.S. ties with China as it finalized the normalization of relations, the Japanese still had concern over receiving lesser treatment. As the State Department told Brzezinski, “Their [Japanese] feelings reflect a deep concern that we might value our relationship with China more highly than that with Japan.” See Memorandum, Peter Tarnoff to Brzezinski, “Prime Minister Ohira’s Visit, May 2, 1979, document no. CK3100468806, DDRS.

⁵¹ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 317. After the talks Carter told the press the same thing, stating his time with Ohira had been “one of the most productive days” since taking office. See Clyde H. Farnsworth, “U.S., Japan Urge Trade Harmony: Carter Expresses Optimism After Talks With Ohira,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1979.

⁵² Sam Jameson, “Analysis: Carter Bets on Soft Line With Japan,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1979. Indeed, the Carter Administration sought a “middle course between apathy and excessive pressure,” according to one NSC staff memo to Brzezinski. The Administration wanted steady pressure placed on Japan, but the tough talk would be in private, not in public. This in part reflected the changing nature of the relationship, where Japan had increased its power. See Memorandum, Nicholas Platt to Brzezinski and David Aaron, “The Japanese—What Have They Done for Us Lately?,” April 3, 1979, doc. 206, *FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. III*, 604.

Egypt, Ohira was a special friend of mine among the foreign leaders I knew.”⁵³ Carter’s affinity for the prime minister even led him to compare their relationship to that of Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. Though an exaggeration, the two leaders did work well together.⁵⁴ And their relationship shows that even though the president thought of Ohira as a “special friend,” he was not always going to be favorably disposed to grant the prime minister more presidential contact. At the same time, such close ties probably emboldened Ohira—and other foreign leaders—to request more personal diplomacy from the American president. Whether the prime minister specifically thought to play on his relationship with Carter to coax the president into more personal diplomacy is unclear, but it is not hard to imagine that would be in the back of his, or indeed any foreign leader’s mind.

When Ohira again visited the White House in the spring of 1980, the Administration’s ire was once more raised as the Japanese requested more from Carter than he wanted to give. Stopping for a day while journeying to Mexico, the prime minister was scheduled to meet with the president for about two hours, but the Japanese requested more time. Before meeting with the Japanese foreign minister in March 1980, Brzezinski’s staff told him, “The Japanese are up tight [sic] about the length and timing of the visit.”⁵⁵ Despite being told repeatedly that the Administration could not give them anymore time, they continued to press the issue. Staffers urged Brzezinski to once again make clear that extra time was not forthcoming.

⁵³ Carter, *White House Diary*, 262; Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 113.

⁵⁴ Maga, *Hands Across the Sea?*, 129-130. Part of Carter’s attraction to Ohira might have been because of their similar religious beliefs. Brzezinski speculated that “Carter was especially captivated by the fact that Ohira was a practicing Christian.” Additionally, as a recent chronicler of Carter’s role in the Camp David Accords noted, Carter often exaggerated his personal relationships, in part to compensate for the fact that he was somewhat rigid in his personal dealings and rarely let people get close. See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 291; Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin, and Sadat at Camp David* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 8.

⁵⁵ Note, Doug Gregg to Brzezinski, “Your Meeting with Okita,” March 20, 1980, Folder: Japan: 1-3/80; Box 25: Japan: 4-5/79 through Kenya: 1977-1978; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Brzezinski Office File, Country Chronological; JCL.

Shortly after Brzezinski's meeting, the Japanese inquired about a possible lunch for Ohira. "We all knew this request for a lunch would come," one chagrined NSC staffer noted, "even though the Japanese this time promised that a 2-3 hour meeting would be enough."⁵⁶ The State Department, however, supported the idea, believing it would increase the visit's importance and symbolically show the closeness of the U.S.-Japan relationship.⁵⁷ But while State was in favor, Carter was not. "Tell State—There will be *no* extension of [the] 2 hour time!" he wrote.⁵⁸

The frequent Japanese requests for more time made the White House leery, thus when the Japanese requested changes to the agenda in order for the visit to function more efficiently, Carter hesitated. Originally there was to be simultaneous translation during the meeting. But the State Department, the commercial interpreting firm used by the State Department, and the Japanese had reservations. Rather, they preferred consecutive translations. This, however, would make the meeting longer, something Carter was adamant about not allowing. In the end though, the president relented. "At first I thought this effort to return to consecutive interpretation was a ploy designed to lengthen the meeting," Brzezinski explained, but "I no longer believe this is the case." He had become convinced that there was real concern about translating between two languages as different as English and Japanese. Thus, he urged Carter to allow consecutive translations. However, he assured Carter that this change, "per your clear instructions...will not

⁵⁶ Note, to David (no last name given, possibly David Aaron), n.d., Folder: Japan, Prime Minister Ohira, 4/30/80-5/1/80: Briefing Book; Box 9: Japan through Jordan; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL.

⁵⁷ Memorandum, Donald Gregg to Brzezinski, "Planning for the Ohira Visit," March 28, 1980, Folder: Japan, Prime Minister Ohira, 4/30/80-5/1/80: Briefing Book; Box 9: Japan through Jordan; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL.

⁵⁸ Memorandum, Frank Press and Brzezinski to Carter, "Signing of US-Japan S&T Agreement," April 17, 1980, Folder: Japan, Prime Minister Ohira, 4/30/80-5/1/80: Briefing Book; Box 9: Japan through Jordan; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL. Emphasis in original. Carter handwrote this message at the bottom of the memo, underlining the word "no" three times.

be used to extend the meeting.”⁵⁹ Carter and Ohira did only meet for two hours, but they did so over a “working luncheon,” thus giving the Japanese the symbolic lunch they wanted.⁶⁰

Despite a variety of irritants in the relationship, by the end of Carter’s time in office ties with Japan were actually one of the few bright spots in his foreign policy. “In contrast to Atlantic relations,” Brzezinski recalled, “during our tenure in office Pacific relations improved steadily. Though American-Japanese economic tensions continued, political consultations became closer than ever.”⁶¹ But this increasing closeness was not always accomplished easily. Relations between the United States and Japan in the late 1970s demonstrate how, despite what presidents may have in mind, they can be compelled into personal diplomacy. As leaders of a vital American ally, Carter would have met with Fukuda and Ohira regardless. But the Japanese prime ministers often set the timing and degree of those interactions. Carter could have refused, like he did in 1980 by declining a longer meeting. An outright rejection, however, would have harmed relations, either in practice or in public perception, something Carter, as well as other presidents, could not ignore.

In the spring of 1979, soon after Ohira publicly invited himself to the United States, Japan had to deal with its own uninvited visitor. According to a Japanese official, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had “been making embarrassing public statements about visiting Japan (without checking with the Japanese).” Sadat also talked about the generous amount of aid Japan would

⁵⁹ Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “Interpreting for the Ohira Meeting,” April 22, 1980, Folder: Japan: 4-5/80; Box 25: Japan: 4-5/79 through Kenya: 1977-1978; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Brzezinski Office File, Country Chronological; JCL.

⁶⁰ The dynamics of the visit changed days before in the aftermath of the aborted rescue mission to free American hostages in Iran. Carter did not consult allies beforehand, and the action came soon after getting European allies and Japan to agree to economic sanctions, thus provoking anger and outrage. Ohira was the first foreign leader to see Carter after the failed mission and was expected to push for an explanation and urge Carter not to embark on any more military endeavors. For press coverage of the meeting, see Bernard Gwertzman, “Ohira Asks Carter to Resolve Hostage Crisis Peacefully,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1980; Sam Jameson, “Carter Offers to Help Japanese Meet Oil Needs,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1980; Robert Reihnold, “U.S. and Japan Sign Science Agreement: Five-Year Pact Termed Landmark –Concession by Tokyo Seen,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1980.

⁶¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 314.

be willing to give Egypt. The Japanese government decided to push the visit back into August or September and remained silent on issues of aid, but they were “rankled by Sadat’s insensitivity.” American officials could not help but experience a bit of schadenfreude. As one NSC staffer noted, “The shoe is on the other foot and it pinches.”⁶² While Sadat may have irritated the Japanese, the United States welcomed his engagement. But little did Carter know that interacting with the Egyptian president would result in the type of intense personal diplomacy that it did. For Sadat, however, that was part of his plan all along.

*Sadat: The Engine and Motivation*⁶³

Entering the 1970s, American-Egyptian relations were in a rather unpromising state. Since the 1950s, dealings between the two nations had been rife with tension. During the Eisenhower Administration the United States became wary of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser. His revolutionary nationalism and burgeoning ties with the Soviet Union were anathema to America’s Cold War leaders. Though relations improved slightly during the Kennedy years, they once again deteriorated under Johnson. At the start of the 1970s, there were no diplomatic relations between the two countries, and Egypt was considered securely in the Soviet orbit.

It was this international context that Anwar Sadat inherited upon becoming president in 1970. Domestically he faced great challenges. “The legacy Nasser left me was in a pitiable condition,” Sadat recalled.⁶⁴ Among the many issues he faced were a moribund economy, bureaucratic corruption, and food shortages. Of these the economy was of greatest concern, and

⁶² Memorandum, Gary Sick to Brzezinski, “Japan in the Middle East,” April 24, 1979, Folder: Japan, 1-4/79; Box 41: Japan: 1-4/79 through Japan: 1-12/77; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

⁶³ This is how one scholar described the Egyptian president and his role as catalyst in the peace process. See Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

⁶⁴ Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), 210.

Sadat initiated a new economic policy in an attempt to attract foreign investment. Despite reforms, growth remained weak, and economic considerations motivated much of his foreign policy throughout the 1970s.⁶⁵

Sadat spent his first year in power combating opponents and Nasser loyalists displeased by his actions. After a failed coup attempt in May 1971, however, he was firmly in power and moved forward with his main foreign policy objective: a settlement with Israel. Egypt and Israel had engaged in four military conflicts since 1948, the year the Jewish state was founded. But he now realized that Egypt had more to gain from peace than war. Peace could provide two main benefits. First, Egypt could regain the Sinai Peninsula, which it had lost to Israel during the Six Day War in 1967. Second, the nation could reduce military spending and focus on others sectors of the economy.

Thus, in February 1971, Sadat proposed that if Israel withdrew from the Sinai, he would be willing to sign a peace treaty, as well as reestablish diplomatic relations with the United States. “It was the first time an Arab leader had the courage to declare this,” according to Sadat.⁶⁶ Israel and the United States, however, were cool to the proposal, not believing he was serious. The United States was also too distracted in the first years of the 1970s to fully engage in the peace process. Other international issues like Vietnam were deemed more important. Speaking of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Sadat’s foreign minister during the first half of the 1970s Ismail Fahmy stated, “Kissinger was not ready to switch his attention from other international problems to the Middle East situation, which he believed would be dormant for a long time to

⁶⁵ Ralph Israeli, *Man of Defiance: A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1985), 183; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 213-215; Melvin A. Friedlander, *Sadat and Begin: The Domestic Politics of Peacemaking* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 2, 4-6; Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, “The Primacy of Economics: The Foreign Policy of Egypt,” in *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 124-126. For a concise examination of the problems Egypt faced in the 1970s, see R. Michael Burrell and Abbas R. Kelidar, *Egypt: The Dilemmas of a Nation—1970-1977* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977).

⁶⁶ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 219.

come.”⁶⁷ The overall result, according to one U.S. source, was that Sadat was “deeply hurt and angered by what he consider[ed] to be a lack of positive American response” to his initiatives.⁶⁸

The ambivalence of the United States was problematic for Sadat. He believed that in order for Egypt to make peace with Israel, America needed to play a substantial role. He realized his country’s relationship with the Soviet Union antagonized the United States and pushed it closer to Israel. Thus he began the process of reorienting Egypt from the Soviet Union toward the United States. Sadat’s first major move was to expel Soviet military personnel from the country in July 1972. He expelled the Soviets “not just to get them out but to get the Americans in,” according to Moshe Dayan, Israeli foreign minister during the late 1970s.⁶⁹ Yet, to Sadat’s disappointment, this did not work. He decided something more needed to be done to shatter the status quo.

In October 1973, Egypt went to war with Israel. Sadat believed that if he could break what he saw as Israel’s military complacency and get the attention of the superpowers, action would then be taken toward a peace agreement.⁷⁰ The strategy paid off. Though technically a military defeat for Egypt, Sadat changed the dynamic in the Middle East. As the Egyptian foreign minister recalled, “The American position had undergone major changes...The war had created a new military and psychological situation...Washington had no option but to move quickly to

⁶⁷ Ismail Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 37.

⁶⁸ Letter, Henry Bellmon to Richard Nixon, November 16, 1971, document no. CK3100514327, DDRS.

⁶⁹ As quoted in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 65.

⁷⁰ In a speech given ten days into the conflict, Sadat discussed his logic and motives for the war. “We have fought for the sake of peace,” he stated. “We do not fight to attack the territory of others, but we fought and will continue to fight for two objectives: (a) to restore our territory which was occupied in 1967; and (b) to find ways and means to restore and obtain respect for the legitimate rights of the people of Palestine.” See Anwar Sadat, October 16, 1973, in *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 7th revised and updated edition, Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds. (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 149, 150.

defuse the crisis.”⁷¹

In the aftermath of the war Kissinger embarked on his famed shuttle diplomacy, facilitating two disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt in 1974 and 1975. Kissinger used a step-by-step approach to these negotiations, focusing on specific and limited objectives that he believed were attainable. He felt this was the only viable path, and that the time was not right for a comprehensive peace settlement that dealt with all outstanding issues.⁷² Thus, by the mid-1970s, Sadat was much closer to his goal. The United States was now fully engaged in the Middle East and had taken the lead in trying to broker a peace agreement. For Sadat this was essential. “The United States has all the cards in its hands,” he believed, “and Israel should heed the United States.”⁷³

Relations with the United State had improved, with diplomatic ties reestablished in 1974, but Sadat wanted more. He wanted to broaden and deepen the U.S.-Egypt connection.⁷⁴ As Jimmy Carter came to office, however, relations “remained rather delicate,” recalled Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy. Part of the problem was Egypt still felt America went too far in its support of Israel. “The United States, for all its new friendship for us,” Fahmy lamented, “was still much more committed to Israel than it would ever be to Egypt.”⁷⁵ Additionally, Sadat had grown tired of the step-by-step approach championed by Kissinger. He wanted something

⁷¹ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 66; Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Sadat and his Statecraft*, 2 ed. (London: Kensal Press, 1983), 135-136.

⁷² For Kissinger’s reasoning behind a step-by-step strategy, see Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 615. For a detailed examination of Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy, see Edward R. F. Sheehan, “How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 22 (Spring 1976): 3-70.

⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation, Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Fahmy, Nixon, Kissinger, and Joseph Sisco, June 1, 1975, document no. KT01650, DNSA.

⁷⁴ According to Kissinger, “Sadat thought it was important to move our relations away from technical military affairs,” and he wanted to “explore maximum cooperation in the economic, scientific and cultural areas,” with the goal being “long-range cooperation between Egypt and the United States.” See Memorandum of Conversation, Richard Nixon, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership, Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, May 31, 1974, Gerald Ford Library, <http://www.ford.utexas.edu/library/DOCUMENT/memcons/1552715.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Fahmy, *Negotiating Peace*, 152, 155.

comprehensive. Technically, Israel and Egypt were still at war. The two agreements Kissinger helped broker were not peace treaties. Looking to 1977, the Egyptian president wanted to work toward an overall settlement. As he stated in an interview weeks after Carter's election, "There is no need for any more 'step by step.'"⁷⁶

By Carter's own estimation, the Middle East occupied more of his time than any other region of the world.⁷⁷ Lucky for Sadat, the American president was of the same mind as himself. Unlike Nixon and Ford, who adopted the step-by-step approach which focused on limited, attainable goals, Carter favored a comprehensive strategy where all issues, including the most divisive, would be discussed. But there was no guarantee Sadat would get what he wanted just because the two presidents' ideas corresponded. Thus, he embarked on a mission to move closer to Carter, and in the process move Egypt closer to the United States.

Between election and inauguration, Carter was told that Sadat might press for a new U.S. initiative soon, and he was presented with numerous options. If the Egyptian leader knew of the suggestions given to the president, he would not have been pleased with most of them. While one option called for the promotion of a comprehensive settlement, others included doing nothing, pushing interim agreements, or working with the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ Though still committed to an overarching agreement, the United States initially decided to work with the Soviets in convening a peace conference in Geneva. This was not Sadat's first choice, but he went along. He still wanted to be seen as cooperative, and in the process maneuver closer to the American president.

Shortly after inauguration, Egypt's foreign minister began inquiring about a possible Sadat

⁷⁶ "Sadat: New Overtures for Peace," *Time*, November 29, 1976.

⁷⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 429.

⁷⁸ Memorandum, Jack Watson to Carter, "Options Papers for Foreign & Defense Policy," November 3, 1976, Folder: Transition: State and Defense Options Papers [2], 11/76; Box 41: Subject File, State Department Evening Reports, 11/80 through Transition: State and Defense Options Papers [3], 11/76; Plains File; JCL.

visit to the United States.⁷⁹ Two months later, in April 1977, he was at the White House.⁸⁰ In the buildup to the meeting, the Egyptian leader made sure to lay the groundwork for close ties. “In his recent speeches,” Carter was informed, “Sadat has often expressed confidence that the two of you will get along because you are both men of faith, deep moral beliefs, and operate from principle.”⁸¹ While the Egyptian president might have truly felt that way, he was also ingratiating himself to the American president, the person whose goodwill he most needed to achieve his objectives.⁸²

For its part, the Administration was well aware of Sadat’s strategy. “Sadat’s personal relationship with you,” Vance told Carter, “will be his main preoccupation on this visit. He will want your confidence and your understanding for his aims.”⁸³ Once at the White House, the Egyptian leader made it clear that the American president was key to any Middle East developments. “You are the man to help end the conflict,” Sadat told Carter. During multiple points in their conversation, he sought to impress upon the president the importance of American involvement. Dismissing Soviet abilities and motivations for peace, the Egyptian leader stated, “The United States is a super power and is the only one who can establish peace in the area,” adding, “it is the U.S. who can balance everything...Peace in the Middle East should be

⁷⁹ Telegram, Herman Eilts to Vance, “Possible Sadat Visit to U.S.,” February 2, 1977, Folder: Egypt: 1-3/77; Box 17: Cuba: Soviet Surrogate, 8-9/79 through Egypt: 4-6/77; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

⁸⁰ Sadat was not the only Middle East leader Carter met with early in his Administration. Within four months he had met with Sadat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, King Hussein of Jordan, and Syrian President Hafez Assad. For summaries of Carter’s meetings with these Middle East leaders, see William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1986), 44-58.

⁸¹ Memorandum, Jim Fallows to Carter, “Sadat Visit: Welcoming Statement,” March 31, 1977, Folder: Egypt: 1-3/77; Box 17: Cuba: Soviet Surrogate, 8-9/79 through Egypt: 4-6/77; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL.

⁸² In his youth Sadat had wanted to be an actor, and the skills he developed in that pursuit never left him. A fan of bold dramatic moves and skilled at delivering theatrical performances for effect, Sadat put his acting skills to good use in trying to warm up to Carter and the United States. See Joseph Finklestone, *Anwar Sadat: Visionary Who Dared* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 8, 123, 146, 195; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 6.

⁸³ Memorandum, Vance to Carter, “Official Working Visit by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat,” March 25, 1977, NLC-128-11-19-2-5; JCL.

American.”⁸⁴ If Sadat hoped to make an impression on the American president in their first meeting, he more than succeeded. In his diary, Carter wrote that Sadat “was a charming and frank and also very strong and courageous leader.”⁸⁵ After the visit, Carter felt he had an ally he could work with. Sadat, too, felt that he could rely on the American president to help advance his agenda.⁸⁶

While both came away from their first meeting feeling positive, by the fall of 1977, the peace process appeared to be going nowhere. Sadat reignited negotiations with his historic trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 where he gave a speech before the Knesset. Former Israeli Prime Minister Gold Meir recalled that it was “as if the Messiah had almost arrived,” and a captivated Vice President Mondale echoed that sentiment, telling Sadat, “More people watched your speech than almost anything in American history. In 48 hours, in the minds of Americans you became one of the world’s leading apostles of peace and states[manship].”⁸⁷ After this spark, however, the peace process quickly became moribund. But even as movement toward agreement with Israel stalled, Sadat made progress toward his goal of moving Egypt closer to the United States. As much as his visit to Israel was meant to advance negotiations, it was also a way to further get into Carter’s good graces. Such a bold gesture was guaranteed to make a favorable impression. Adding extra power to the journey was Sadat’s claim that it was Carter who inspired him to go. In an October 21, 1977 letter to the Egyptian president, Carter wrote that it was a “crucial

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Carter, Sadat, et al., “President’s Meeting with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Cabinet Room,” April 4, 1977, NLC-25-109-8-2-3; JCL.

⁸⁵ Carter, *White House Diary*, 38. In his memoir, Carter was even more effusive, writing that when he first met Sadat it was if “a shining light burst on the Middle East scene.” See Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 282.

⁸⁶ Sadat recalled thinking “Carter was sincere,” and that his first visit “was a very important one, for we pledged to work together...no matter what difficulties this created.” See Anwar Sadat, *Those I Have Known* (New York: Continuum, 1984), 98-99.

⁸⁷ Meir as quoted in Stein, *Historic Diplomacy*, 227; Memorandum of Conversation, Carter, Sadat, et al., February 4, 1978, Folder: Serial Xs--[8/77-8/78]; Box 36; Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; JCL.

moment” and that he needed Sadat’s “help...The time has now come to move forward.”⁸⁸ At the time and later in his autobiography, Sadat would state that this letter inspired the idea for his Jerusalem enterprise. “The inspiration for my initiative itself came from President Carter,” he said months later in a meeting between American and Egyptian officials.⁸⁹

Soon after Jerusalem, the two presidents met again. In early January 1978, Carter stopped in Egypt as part of a larger foreign trip.⁹⁰ After visiting with Sadat, the president wrote in his diary that his Egypt stop “was perhaps the most exciting visit [of the trip] because of my strong friendship toward Sadat and worldwide interest in our resolving the Mideast disputes.” Adding, “Sadat and I have no differences between us.”⁹¹ The Egyptian president was well on his way to winning over Carter.

But while progress was made on that front, advancement toward an Israeli-Egyptian agreement remained stalled. Weeks after meeting with the American president and discouraged by what he believed to be Israeli intransigence, Sadat decided to suspend political talks with Israel. “I am very disappointed with the Israeli attitude,” he told Carter in a telephone conversation. “They didn’t get the conception of my initiative. They prefer land to peace...They

⁸⁸ Letter, Carter to Sadat, October 21, 1977, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid25/cda04.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Carter, Sadat, et al., February 4, 1978; CBS Evening News, 12/4/1977, Vanderbilt Television News Archive; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 301-302. Writing less than a decade after Sadat’s trip, Martin Indyk (who in the future would become an ambassador to Israel) wrote that Sadat’s purpose in going to Jerusalem was to change the course of American diplomacy. Rather than reconvene the Geneva Conference, Sadat wanted bilateral negotiations between Egypt and Israel with the U.S. as chief mediator, and the Soviets excluded. See Martin Indyk, *“To the Ends of the Earth”: Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative* (Cambridge, MA: Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

⁹⁰ Presidential adviser Hamilton Jordan told Carter a stop in Egypt would help “reestablish and enhance your personal relationship with him [Sadat]. This is something that can only be done in a face-to-face meeting.” While it was the Administration’s idea to meet with Sadat during Carter’s trip, the reason was that Sadat had already made himself the key interlocutor in the Middle East. Jordan told Carter that when the trip was over, he would have met with four of the key leaders in the Middle East in the past month. But not with Sadat, a glaring omission because Sadat was “the man who is personally responsible for opening things up.” See Jordan to Carter, December 30, 1977, NLC-126-10-15-8-6; JCL.

⁹¹ Carter, *White House Diary*, 161.

think I want peace at any price.”⁹² While the decision to stop talks was seen by some as a desperate act by a “glum and secluded” leader, others saw a more calculated maneuver.⁹³ The sudden nature of the Egyptian leader’s announcement produced a swift reaction by Carter, who quickly called him. In a ten-minute conversation, Carter persuaded Sadat to, at the very least, continue military talks, which were occurring alongside the political ones.

Some diplomats saw this prompt attention by the American president as partially, if not completely, Sadat’s goal in abruptly announcing the end to political talks.⁹⁴ It was speculated that such an action would force the United States to become more involved. Up to this point, Sadat believed Carter was reluctant to become deeply enmeshed in Middle East talks, in part because he was wary of domestic political pressure, which made him unwillingly to strongly challenge Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.⁹⁵ According to some news reports, Sadat hoped his announcement would pressure Carter to be bolder. The Egyptian president’s preferred option was a trilateral summit with Carter, Begin, and himself. At such an event Sadat reportedly believed he could create enough public pressure on Carter to force the American president to take a firmer line with Begin. Presented with this analysis of Sadat’s actions, Carter told reporters, ““I don’t agree.””⁹⁶ Whether he was merely pacifying the press or really believed what he said is uncertain. But it seems clear that Sadat, with his flair for the dramatic, was angling for something. Though impatient and impulsive, it is not hard to see his action as more than simple frustration. Rather, such a histrionic and sudden action held the promise of not only providing a spark to negotiations, but also directing them toward his preferred positions.

⁹² Memorandum of Conversation, “Telephone Conversation Between President Carter and President Sadat, January 18, 1978, 2:07-2:17 p.m.,” NLC-128-11-18-3-5, JCL.

⁹³ Don A. Schanche, “Sadat Pictured as Dejected Man,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1978.

⁹⁴ Murrey Marder, “Sadat’s Sudden Drama Seen Calculated,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 1978;

⁹⁵ For the influence of domestic politics on Carter see Quandt, *Camp David*; Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁹⁶ Murrey Marder and Edward Walsh, “Carter Calls Mideast Breakdown Temporary, Urges Private Moves,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 1978.

While no trilateral summit was yet imagined by the Carter Administration, a few weeks after Sadat's announcement he was invited to Camp David. This was the first time Carter had taken a foreign leader there. Unsurprisingly, the Egyptian president sought to utilize the visit to urge the United States to influence Israel to make concessions. He also viewed the visit as a way to further emphasize the growing closeness of Egypt and the United States.⁹⁷ During the visit, he continued on the same theme featured in his earlier phone call with Carter. The Egyptian president was frustrated by Begin's intransigence and was considering completely withdrawing from talks. Carter convinced him otherwise, but it was clear that a peace agreement was still a long way from becoming reality.⁹⁸ Sadat had hoped the visit would result in some spectacular gesture by the United States, but this was not to be. He was successful, however, in further influencing Carter and other American officials. By the end of his visit, it was obvious the Egyptian leader had garnered new favor and sympathy from the Administration.⁹⁹

During the two men's first meeting in 1977, Sadat had made clear that he envisioned a major role for the United States, one where the Americans were not just associated with a peace agreement but full partners. In June 1978, Sadat was sending the same message, making plain how vital he viewed U.S. participation and that without it "as a witness" and "near or present," direct negotiations between Israel and Egypt would fail.¹⁰⁰ As the months passed and

⁹⁷ Memorandum, Sidney Sober and Harold H. Saunders to Vance, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments, No. 364," February 2, 1978, NLC-25-109-6-9-9, JCL.

⁹⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 307-308.

⁹⁹ Hedrick Smith, "Sadat Makes an Impression: Analyst Believe Egyptian Leader, at Camp David, May Have Influenced the Attitudes of Carter," *New York Times*, February 8, 1978. Writing about Sadat's "private courting" of Carter, Smith wrote that "Sadat may have been more persuasive with President Carter than vice versa." According to Administration officials, "there was little secret that Mr. Sadat has strengthened their sympathy for his predicament and reinforced their inclination to believe that Israel's leaders face the toughest decisions in the weeks ahead."

¹⁰⁰ Hermann Eilts to Vance, Jun 11, 1978, "Meeting With Sadat, June 11," Folder: Israel, 5-6/78; Box 35: Israel: 7/77 through Israel: 7-12/78; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL. A little over a month after Eilts' meeting with Sadat, NSC staffer William Quandt reported to Brzezinski about Sadat's motivation and again reemphasized the Egyptian leader's desire for full U.S. participation: "Sadat has repeatedly tried to get a clear statement of an American position concerning a Middle East settlement. He views this as the precondition for successful negotiations...Sadat has been waiting since last spring for us to advance our own proposals. He has been speaking of

the peace process again seemed on the verge of collapse, Sadat finally got his trilateral summit. Carter decided to take a major gamble and invite Sadat and Begin to Camp David for negotiations in September 1978. This was an unprecedented foray into personal diplomacy. Rather than have leaders come together to simply finalize an agreement, Carter planned to have Begin and Sadat actually engage in negotiations with no guarantee of success.

Though it took time and effort, this deep American involvement was exactly the kind of investment Sadat had wanted all along and what he had been laying the groundwork for from the beginning. In the weeks leading up to the summit, it was clear he was continuing to move closer to Carter. Reporting on talks with the Egyptian president, American ambassador to Egypt Herman Eilts noted Sadat was pleased with Carter's indication of full partnership and how he wished to talk with the president about "their common strategy." Eilts continued, "Sadat's strategy is that President Carter and he come out 'victorious,' whatever the results of the Camp David talks might be."¹⁰¹

From the beginning, Sadat acted strategically. In his youth he wanted to be an actor, and that flair for the dramatic never left him. This fondness for theater, combined with his penchant for personalizing his international relationships, was a key feature of his diplomacy with the United States.¹⁰² While the Administration knew this, they could not help but be drawn in. "Sensing in Carter a personal friend, Sadat saw in the peace process an opportunity to fashion a new American-Egyptian relationship," Brzezinski recalled, "one in which Egypt might even displace Israel as America's closest ally in the region." If unsuccessful in this, Sadat had a

the need for the United States to be a full partner, not just a mediator." See Memorandum, Quandt to Brzezinski, "Sadat's Motivations," July 31, 1978, Folder: Middle East-Negotiations (7/29/78-9/6/78); Box 13: Middle East (10/78-7/79) through Middle East-Negotiations (7/29/78-9/6/78); Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Geographic File; JCL.

¹⁰¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, and Eilts, "Meeting with President Sadat re Camp David," August 26, 1978, NLC-133-223-5-7-4, JCL

¹⁰² Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 4-6.

backup plan. With his words, actions, and relationship with Carter, the Egyptian president would “at the very least...be well on his way to becoming America’s favorite statesman in the region.”¹⁰³ For the most part, this is what happened. Sadat was the darling of the West, and the American public held a very high opinion of him, an extraordinary achievement for an Arab leader in the late 1970s. More importantly he succeeded in drawing out Carter, who at one point during the Camp David summit, in trying to persuade the Egyptian leader not to give up, told Sadat that even if Israel did not accept an agreement, Egypt and the United States could come to their own understanding.¹⁰⁴

The relationship that Sadat formed with Carter not only played a role in bringing the American president to Camp David, but once there forced him into a deeper personal diplomacy than he probably ever imagined. Initially, Carter thought his role would be simple. He would bring Begin and Sadat together, and seeing the other was sincere in his desire for a fair and just peace, work their problems out rationally.¹⁰⁵ But he was wrong. There was too much history and too much emotion for both men to work together. Thus it fell to Carter to save the summit and produce an agreement. He would be at the center of the negotiation, and as the key figure, both the Egyptian and Israeli leaders sought to have the American president on their side at Camp David.¹⁰⁶

As the fulcrum on which negotiations hinged, however, Carter had to not only work out

¹⁰³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 236. Indeed, Sadat told his delegation that Camp David was a win-win. With pressure from Carter, Israel would accept Egyptian positions. If not, Begin would be blamed and the United States and Egypt would move closer together. According to Egyptian foreign minister Mohamed Kamel, Sadat said, “President Carter is on our side. This will end in Begin’s downfall!” See Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords: A Testimony of Sadat’s Foreign Minister* (London: KPI, 1986), 283; Wright, *Thirteen Days in September*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Wright, *Thirteen Days in September*, 116.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 185, 284, 285.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “Strategy for Camp David,” n.d., Folder: Middle East-Negotiations (7/29/78-9/6/78); Box 13: Middle East (10/78-7/79) through Middle East-Negotiations (7/29/78-9/6/78); Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Geographic File; JCL; Memorandum, Vance to Carter, “Camp David Talks,” n.d., NLC-133-62-3-11-0; JCL.

complicated compromises on issues that had previously been intractable, but also engage with Sadat and Begin merely to keep them at Camp David. For example, when on the eleventh day of the summit Sadat planned to leave, Carter had to become very personal to keep him there and hopes of success alive. Telling the Egyptian president what the consequences of leaving would be, Carter recalled that he told Sadat “his actions would harm the relationship between Egypt and the United States, [that] he would be violating his personal promise to me, and the onus for the failure would be on him. I described the possible future progress of Egypt’s friendships and alliances—from us to the moderate and radical Arabs, thence to the Soviet Union. I told him it would damage one of my most precious possessions—his friendship and our mutual trust.”¹⁰⁷

When Carter spoke of “friendship and our mutual trust,” it was not hyperbole.¹⁰⁸ The two men did have a close relationship, and the trust they developed was key at Camp David. But it did not develop overnight. It was something both men cultivated, especially Sadat. All along he needed Carter to push Israel to make concessions. The closer he was to the American president, the more he benefitted. At Camp David, Sadat tried to use the trust he and Carter had to Egypt’s advantage. In many ways, the Egyptian leader wanted the American president to negotiate for him. Rather than try to convince or reason with Begin, whom he did not get along with, he would use Carter and the Americans. “Sadat essentially gave Carter a blank check. He told Carter to do the best he could; he would trust the American President not [to] give away Egypt’s interests.

¹⁰⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 392.

¹⁰⁸ The two men were close and talked about each other in a very intimate way. For example, in his private papers Sadat wrote, “Jimmy Carter is my very best friend on earth,” and years after Sadat’s death Carter wrote, “I lost a beloved friend.” Those who observed the two together also noticed something special. Vance wrote that the two men had a “unique rapport” that was “sincere and real.” Brzezinski noted, “Carter spoke of Sadat as his dearest friend, a person who would do anything for Carter and to whom Carter was utterly committed.” Ambassador Eilts recalled that the two presidents developed “the most remarkable personal relationship.” For the Sadat quote see Douglas Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter’s Journey to the Nobel Peace Prize* (New York: Penguin Press, 1998), 106. For Carter’s words, see Jimmy Carter, “A Personal Tribute to Anwar Sadat,” foreword, in Sadat, *Those I Have Known*, viii. For others observations, see Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 175; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 24; Herman F. Eilts, interview by William Brewer, August 12, 1988, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004eil01>.

That was a technique that Sadat repeatedly used with Carter and used very successfully,” recalled U.S. ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis.¹⁰⁹ While Carter enjoyed having Sadat’s trust, he was also somewhat wary about having such a freehand to negotiate.¹¹⁰ But such was the position he found himself in because of the Egyptian leader’s actions. At this point, he had little choice. By becoming so intimately involved in the peace process and with Sadat personally, and putting the prestige of his office and country at stake, Carter had to plunge fully into intensive personal diplomacy.

After much cajoling and threatening, a deal was struck at Camp David. But that was just the beginning. A treaty was now needed to incorporate the principles agreed to at the summit. This meant more painful negotiations. Within two months of Camp David, treaty talks between Israel and Egypt were unraveling. The main reason, according to Brzezinski, was that Carter was no longer at the center of negotiations and in control of the process.¹¹¹

As a final treaty appeared to be slipping away, Sadat once again sought to align himself with the American president. “In the coming few weeks, we should maintain close consultation and coordination,” he told Carter in an eight-page handwritten letter. “We can devise a joint course of action which could serve our purpose. It would be useful too, if we check with one another before submitting any ideas or proposals.”¹¹² American involvement was key to getting any treaty negotiated, and as much as the Administration might have hoped that the hard part was accomplished at Camp David and that the two sides could now come together to craft a

¹⁰⁹ Samuel W. Lewis, interview by Peter Jessup, August 9, 1988, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004lew03>.

¹¹⁰ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 11; Wright, *Thirteen Days in September*, 53.

¹¹¹ Memorandum, Brzezinski to Carter, “Initial Reaction to the Latest Middle East Difficulty,” November 30, 1978; Folder: Middle East-Negotiations (9/75-12/78); Box 13: Middle East (10/78-7/79) through Middle East-Negotiations (7/29/78-9/6/78); Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Geographic File; JCL.

¹¹² Letter, Sadat to Carter, n.d., Folder: Egypt, 11/77-11/81; Box 1: President’s Personal Foreign Affairs File, Afghanistan, 3/78-2/80 through Germany, Federal Republic of, 9/77-11/80; Plains File; JCL. Though undated, the contents of the letter suggest it was written after the Camp David summit.

treaty, it was going to take another extraordinary effort by the American president. With Carter already heavily invested, he again went for broke, traveling to the Middle East to attempt to finalize an agreement. Though most of his advisers were against such a journey, fearing that it would look like he was “traipsing around the Middle East, hat in hand,” Carter went.¹¹³ This was a huge risk that put not only Carter’s personal prestige on the line but that of the United States. But he had few alternatives. He was so deeply involved, in large part because of Sadat, he had to see it through.¹¹⁴

Flying to Israel and Egypt in March 1979, Carter’s gamble paid off. Though it appeared talks had failed, he was able to finalize an Egyptian-Israeli treaty at the last minute.¹¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, implementing the terms of the agreement proved no easier than negotiating it. The main problem revolved around autonomy for the Palestinians. As attempts to resolve this issue faltered, Carter brought Sadat and Begin to the White House for separate meetings in April 1980. The Egyptian president hoped to show publicly that he and Carter were of one mind, but the Administration could only go so far without making it appear as if Egypt and the United States were colluding at Israel’s expense.¹¹⁶ Thus we see the other side to Sadat’s attempts to

¹¹³ Lewis, interview by Jessup. For an account of how Carter decided to embark on his last minute effort, see Martin Schram, “Road to the Mideast,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 1979.

¹¹⁴ For newspaper coverage about the risk Carter was taking, see Hedrick Smith, “Carter’s Bold Stroke: President’s Mission Is Seen as a Great Opportunity But One That Will Also Expose Him to Big Risks,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1979; Edward Walsh and Martin Schram, “Mideast Trip: Major Gamble for Carter,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 1979; Karen Elliott House, “Carter to Put Prestige on the Line in Trip To Mideast Described as Do-or-Die Effort,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 1979; John Maclean, “Carter Flies to Mideast in his Biggest Gamble,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 1979. For how Carter was in too deep to stop now, see Hedrick Smith, “This New Gamble for a Treaty Actually Began at Camp David,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1979.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, “For the Peacemakers, a Hopeful Turn on a Twisting Road,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1979; John Maclean, “Last-minute Phone Call Turned Tide in Mideast,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 1979. When he initially arrived in Egypt, Carter was received very enthusiastically. In Israel the response was less passionate. While in Egypt, Ambassador Lewis noted that Carter and Sadat had “another of their ‘love feasts,’” and similar to Camp David, Sadat gave Carter a “blank check” to negotiate on his behalf. See United Press International, “Wild Welcome for Carter: Up to Million Egyptian Line Streets,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1979; Thomas W. Lippman, “Egyptians Hail Carter on Train Route: Cheers Resound at Every Town Between Cairo and Alexandria,” *Washington Post*, March 10, 1979; Jonathan Kandell, “Carter Gets a Muted Greeting in Jerusalem,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1979; Lewis, interview by Jessup.

¹¹⁶ Memorandum, David Aaron to Carter, “Sadat Summit,” April 3, 1980, NLC-25-118-2-1-1; JCL.

engage the American president. As the Egyptian leader moved closer to Carter and brought him deeper into the peace process, Sadat also pushed him into increased contact with Begin, amplifying the amount of personal diplomacy required of the American president.

Carter first met with the Israeli prime minister in July 1977, and though he wrote in his diary that he found Begin “congenial, dedicated, [and] sincere,” the two men never had a close relationship.¹¹⁷ “Carter’s relations with Begin were correct,” Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan recalled, “with Sadat they were much warmer.”¹¹⁸ Though not having the best relationship, Carter obviously could never avoid Begin, and in part because of the actions of the Egyptian president, the two were in frequent contact. When Sadat announced his intention to go to Jerusalem, Carter sent a message to Begin urging him to make the visit a success. After Sadat’s journey, Carter wrote the prime minister to inform him he was sending Secretary of State Vance to the region and urged the Israeli leader to seize the “unparalleled opportunity” now before him and share his “thoughts with him [Vance] as you would with me personally.”¹¹⁹

Begin’s views, however, rarely aligned with the president’s. Prior to meeting, Carter wrote in his diary that the Israeli leader’s views on a peace settlement were “frightening.”¹²⁰ The situation did not improve much at Camp David, as the president felt Begin was “rigid” and “unimaginative.”¹²¹ The Israeli prime minister would have been quite content to leave negotiations at an impasse and drag them out indefinitely. But he came to realize that Sadat was maneuvering to supplant Israel as America’s premier ally in the region, and if negotiations failed

¹¹⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1981), 156.

¹¹⁹ Vance to Lewis, “Message From President Carter to Prime Minister Begin,” November 19, 1977, NLC-16-101-1-20-9; JCL; Letter, Carter to Begin, December 6, 1977, Folder: Israel: Prime Minister Menachem Begin 11/77-6/78; Box 9: India through Israel; NSA, Brzezinski Material, President’s Correspondence With Foreign Leaders File; JCL.

¹²⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 56.

¹²¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 255.

the blame would be placed on him.¹²² Thus he too had an incentive to seek out Carter and convince him of the merits of Israel's positions. This type of personal diplomacy suited Begin, who "had a strong conviction that face-to-face meetings between world leaders can bring about changes in their approaches" to world problems, according to Ambassador Lewis.¹²³

When first elected, Begin was confident he could influence the American president and convince him of the correctness of his views. But in the tug-of-war for Carter's favor, Begin fell short, and he knew it.¹²⁴ This did not mean, however, that he gave up. He still needed Carter, and as negotiations over the treaty intensified, Begin only wanted to deal with the American president. As Israeli Defense Minister Ezer Weizman told the Administration prior to Carter's 1979 journey to the Middle East, "The most important factor in the pending visit is that you [Carter] personally, and as much as possible alone, handle the negotiation with Begin." Despite not having the best bond with the president, Begin respected and valued the office of the presidency and recognized what it could do for him and his country.¹²⁵

¹²² Wright, *Thirteen Days in September*, 60-61.

¹²³ Lewis to Vance, "Begin's Visit to Washington: Begin The Individual," July 1, 1977, Folder: Israel, Prime Minister Begin, 7/19-20/77: Cables and Memos, 6/21/77-7/15/77; Box 6: Ireland through Israel; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL.

¹²⁴ Memorandum, Robert Lipshutz to Carter, "Israel Election and Related Matters," May 23, 1977, Folder: Israel, 1-3/77; Box 34: Iran: (Verification), 4/79 through Israel: 4-6/77; NSA, Brzezinski Material, Country File; JCL. Before a visit in the spring of 1978, a month after Sadat and Carter had been to Camp David together, Begin felt he had lost "support and sympathy" that he had had months before. Begin, however, did have some things working in his favor. Almost constant criticism of the Administration's policy toward Israel from the American Jewish community and strong support for Israel in Congress kept Carter from ever venturing too far away from Israeli concerns. Thus, though Carter may never have been a personal ally of the Israeli prime minister, domestic constraints on Carter allowed Begin to be in a stronger position than he otherwise might have been. See Memorandum, Vance to Carter, "Your Meeting with Prime Minister Begin," March 12, 1978, Folder: Israel, Prime Minister Begin, 3/21-22/78: Briefing Book [II]; Box 7: Israel through Italy; NSA, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File; JCL. For the Carter Administration's analysis of the domestic political implications of their Middle East policy, see Memorandum, Hamilton Jordan to Carter, "Domestic Political Implications of Foreign Policy," June 1977, Folder: Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 6/77; Box 34A; Staff Offices, Chief of Staff (Jordan); JCL.

¹²⁵ Memorandum, Bob Lipshutz to Carter, "Israel-Egypt Negotiations," March 1, 1979, Folder: Middle East, 12/78-3/79; Box 3: President's Personal Foreign Affairs File, Mid East, 8-11/78 through Portugal, 8/78-6/80; Plains File; JCL. As both Sadat and Begin sought to leverage Carter for their own purposes, in the end they could never get total satisfaction. During the mid-1970s Ambassador Eilts noted, "What Sadat can never understand is why the United States, which provides Israel with everything cannot move them." Though Carter publically stated that both Begin and Sadat knew American influence was limited, he would later write the opposite. On a transcript of a telephone

Though Sadat played a better personal game than Begin and coaxed Carter and the United States into certain actions, he himself was also used to a certain degree. Because of his relationship with the president and because he was seen as less intransigent, Carter counted on Sadat to be more flexible and make more concessions. In the end the Egyptian leader got what he wanted, the return of the Sinai. But he was attacked throughout the Arab world. Sadat “deviated from the Arab ranks and has chosen, in collusion with the United States, to stand by the side of the Zionist enemy,” the Arab League declared as it expelled Egypt.¹²⁶ The result was that the Egyptian president clung ever tighter to the United States. The Administration recognized this and saw the need to bolster him. “He [had] placed all his eggs in the American basket,” the State Department noted, and had “devoted much energy and personal prestige to attaining peace. A shift in the US position would discredit much of his effort and would give ammunition to his critics.”¹²⁷ Though the United States tried, it could not ultimately save Sadat. Islamic extremist assassinated him in 1981.

Carter’s fate was not nearly as dire. Though engineering an historic agreement, his diplomatic efforts were forgotten and he was not reelected in 1980. Even at the time of the peace treaty, many Americans did not pay much attention to the accomplishment, as inflation and high gas prices occupied their minds. This is not to say that Carter received no boost in the direct

conversation with Sadat he wrote, “you [Sadat] overestimate our influence with Israel & they overestimate my influence with you.” See Memorandum of Conversation, Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, et al., June 21, 1975, Gerald Ford Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/memcons/1553133.pdf>; Marder and Walsh, “Carter Calls Mideast Breakdown Temporary;” Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Sadat and Carter, February 27, 1979, NLC-128-11-18-11-6, JCL.

¹²⁶ Arab League: Summit Communiqué, March 31, 1979, in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, 228; Wright, *Thirteen Days in September*, 276-277.

¹²⁷ Memorandum, William G. Bowlder and Harold H. Saunders to Vance, “Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments,” August 14, 1978, NLC-SAFE 17 B-12-66-4-5, JCL; Memorandum, Saunders and Bowlder to Vance, “Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments,” May 1, 1978, NLC-SAFE 17 A-35-56-1-5, JCL.

aftermath of his efforts, but overall, he never achieved the domestic windfall hoped for.¹²⁸ Jody Powell, Carter's press secretary, remembered somewhat bitterly that the president "had gotten no benefit in the minds of the public...for one of the most dramatic and important diplomatic triumphs in recent American history."¹²⁹ Just as Carter engaged in personal diplomacy to an unexpected degree, the end results were also unanticipated.

Conclusion

As much as American presidents sought out foreign leaders for personal interaction, foreign leaders also sought out American presidents. With the country's power and prestige growing after WWII, world leaders frequently looked to the United States. America's wealth and dominance made it a natural destination for foreign countries in need of aid, and looking at the American political landscape, foreign leaders saw the president as the best way to achieve their aims, pushing personal diplomacy to the fore.

Narratives similar to those of Japanese prime ministers Fukuda and Ohira played out numerous times with various countries in the second half of the twentieth century, as foreign leaders sought out the president either through correspondence or face-to-face meetings. Not all received satisfaction, but often U.S. presidents engaged with their foreign counterparts as a result of the initiative of the latter. The irritation that the Carter Administration occasionally expressed toward Japan for their requests of presidential time did not always occur. As with Anwar Sadat, presidents often welcomed close contact with other world leaders, especially ones they might

¹²⁸A Gallup poll a week before Camp David showed Carter's approval rating at 42%. A couple days into the summit it stood at 56%, and then by the end of the two-week parley was at 50%. When Carter traveled to the Middle East in 1979 to try to finalize a treaty his approval rating was 39%, but two weeks later after he clinched the deal it shot up to 47%. See Gallup polls, September 8-11, September 19, September 22-29, 1978; March 2-5 and March 16-19, 1979, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>).

¹²⁹Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1984), 102.

consider a friend. Sadat's example shows how a foreign head of state or government could involve a president in personal diplomacy to a degree at first unimagined. The Egyptian president's words and actions made it difficult for Carter to resist becoming more involved in the Middle East. While peace was something Carter hoped to achieve, the scope and depth of the personal diplomacy he engaged in was due in large part to Sadat, whose persistence forced him to deal with Prime Minister Begin as well. The Camp David summit is the ultimate example of the unintended results of personal diplomacy. Scheduled to last only a few days, it went on for thirteen, something Carter never could have imagined. As much as presidents tried to control and protect their time, foreign leaders often had plans of their own.

CHAPTER 7

“THE PRESIDENT MUST TAKE PERSONAL COMMAND OF THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA”: RONALD REAGAN, THE SOVIET UNION, AND THE DESIRE FOR CONTROL

In May 1983, Ronald Reagan hosted the ninth Group of 7 (G-7) economic summit in Williamsburg, Virginia. As host, he wanted a smooth, successful event. It was an opportunity to bask in the spotlight—to positively portray himself and his country to the rest of the world. Reagan’s biggest contribution to the summit was to change the format. At the previous two G-7s he attended he had been “frustrated” according to his second Secretary of State George Schultz.¹ Reagan felt that the meetings were too structured and formal, and that too much of the agenda was dictated by the bureaucracy. He also felt that the heads of government in attendance did not spend enough time alone together. When they met, it was often in the presence of various aides and advisers. Reagan sought to change this. Rather than have a communiqué drafted mostly in advance by bureaucrats, he decided that any agreements or statements would come out of the leaders’ discussions. He also wanted the allies to spend as much time as possible together alone. That way, according to Shultz, the president could “set the agenda from the top down rather than from the bureaucracy up.”²

Reagan prepared more thoroughly for Williamsburg than he had for his previous G-7 summits in Ottawa and Versailles. That is not to say that Reagan did no advanced study before the other gatherings. He did. The difference this time was that he fully invested in the pre-

¹ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 352.

² *Ibid.*, 353. This was essentially the view taken by the original initiators of the summit, French President Giscard d’Estaing and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Shultz, who played a role in bringing about the G-7 summits, wrote that “the original idea of the economic summit had been to promote private, informal discussions among the heads of government so that they could actually get to know each other and reach an understanding of each other’s thinking about economic issues and other matters of mutual concern, particularly those involving security.”

had been “poorly prepared.”³ Not so at Williamsburg. While before he might have superficially gone over briefing books or waited to the last minute to prepare, this time he started six months in advance.⁴ Why was Reagan so much more invested? Because he knew most of his interactions with his foreign counterparts were going to be without his advisers. It was all on him—which is what he wanted.

The pre-summit preparation went beyond studying briefing books. Reagan also engaged the other G-7 leaders through correspondence. As the *New York Times* reported, “Mr. Reagan, bypassing the corps of diplomats and economic specialist that normally prepare the annual gathering, has used four rounds of personal correspondence with the [other leaders]...to work out the arrangements and themes for their discussion.”⁵ Through this correspondence, Reagan got his counterparts to agree to his two main ideas: no pre-negotiated communiqué and meeting privately as much as possible.

“I’ll be in charge & frankly I’m a little edgy,” Reagan wrote in his diary days before the summit.⁶ But on the first day, it became clear that the president had little to worry about. After dinner, Reagan reported to Shultz that the “content and tone of the dinner meeting were good and the give-and-take vigorous.”⁷ Through the evening Reagan was actively engaged and at the center of events. In addition to being asked to explain why the American economy appeared to be doing better than others, he also got all the attendees to agree to a security statement on arms

³ Ibid. Reagan felt that at the first two economic summits he was still being reined in too much. As Reagan biographer Lou Cannon noted about the Ottawa summit, the president’s “staff was horrified at the thought of Reagan conversationally roaming the world political landscape without a guide or map,” they wanted him to stick to certain issues. See Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 466.

⁴ In addition to reading material, Reagan also prepared by role-playing. As he recorded in his diary, “Spent virtually all day in Cabinet meeting doing dry runs on the Summit meetings. Various people played the parts of the other heads of State.” Shultz noted that the use of this technique helped to engage the president more fully: “With Mike Deaver as the impresario, we selected people to play the parts of Mitterrand, Thatcher, Trudeau, Kohl, Nakasone, and let the president interact with them. We’d have a little drama and fun.” See Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, Douglas Brinkley ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 155; Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 353.

⁵ Hedrick Smith, “Reagan Plans Ambitious Role as Summit Host,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1983.

⁶ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 155.

⁷ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 355.

control that he and Margaret Thatcher had pushed for.⁸ Reagan was “elated” that first night, according to the secretary of state. “I could see he knew his extensive preparatory effort was paying off,” Shultz recalled, “that he was really getting somewhere and convincing people of the importance of what we were doing. I could also see that he was asserting himself front and center.”⁹

The summit “was a Reagan production from start to finish,” wrote the *Los Angeles Times*. Describing the many roles played by the president, it noted that Reagan “served as the host, moderator and self-appointed note-taker, and he arranged for the strictly private sessions and unstructured agenda to encourage the leaders to relax and engage in freewheeling discussions. From all accounts they did.”¹⁰ Shultz concurred. “President Reagan,” he recalled, “had come into his own as a forceful and effective leader at this summit. He had really put himself into it.”¹¹

“It’s true hard work never killed anybody, but I figure why take the chance?” Reagan once quipped.¹² For a president notorious for delegating and at times being disengaged, his performance at Williamsburg was impressive, and it demonstrated that on issues he deemed important he could be engaged and intimately involved. But it also illustrates a larger point about presidential conduct in the second half of the twentieth century. On matters of great significance, presidents often sought to control both strategy and tactics. And one of the ways they did that was through direct contact with other world leaders. Foreign affairs bureaucracies, ostensibly there to help facilitate presidential designs, frequently became impediments in the minds of many presidents and their White House advisers. For routine diplomacy the bureaucracy was adequate.

⁸ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 351.

⁹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 355.

¹⁰ Jack Nelson, “Summit Promises Economic Unity: 8 Leaders End Williamsburg Meeting Seeing Clear Signs of World Recover,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1983.

¹¹ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 357.

¹² As quoted in Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 121.

But new, bold initiatives were often believed to need direct, sustained presidential involvement, often manifesting itself in personal diplomacy. This avoided bureaucratic lag and the possibility that the president's message would become distorted. It also signaled to other nations the seriousness that the United States placed on a particular initiative.

Confidence and hubris, common to all modern presidents, also encouraged presidents to believe that they, through direct communication, could shape their foreign counterparts thinking and actions. Whether they relied on their charisma or charm, or the political, military, and economic might of the nation they led, presidents frequently believed that if they personally controlled diplomacy the nation's foreign policy would be better served. Presidents also saw the practice as a way to further control and advance their political position, as well as legacy and place in history. Diplomatic breakthroughs are difficult, and if left to the State Department the feeling was that the status quo would generally remain unchanged. Thus, personal diplomacy was needed to give impetus and force to a bold diplomatic initiative. If successful, the end result would be legacy-defining images of a beaming president shaking hands with another world leader.

At the end of the day, the buck stops at the Oval Office. As a former National Security Council staffer stated, "given that the president would be the one held accountable by the public, press, and Congress" for every action of his administration, "the incentives usually were for the White House to take more control, not less."¹³ Using Ronald Reagan's engagement with the Soviet Union, this chapter examines how presidents sought to use personal diplomacy in order to exercise more control over their foreign policy. Reagan's journey from cold warrior to peacemaker was not smooth. He had an ambiguous policy, attempting to pursue contradictory goals of privately engaging

¹³ Derek Chollet, "What's Wrong with Obama's National Security Council?," *Defense One*, April 26, 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/04/whats-wrong-obamas-national-security-council/127802/>.

the Soviet Union while publically challenging it with bellicose language and a military buildup. Taking its cue from its head, the Administration was riddled with divisions between moderates and hardliners. Though developing in fits and starts, Reagan would use personal diplomacy to exert control over his Soviet outreach, allowing him to avoid bureaucratic infighting and stagnation, overcome hardliners, and secure his place in history.

Reagan in the White House

Exuding confidence and optimism, Ronald Reagan took over a country in need of both. Despite well-intentioned efforts, his predecessor Jimmy Carter had left the nation with neither. In Reagan's victorious campaign against Carter in 1980, he asked Americans if they were better off than they had been four years ago. Most answered no. The country's economy was in doldrums and the nation's standing in the world seemed at an all-time low, especially as over fifty Americans remained captive in Iran. But asking the question was easy. Trying to improve American lives and the country's position abroad was more difficult.

At home, Reagan thought economic salvation lie in a supply-side approach. Abroad, the path back to prominence was strength. Believing the Carter Administration timid, Reagan embarked on a muscular foreign policy. He greatly expanded the military budget and used aggressive rhetoric. He thought a confrontational stance would impress allies and cower enemies. In reality, Reagan's hostile language and increased military budgets caused worry among allies and the Soviets. Allies believed renewed Cold War tensions would adversely affect them, while the Soviets feared being left behind in the arms race and a possible preemptive attack. And this rise in military spending, along with tax cuts, caused soaring deficits.

Reagan had little foreign policy experience when he came into office. Other than wanting

to take a hardline against the Soviets, it was unclear where the president stood on international issues. “I like President Reagan as a person,” German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated six months into Reagan’s presidency, “but I can’t say that about his foreign policy because I don’t know what it is.”¹⁴ Obviously the Administration disputed that type of characterization, even though halfway through his first year Reagan had yet to give a major foreign policy speech. “I know I’m being criticized for not having made a great speech outlining what would be the Reagan foreign policy. I have a foreign policy; I’m working on it,” a frustrated Reagan wrote in a letter. “I just don’t happen to think that it’s wise to always stand up and put in quotation marks in front of the world what your foreign policy is. I’m a believer in quiet diplomacy and so far we’ve had several quite triumphant experiences by using that method. The problem is, you can’t talk about it afterward or then you can’t do it again.”¹⁵

Despite an ill-defined foreign policy, Reagan’s engagement in personal diplomacy was on par with his predecessors. By the end of his first year in office, Reagan had met with foreign leaders twenty-nine times in the United States, travelled to Canada for a state visit and the G-7 summit, and in October attended the International Meeting on Cooperation and Development Summit in Mexico with almost twenty other world leaders. When a new president comes to office opponents of personal diplomacy hope the new White House occupant will put an end to the practice. The beginning of Reagan’s term was no different. As an op-ed by a former ambassador argued, “Reagan’s opportunity lies in rejecting the Nixon-Carter infatuation with personal diplomacy and insisting from the outset that the nation’s foreign affairs be conducted

¹⁴ As quoted in Flora Lewis, “Foreign Affairs: A Voice at the Top,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1981.

¹⁵ Lou Cannon, “White House Lists Much Plus, a Bit Minus,” *Washington Post*, July 17, 1981; Ronald Reagan, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, eds. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 375. For an argument that Reagan did indeed have a foreign policy, see Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 102-143.

through normal if underused channels of international intercourse.” Continuing, he wrote, “Diplomacy at the head-of-government level is completely out of hand. The arrogant assumption, which the record explodes, that occasional personal contact among these leaders can resolve the world’s woes reveals either their ignorance or contempt for the complexity of international problems.”¹⁶

Reagan did not embrace this advice. His first six months in office saw him meet with numerous world leaders, but the G-7 summit in Ottawa in July was his first real venture onto the world stage and first major foray into the realm of summit diplomacy. “I was the new boy in school when I flew to Ottawa,” Reagan remembered.¹⁷ With the global economy in poor shape, the gathering of leaders from the major industrialized nations garnered great international attention, as the economic issues dealt with at the summit affected more than just the seven countries in attendance.

The summit presented Reagan with opportunities and challenges. For a president portrayed as uninformed about foreign affairs, the Administration hoped that a strong showing would dispel notions—both at home and abroad—that he was not up to the task of international statesmanship. “The conference in Canada,” the *Washington Post* reported, “presents an immediate opportunity for the president to mingle with other world leaders and convince them and the voters at home that he is comfortable dealing with foreign issues as well as domestic.” The paper continued that the president was “sensitive” to intimations in the press that he lacked awareness of foreign issues, thus had been “boning up” for the summit.¹⁸ Though Reagan was

¹⁶ Robert J. Schaetzel, “The Dreaded Diplomatic Disease: Reagan Should Shun Personal Approach, Let Experts Do Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1981.

¹⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, 350.

¹⁸ Hobart Rowen and Lou Cannon, “Reagan Boning Up to Sell His Economic Policy at Summit Meeting,” *Washington Post*, July 19, 1981; Bill Neikirk, “Summit is 1st Test of Reagan’s World Leader Image,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1981.

skeptical it would pay off. “A lot to do & I wonder if it’s worth it,” he wrote in his dairy.¹⁹

Shortly after Ottawa, Reagan was off to another gathering of world leaders in October. This meeting also dealt with economic issues, but rather than a small gathering of the most developed nations, the meeting in Cancun, Mexico was the largest gathering of world leaders up to that time. Conceived of as a forum for nations, both rich and poor, developed and undeveloped, to meet and discuss, the heads of nineteen nations descended on the resort town for two days. The summit had no set agenda, with the exception of informal discussions on four broad economic issues: agricultural development and food security, trade, financial and monetary matters, and energy.²⁰

Though an early venture in personal diplomacy, the Administration was keenly aware that at Cancun the president’s personal involvement would be an important tool in advancing American interests.²¹ Initially hesitant to go, Reagan could not avoid the summit after every leader of an industrialized nation indicated they would attend.²² Once the decision to go was made, Reagan and his advisers sought to set the agenda and limit any criticism of American policies. A week before the conference, Reagan put forth his Administration’s views on development in poor nations. In a speech that reportedly caused “disappointment and irritation” among developing nations—in part because conference attendees were to arrive in Cancun with

¹⁹ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 30.

²⁰ “Cancun Meeting At a Glance,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1981.

²¹ This applied to other aspects of presidential personal diplomacy as well. Less than a week after inauguration, staffers on the NSC pondered how to enhance visits by foreign leaders by occasionally having the president engage in an extra social activity. Because of “the sensitivity of our relations with key allies,” which were probably going to become more “delicate” in the years ahead, an NSC staffer thought such activities “may be not only desirable but indispensable.” Such an effort would be “psychologically valuable,” showing the importance the Administration placed on its allies, and helping to avoid press stories about tensions in relations. See Memorandum, Jim Rentschler to Chuck Tyson, “Thatcher Visit and Related Thoughts,” January 26, 1981, Folder: United Kingdom-Prime Minister Thatcher Visit, February 25-28, 1981 (RAC 1); Box 2 (RAC Box 1-3); Executive Secretariat, NSC: VIP Visits; RRL.

²² Also influencing Reagan’s decision were personal appeals from Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. See Richard E. Feinberg, “Reaganomics and the Third World,” in *Eagle Defiant: United States Foreign Policy in the 1980s*, Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Leiber, and Donald Rothchild, eds. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983), 134.

no fixed positions and it showed that the United States was not going to offer anything—Reagan defended capitalism and expressed his belief that the best way forward for developing nations was private enterprise and free markets.²³ This message was not one that most nations wanted to hear. Because of his free market philosophy, “President Reagan will not be the most popular fellow...in Cancun,” the *Chicago Tribune* editorialized.²⁴ However, while his views left some bitter, no one had exceptionally high hopes for the summit to begin with. No major agreements were expected. The best that was hoped for was a constructive dialogue that would lead to continuing discussions.²⁵ But fears persisted that Reagan would be publically condemned at the summit.²⁶ Thus, the Administration sought to contain any virulent criticism.

The key to this was a series of one-on-one talks with the other leaders. “Your bilateral meetings are an extremely important part of our strategy for Cancun,” Secretary of State Alexander Haig told the president. And indeed, Reagan’s time in Cancun was filled with one-on-one meetings. According to Haig, they provided “an opportunity to explain your [Reagan’s] views on growth and development, thereby helping to achieve our objectives for the Summit itself.” He went on to sketch out three reasons why the bilateral meetings were so vital to the Administration’s strategy. First, it was believed that the majority of U.S. objectives would be achieved outside the plenary sessions, and “even the objectives which must be achieved in the plenary will benefit from your presentation in a personal meeting.” Second, even if some leaders disagreed with Reagan, they would be “less likely to criticize your policies in the plenary if they

²³ “Remarks at a Luncheon of the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia,” October 15, 1981, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (hereafter *PP*), *Ronald Reagan: January 20 to December 31, 1981* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office (hereafter GPO), 1982), 938.

²⁴ “Reaganomics Go To Cancun,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1981.

²⁵ “What’s Possible at Cancun,” *New York Times*, October 22, 1981; “Cancun: A Place in the Sun,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1981.

²⁶ Jack Nelson, “U.S. Fearful Reagan Will be Denounced at Summit,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1981; Lee Lescaze, “Reagan Braves ‘Hostile Atmosphere’ Among Have-Not Nations at Summit,” *Washington Post*, October 21, 1981.

have talked about them with you in private.” Lastly, it was thought that press coverage would determine perceptions of the summit’s success as much as tangible results. The one-on-one meetings, which would undoubtedly receive ample coverage, could be used to portray a positive image of Reagan. “We can use the bilaterals,” Haig noted, “to demonstrate to the public in the US and other countries your interest in and sensitivity to developing countries.”²⁷ Thus, Cancun provided Reagan with the opportunity to show sympathy, publicize his own economic views, and be seen as a statesman.

“We hope these personal contacts will reinforce the bilateral and regional thrust of our policy,” Haig said, “and can be reopened later to help achieve our objectives.”²⁸ Reagan’s use of personal diplomacy at Cancun was thus not only meant to achieve immediate results, but also possibly pay long-term dividends. Returning home, he called the conference “a substantial success.”²⁹ For the developing nations in attendance this was more than a bit of hyperbole. Those nations—desiring more assistance from the industrialized world—left Cancun wanting. The only thing agreed to was future talks, but the subject and timing of those talks were left unclear.

As one journalist described,

The Third World got the Reagan treatment... The Gipper bounced in, apologizing for being a bit late, and with his good humor and easy-going manner delivered a poignant little parable about how he would rather teach a man to fish than to give him a fish. He told poor countries he would support their plea for global negotiations to obtain more of the world’s wealth, but only if the rich countries retained power over the way resources are transferred... And when it was over and Reagan had, in his words, left his jet trails in the sky, the Third World realized that it had gotten the crumbs. Reagan had promised nothing more than to permit them to talk about their demands in an agreed-upon forum.³⁰

²⁷ Memorandum, Alexander Haig to Ronald Reagan, “Your Meetings with Other Heads of State or Government in Cancun, October 21-24,” Folder: Cancun Economic Summit-Bilateral Mtgs, October 21-23, 1981 [1 of 5] (Box 8); Box 2 (Box 8-10); Charles P. Tyson Files; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (hereafter RRL).

²⁸ Memorandum, Haig to Reagan, “Your Meetings with Other Heads of State or Government in Cancun, October 21-24,” Folder: Cancun Economic Summit-Bilateral Mtgs, October 21-23, 1981 [1 of 5] (Box 8); Box 2 (Box 8-10); Charles P. Tyson Files; RRL.

²⁹ “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters Upon Returning from the International Meeting on Cooperation and Development in Cancun, Mexico,” *PP, Reagan: 1981*, 986.

³⁰ Bill Neikirk, “North-South Summit Hears Reagan Sermon,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 1981.

As noted, some U.S. officials feared Reagan would face great hostility in Cancun, but this never materialized to any large extent. ““We didn’t do too badly,”” one White House official said, ““especially when you consider we came down here expecting to be kicked in the ass.”” The Administration felt that the president’s bilateral meetings played an important role in avoiding such a fate. At the conclusion of the summit, Haig said that the one-on-one encounters ““provided an opportunity [for leaders from the developing world] to look at the behemoth from the North and vice versa, and both found (the other) devoid of horns.””³¹ According to one scholar, Cancun represented the Administration’s ““greatest triumph in north-south diplomacy.””³² The Administration, in the secretary of state’s words, achieved ““in two days what might take literally months of diplomacy.””³³

The Reagan Administration sought to leverage the authority and power of the president to influence foreign leaders in other ways as well. For example, mere days after inauguration the State Department recommended that Reagan send a letter to a gathering of leaders from the Islamic world. Nothing that the summit ““is likely to be helpful to U.S. policy objectives by...condemning the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan,”” and that the Administration ““will need to work with many of the Islamic leaders to advance important U.S. policy objectives”” in the region, a letter from the president would ““establish the tone for future cooperation with many of

³¹ As quoted in Jack Nelson and Paul E. Steiger, “Main Reagan Goals Met at Development Summit,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1981. While these bilateral meetings did indeed help Reagan and his foreign counterparts get to know each other better and have greater understanding of the other’s position, the Administration was much more likely to characterize all their meetings as positive and full of agreement than other nations. For example, after Reagan met with Nigerian President Shehu Shagari, Haig told reporters that the two leaders had ““a remarkable convergence of views.”” The Nigerian Foreign Minister, however, said Haig had ““exaggerated”” and that there were ““a number of disagreements.”” See Lee Lescaze, “Reagan Uses Hotel Like White House,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 1981.

³² Feinberg, “Reaganomics in the Third World,” in *Eagle Defiant*, 134.

³³ Lee Lescaze, “Reagan Uses Hotel Like White House,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 1981.

the Islamic world's leaders."³⁴ Similarly, also in the Middle East, as the Administration sought to prevent further conflict between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), it wanted Syria to accept PLO combatants currently in Lebanon. When Syria refused, the State Department once again suggested a presidential letter. "If there is to be any hope for further progress," the department told Reagan, "a personal message" from him to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad was needed. A "direct and personal effort" was the best chance of getting Syria's agreement.³⁵

But like most presidents, however, Reagan was not involved in some of the more routine aspects of leader-to-leader contacts. For example, Reagan was simply notified that his National Security Adviser Richard Allen "had sent" a condolence message to West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt after his father died. Months later, Allen again informed the president after the fact, this time about a get well message to Schmidt. "I have taken the liberty to send the following message in your name," he told Reagan.³⁶ In other instances, however, Reagan's staff made it a point to involve him. When preparing a response for British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for example, Allen told the president, "because of the closeness of your relationship... you may wish to make some personal changes or additions prior to final typing.

³⁴ Memorandum, Peter Tarnoff to Richard V. Allen, "Presidential Message to King Khalid of Saudi Arabia as Host of the Islamic Summit Conference," January 23, 1981, Folder: Saudi Arabia: King Khalid; Box 29: Romania: Pres. Ceausescu—Saudi Arabia: King Fahd; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

³⁵ Memorandum, Walter J. Stoessel, Jr., to Reagan, "Message from President Reagan to Syrian President Assad," July 12, 1982, Folder: Syria: President Assad; Box 33: Sweden: PM Palme—Thailand: PM Prem; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

³⁶ Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, "Presidential Message of Condolence on Death of Chancellor Schmidt's Father," March 28, 1981, Folder: Germany, West: Chancellor Schmidt; Box 12: Gambia: Acting Pres. Camara—Germany, West: Chanc. Kohl; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL; Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, "Get Well Message for Chancellor Schmidt," October 12, 1981, Folder: Germany, West: Chancellor Schmidt; Box 12: Gambia: Acting Pres. Camara—Germany, West: Chanc. Kohl; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

You will note that Mrs. Thatcher wrote important parts of her letter in her own hand.”³⁷ But there was no issue that Reagan was more involved in than relations with the Soviet Union, and it is here where we see how Reagan used personal diplomacy to exert more control over his Administration’s foreign policy.

“The Urge of Modern Presidents to Engage in Personal Diplomacy... Pulls the Most Urgent Business Into the White House”: The Desire for Control

As James Wilson has written, Ronald Reagan “was fundamentally of two minds about whether to undermine the Soviet Union or to engage with its leaders.”³⁸ He despised communism and dreamed of its demise. Yet, he also recognized the horrors of nuclear war and wanted to reduce the threat. These two objectives required different approaches: unremitting hostility or engagement. In the end he chose the latter. Reagan, the fierce cold warrior, sought to find compromise with his Soviet counterparts.

Though his public rhetoric remained hostile, behind the scenes Reagan tried his hand at personal diplomacy with a series of Soviet leaders. Engagement, however, did not come easy. The Soviets were leery of the new tough talking president and unwilling to modify their positions to meet Reagan’s standards. But just as important was the challenge by conservative forces within the Administration. They posed a threat to Reagan’s desire to engage with the Soviet Union and in part help explain the president’s turn to direct engagement with Soviet leadership. And if left to the cautious, slow moving bureaucracy, Reagan’s initiative may never have gotten off the ground. He had to more forcefully insert himself into the diplomatic process.

³⁷ Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, “Bread-and-Butter Letter from Prime Minister Thatcher,” n.d., Folder: United Kingdom: Prime Minister Thatcher; Box 35: United Kingdom-PM Thatcher—United Kingdom-PM Thatcher; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

³⁸ James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev’s Adaptability, Reagan’s Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 5.

A central part of Reagan's problem was the fractures within his Administration. There was discord between the State Department and the NSC, as well as between State and the Defense Department. In memoirs from the Reagan years there is no shortage of bitterness over the disputes between competing agencies. "Morale had been damaged," Haig wrote, "most recently by a long period in which the making of foreign policy had been preempted by the White House. Every Secretary of State since the redoubtable Dulles, with the exception of Kissinger, had to some degree been a bystander. State had increasingly become a housekeeping agency charged with the errands of foreign policy. The creation of policy was in the hands of the National Security Council staff, or sometimes the Secretary of Defense."³⁹ Haig noted with resentment that he thought this would change under Reagan. Shultz's memoir is replete with references to his issues with the NSC, at one point referring to the organization as a "wildcat operation."⁴⁰ Robert McFarlane, Reagan's third national security adviser, also spent much time in his memoir detailing the policymaking disarray in the Administration and fighting between individuals.⁴¹ A staff member on the NSC, Richard Pipes, recalled that the first year and a half of the Reagan Administration "passed in an atmosphere of unremitting tensions between the NSC and State," and that the State Department was the "enemy."⁴² The end result was that Reagan's

³⁹ Alexander M. Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), 62-63.

⁴⁰ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 822. For other references to Shultz's issues with the NSC, see pp. 12, 166-167, 306-318, 902-904.

⁴¹ Robert C. McFarlane, with Zofia Smardz, *Special Trust* (New York: Cadell & Davies, 1994).

⁴² Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 153. The divide between State and NSC can be seen in the handling of correspondence. Regarding a proposed letter to King Hussein of Jordan, one NSC staffer wrote, "This State Draft is bad! It is, in its original form, a patronizing and simplistic message." Not long after a State Department official wrote that an NSC draft was "only the sparsest response," and did not "meet the requirement for a substantive dialogue" between Reagan and Hussein. In another instance the NSC was frustrated by what it believed was the State Department's delay in responding to foreign leaders. "We have got to do something about turn around time on correspondence," National Security Adviser William Clark handwrote on a memo. "We will simply to it ourselves & to hell with State." See Note, Philip Dur to Liz Attardo and Howard Teicher, n.d, Folder: Jordan: King Hussein; Box 20: Jordan: King Hussein I—Korea, South: Pres. Chun; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL; Memorandum, L. Paul Bremer to William P. Clark, "Letter from the President to King Hussein," January 8, 1982, Folder: Jordan: King Hussein I; Box 19: Japan: PM Nakasone—

foreign policy team, according to Chief of Staff James Baker, “was often a witches’ brew of intrigue, elbows, egos, and separate agendas.”⁴³

Causing further tension was the fact that Reagan relied heavily on his “troika” of personal advisers—Baker, Michael Deaver, and Edwin Meese.⁴⁴ These three dominated policy from the White House during Reagan’s first term. Writing in the 1980s, Hedrick Smith, former Washington Bureau Chief for the *New York Times*, noted, “the Reagan presidency has probably been simultaneously the most centralized and staff-dominated presidency in history.”⁴⁵ While Reagan set the broad agenda, he gave his staff a great amount of power and autonomy. Decisions were often made in discussions between Reagan and his troika. Depending on the issue others might be brought in, but in Haig’s view, the troika “perceived their rank in the Administration as being superior to that of any member of the Cabinet,” and “regard[ed] themselves as managers of the Presidency.”⁴⁶ In many respects they were. They had complete access to the president and his trust. “The power dynamic is natural enough,” Hedrick Smith explained. “Presidents see their staffs, domestic or foreign policy, as extensions of themselves, whereas they look at cabinet secretaries and departments as sometimes difficult allies or even liabilities and nuisances.”⁴⁷

In international affairs, a president’s own desire to be in control is often exploited by

Jordan: King Hussein I; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL; Memorandum, Richard Pipes to William P. Clark, “President’s Response to Letter from Ceausescu,” August 17, 1982, Folder: Romania: President Ceausescu; Box 28: Portugal: PM Soares—Romania: Pres Ceausescu; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁴³ James A. Baker III, *Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 26.

⁴⁴ In Reagan’s first term Baker was the White House Chief of State, Deaver Deputy Chief of Staff, and Meese was Counselor to the President for Policy. In the second term, Baker became Treasury Secretary, Deaver resigned in 1985, and Meese became Attorney General.

⁴⁵ Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works* (New York: Ballantine Books 1988), 297. Smith described Baker, Deaver, and Meese as “the nerve center of the administration, orchestrating the Reagan presidency,” p. 296.

⁴⁶ Haig, *Caveat*, 77, 150.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Power Game*, 590.

White House aides to further centralize policymaking and execution.⁴⁸ The end result is that the State Department is less influential—and foreign governments know this. As the astute political observer Smith perceived, “the urge of modern presidents to engage in personal diplomacy—summit meetings, personal visits, and a flow of private correspondence with kings and prime ministers everywhere—has enlarged the domain of national security advisers and pushed them into operational activism. They leave State the routine diplomacy, but they pull the most urgent business into the White House.”⁴⁹ Thus, for something to be authoritative or taken seriously it often had to come directly from the White House, and the most powerful and authoritative messages came personally from the president.

In addition to the infighting, Reagan confronted hardliners—many whom he appointed—who resisted any accommodation with the Soviet Union. As he wrote in his diary, “I think I’m hard-line & will never appease but I do want to try,” but “some of the N.S.C. staff are too hard line & don’t think any approach should be made to the Soviets.”⁵⁰ Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was one such hardliner and never fully embraced the president’s agenda, going so far as to try to undermine him on the eve of a summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. But Reagan, with the urging of Secretary of State George Shultz, would engage his Soviet counterparts to a greater degree than many at the time realized.

*“How Am I Supposed to Get Anyplace With the Russians If They Keep Dying on Me?”: Reagan and the Soviet Gerontocracy*⁵¹

In his first press conference as president Reagan said, “So far détente’s been a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims... the only morality they recognize

⁴⁸ Ibid., 562.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 592.

⁵⁰ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 142.

⁵¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, 611.

is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.” The following year Reagan said the Soviet Union would end up on the “ash-heap of history,” and in 1983 labeled it an “evil empire.”⁵² That same year he proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a space-based missile defense system, and his Administration’s opening arms control proposal for intermediate nuclear forces (INF) was the “zero option,” which called for the Soviet Union to remove all their intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Europe in exchange for the United States not to deploy Pershing and Tomahawk missiles on the continent. But the proposal was “loaded to Western advantage and Soviet disadvantage,” according to arms control expert Raymond Garthoff.⁵³ The missiles of Western Europe were exempt, as were sea- and air-based missiles, which the United States had an advantage in. Many saw it as a disingenuous proposal.

Despite this unyielding public posture, behind the scenes Reagan was more flexible. “For all his distaste for the Soviet system,” Jack Matlock, Soviet specialist on the NSC and later ambassador to the Soviet Union, recalled, “he nevertheless believed that it could change if subjected to sufficient pressure and his personal negotiating skill.”⁵⁴ And he took the lead in reaching out to the Soviets. In April 1981, about a month after John Hinckley Jr.’s attempt on his life, Reagan sent two letters to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. One was drafted by the State Department. It was official and formal in tone and sent through normal diplomatic channels. Reagan himself, however, personally penned the other a week after leaving the hospital. As

⁵² “President’s Press Conference,” *PP, Reagan: 1981*, 57; “Address to Members of the British Parliament,” *PP, Reagan: January 1 to July 2, 1982, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1983), 747; “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida,” March 8, 1983, *PP, Reagan: January 1 to July 1, 1983, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1984), 364.

⁵³ Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985), 1024. For the hardline positions and intransigence of the Reagan Administration’s arm control efforts in this period see, Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

⁵⁴ As quoted in Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 355.

Michael Deaver, deputy chief of staff, noted, the letter contained “no proposals, just a direct and personal and thoughtful message to try to nudge the process along.”⁵⁵ At first, Reagan was not completely sure he would send the letter, but in his diary he wrote that he “enjoyed putting some thoughts down on paper.”⁵⁶ When he informed his advisers about the potential letter, they were hesitant. Haig “was reluctant to have *me* actually draft it. If I was going to send a letter, he said the State Department should compose it,” the president recalled.⁵⁷ Reagan consented to revisions, but did not like the results. Deaver recalled that the president received an amended letter a few days later that was “a somewhat shorter redraft of his letter, something the State Department might have written twenty years ago. Typical bureaucratese.”⁵⁸ The president felt the same way, recalling that the overall effect was a “diluting [of] some of my personal thoughts with stiff diplomatic language that made it more impersonal than I’d wanted.”⁵⁹ Thus, Reagan reverted back to his original letter and sent it largely unchanged, while also agreeing to send a formal State Department message.

The letter to Brezhnev was conciliatory and heartfelt. Recalling their first meeting in the early 1970s, Reagan said, “you took my hand in both of yours and assured me...that you were dedicated with all your heart and mind to fulfilling those hopes and dreams” of people all over the world who were affected by the Soviet leader’s decisions. “It is in this spirit, in the spirit of

⁵⁵ Michael Deaver, with Mickey Herskowitz, *Behind the Scenes: In Which the Author Talks About Ronald and Nancy Reagan...and Himself* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), 262.

⁵⁶ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 13.

⁵⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, 270. In another instance involving Haig and correspondence with Brezhnev, National Security Adviser Richard Allen opposed the draft of a letter Haig had submitted, believing that the letter was not “felicitous.” Allen argued that the secretary’s draft “was fundamentally negative in content and in places undiplomatic in language. Given the importance of this document—the first formal exchange of correspondence between the heads of state of the United States and the USSR—it deserves more careful thought. The whole tone of the response is petulant and suggests a ‘brush off’...If this draft were adopted, it would be perceived by Moscow as deliberately insulting, and by our Allies as indicative of a lack of constructive ideas. I suggest it be thoroughly rethought and rewritten.” See Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, “Draft of President’s Response to Brezhnev,” n.d. Folder: Head of State Correspondence (US-USSR) Jan-Jun 1981 (1 of 2); Box 64: Head of State Correspondence (UK-US) 10/86--H/S Correspondence (US-USSR) July 1984; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL.

⁵⁸ Deaver, *Behind the Scenes*, 263.

⁵⁹ Reagan, *An American Life*, 271.

helping the people of both our nations,” the president wrote, “that I have lifted the grain embargo. Perhaps this decision will contribute to creating the circumstances which will lead to the meaningful and constructive dialogue which will assist us in fulfilling our joint obligation to find lasting peace.”⁶⁰

Brezhnev replied with an “icy” letter, Reagan recalled. “So much for my first attempt at personal diplomacy.”⁶¹ The Soviet premier’s response, however, was not nearly as cool as the president remembered. Soviet specialists on the NSC staff had a more positive assessment at the time. Though the Soviet leader’s letter was “unbending in substance,” it was also “conciliatory in tone.” He “tries to match the constructive tone of your letter,” Reagan was told.⁶² Indeed, Brezhnev wrote that the main thrust of his message was that the Soviet Union did “not seek confrontation with the USA or infringement upon American legitimate interests.” Rather “our policy is peace,” he told Reagan. “We will never set up the fire of war. You know very well, as we do, what such a fire would lead to. I would want to believe in the wisdom of your people, in your personal wisdom also not to allow anything that would push the world toward catastrophe.”⁶³

Despite the conciliatory language, little progress was made on arms reduction. In September, to regain the “political offensive” and demonstrate to the world that the United States was interested in peace and that it was the Soviet Union hindering advancement toward this goal, Haig suggested a message to Brezhnev, which Reagan approved. “To get this campaign off the ground, I believe that you should send a letter to Brezhnev,” he told the president. “Although we

⁶⁰ Ibid., 272. Lifting the grain embargo, however, also had a domestic component, as it pleased American farmers.

⁶¹ Ibid., 273.

⁶² Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, “Leonid Brezhnev’s Letter of May 25, 1981,” May 28, 1981, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Brezhnev; Box 38: USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev-USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁶³ Letter, Brezhnev to Reagan, May 25, 1981, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Brezhnev; Box 38: USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev—USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

would not release the text of the letter, we envisage briefing the press on its main themes in order to create the maximum possible impact on Western opinion.”⁶⁴ In preparation for a press backgrounder on the letter, National Security Adviser Richard Allen was advised to emphasize that it was the Soviets’ fault for world tension and that the disagreements between the two nations was not the result of misunderstanding: “There is dialogue...the Soviets simply do not like what they are hearing.” Through the first five months of 1981, the Administration noted there had been fifty-two exchanges between the two nations, and of these thirty-six were taken at the initiative of the United States.⁶⁵

As movement on an INF agreement went nowhere, progress on strategic arms also faltered. In May 1982, Reagan delivered a commencement address at Eureka College where he put forth his vision for strategic arms reduction talks (START). “The focus of our efforts will be to reduce significantly the most destabilizing systems, the ballistic missiles, the number of warheads they carry, and their overall destructive potential,” he said.⁶⁶ But like the zero option, Reagan’s START proposals were one-sided. They would have required the Soviets to destroy more of their strategic arsenal than the United States, while leaving untouched technologies that were to America’s benefit.

If Reagan thought Brezhnev would welcome his proposals he was mistaken. He felt the Soviet leader responded with the usual rhetoric. Brezhnev labeled it a “one-sided approach” that would endanger “the very stability which the U.S. side is allegedly so anxious to ensure.” “This is not a realistic position, not the path toward agreement,” he told the president. The divide

⁶⁴ Memorandum, Haig, Jr. to Reagan, “Letter to Brezhnev,” September 18, 1981, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Brezhnev; Box 37: United Kingdom: PM Thatcher—USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, Dennis Blair and Richard Pipes to Richard Allen, “Press Backgrounder on President’s Letter to Brezhnev, 22 September 1981,” September 21, 1981, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Brezhnev; Box 37: United Kingdom: PM Thatcher—USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁶⁶ “Address at Commencement Exercises at Eureka College,” May 9, 1982, *PP: Reagan, January 1 to July 2, 1982, Vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1983), 585.

between the two men was clear. “He has to be kidding,” an incredulous Reagan wrote in the margin of the letter. “He’s a barrel of laughs.”⁶⁷ A month later Reagan, again frustrated by a Brezhnev message, wrote on a memo, “Do you suppose he really believes all that crud—or did he even write it?”⁶⁸

Brezhnev’s days of frustrating the president, however, were short-lived. In November 1982 he died. Reagan sent Vice President George H. W. Bush to attend the funeral in Moscow, and the president made an “unusual gesture” when he went to the Soviet embassy in Washington to sign the condolence book. According to Jack Matlock, “it was a signal that he [Reagan] was ready to improve communication with the new Soviet leader.”⁶⁹

The new man at the helm of the Kremlin, however, did not appear to want improved communication. The Administration hoped Brezhnev’s passing would lead to changes in Soviet policies, but Yuri Andropov seemed determined to follow in his predecessor’s footsteps. “It is becoming increasingly clear that the Andropov approach is not marked by significant experimentation or initiative,” the U.S. ambassador in Moscow reported.⁷⁰ Reagan, however, still sought to engage him. “I decided to experiment with some personal diplomacy using back channels to the Kremlin,” he recalled, “outside the spotlight of publicity, through which both sides could speak frankly without the posturing” so typical in relations between the United States and Soviet Union.⁷¹ Reagan was confident in his own abilities to engage with his Soviet counterpart. Though the time was not right for a summit, “I felt that if I could ever get in a room alone with one of the top Soviet leaders,” he remembered, “there was a chance the two of us

⁶⁷ Letter, Brezhnev to Reagan, May 20, 1982, Box 38: USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev-USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁶⁸ Memorandum, Allen to Reagan, “Letter from Leonid Brezhnev,” October 17, 1981, Box 37: United Kingdom: PM Thatcher—USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁶⁹ Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004), 49.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 69.

⁷¹ Reagan, *An American Life*, 567.

could make some progress in easing tensions between our two countries.”⁷²

In February 1983, at the urging of Secretary of State George Shultz and over the protests of the NSC, Reagan did finally meet with a Soviet official. He spent two hours meeting with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, and made clear he wanted direct communication with Dobrynin’s boss. “I told him I wanted George [Shultz] to be a channel for direct contact with Andropov—no bureaucracy involved,” Reagan wrote in his diary.⁷³ To further show his seriousness on arms reduction and lessening tensions, he pondered appointing a “close personal associate” as ambassador to the Soviet Union. Though in the end this did not happen, Matlock believed that this showed Reagan’s “eagerness to do something to get U.S.-Soviet relations on a more constructive trajectory.”⁷⁴

More significantly, Reagan began to seriously consider a summit. Talks of meeting with Soviet leadership had been around since the start of his Administration. In February 1981, in an address to the 26th Communist Party Congress, Brezhnev broached the summit issue. Portraying the Soviet Union as peace loving he proclaimed, “international problems requiring a solution necessitate a dialogue... We are prepared to have such a dialogue. Experience shows that the crucial factor here is meetings at [the] summit level. This was true yesterday, and is still true today.”⁷⁵ The proposal, however, was not a serious one. It was more propaganda, attempting to show the Soviet Union as moderate and seeking to reduce tensions, in contrast to the bellicose rhetoric of Reagan. According to Matlock, the Administration “treated it courteously, welcoming

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 131. Reagan apparently did not see the contradiction in using Shultz as the backchannel to the Kremlin. He wanted to avoid the bureaucracy, yet Shultz was the head of a large bureaucracy. How Reagan rationalized this is unclear, but one can surmise that he trusted his secretary of state enough not to share details with, or involve his agency. And Shultz himself seemed to have a certain disdain for bureaucracies.

⁷⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 74.

⁷⁵ Leonid Brezhnev, “Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU to the XXVI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” February 23, 1981, [302](https://archive.org/details/ReportOfTheCentalCommitteeOfTheCPSU>ToTheXXVI CongressOfTheCPSU.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

a dialogue, but noting that any Reagan-Brezhnev meeting should be well prepared.”⁷⁶ But the Soviet proposal did put some pressure on the Administration. As one reporter for the *New York Times* noted, Brezhnev’s words forced Secretary of State Haig “to explain somewhat defensively why Washington believed that ‘summitry should result in achievements,’ that meetings ‘must be carefully prepared’ and that differences ‘should be on the verge of some kind of negotiated consummation.’”⁷⁷ Haig’s summit criteria would not survive into Reagan’s second term, as the president essentially violated each of those prescriptions. But even if Reagan had agreed to an early meeting in 1981, the Soviet Union mostly likely would have stalled, as Brezhnev’s health and mental faculties were not up to the task.⁷⁸

But by 1983, Reagan wanted to explore the possibility of a summit. He had Matlock draft a memo laying out the pros and cons of meeting face-to-face with Andropov. The main downside was that it would raise public expectations to unrealistic levels. Matlock, however, argued that if Reagan made clear that no agreements would come from a summit, but rather the meeting would spur negotiations that would then hopefully lead to an accord, the public would understand. On the other hand, “the main benefit of summitry,” he argued, “lay in the opportunity for direct communication with the Soviet leader and the push such meetings give bureaucracies to work out as many problems as possible in advance.” Reagan read the memo with “care, making notes in the margin.” It was clear, at least to Matlock, that the president was searching for a way to meet with the Soviet leader.⁷⁹ Indeed, in January 1983, as the NSC discussed arms control

⁷⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 30.

⁷⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, “Summit Delay During Military Buildup Is Part of Reagan Strategy,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1981.

⁷⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65. Earlier in 1983, NSC staffers discussed the visit of Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang. Taking a page out of Nixon and Kissinger’s playbook, they mentioned that a visit by Zhao might have a positive impact on Andropov. “We think a visit to the US by Zhao before any visit by Yuri Andropov would have a certain value in dealing with Andropov, although that could also be argued the other way around.” See Memorandum, David Laux, through Charles Tyson, to William Clark, “Timing of Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang’s Visit to the US,” January 25, 1983,

negotiations, Reagan told his diary, “I was wishing I could do the negotiating with the Soviets.”⁸⁰

In July, the president sent a handwritten letter to Andropov. With all the troubles in the world, the leaders of their two countries needed “a more active level of exchange than we have heretofore been able to establish,” Reagan wrote. He suggested that “private and candid” communication between the two of them would be most effective, and if Andropov “wish[ed] to engage in such communication you will find me ready.”⁸¹ Though Reagan wanted a more informal and forthright exchange, he never got it. Andropov’s “letters were stiff and cold as a Siberian winter, confined to platitudes,” according to the president.⁸² And matters were made worse by a series of events that raised tensions and risked direct confrontation such as the Soviet downing of a civilian airliner and NATO’s Able Archer exercise, which frightened the Soviets into believing a nuclear attack was imminent and brought them to the brink of ordering a retaliatory strike. But as with Brezhnev, Reagan did not have to deal with Andropov’s perceived intransigence long. He died in February 1984. The Administration debated whether the president should attend the funeral, but in the end decided against it. “I don’t want to honor that prick,” Reagan said.⁸³

Andropov’s successor, Konstantin Chernenko, was a hardline septuagenarian in ill health. The president, however, was determined to move forward with a summit. “I have a gut feeling I’d like to talk to him about our problems man to man,” Reagan wrote in his diary, “and see if I could convince him” of the benefits of changing Soviet behavior. He directed his advisers to

Folder 16: China: Premier Zhao Ziyang; Box 6: Cape Verde: Pres. Pereira—Columbia: Pres. Batancur (cables); Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁸⁰ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 125.

⁸¹ Letter, Reagan to Yuri Andropov, July 11, 1983, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Andropov; Box 38: USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev-USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁸² Reagan, *An American Life*, 575.

⁸³ As quoted in Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 87.

pursue such a meeting.⁸⁴ While Reagan might have had a “gut feeling” it was time to sit down and talk, his reelection bid in 1984 gave him an added incentive. His aggressive rhetoric and military buildup during his first four years, combined with the fact he had yet to meet with a Soviet leader, gave the Democratic challenger Walter Mondale a line of attack. He tried to portray Reagan as a loose cannon leading the nation closer to war than peace. “It’s been four years, and President Reagan still hasn’t met even once with the leaders of the Soviet Union,” one Mondale television ad reminded voters. “The tough talk, the political rhetoric—that’s one thing. But no talk—that’s dangerous. No conference, no meeting, and the nuclear arms race goes on and on. More nuclear warheads, more threats, but no meeting.”⁸⁵ Mondale’s attack, however, did not gain much traction. Reagan moderated his tone and met with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko before the election, and the improved American economy reassured the president a landslide reelection.⁸⁶

World leaders such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl also pushed Reagan toward engagement with the Soviets. “Progress will be possible only if there is direct communication at the highest level with the Soviet leadership,” Thatcher wrote Reagan in September 1984, as she applauded his meeting with

⁸⁴ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 220, 223.

⁸⁵ “Table,” Mondale 1984, Museum of the Moving Image, *The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials 1952-2012*, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984/table>. Mondale also stated that as president he would strive to implement annual summits with the Soviets—an idea the Reagan Administration quickly rejected. The Administration also had to deal with pressure from its own party. In June 1984, Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker and Senator Charles Percy urged Reagan to drop his precondition that a summit be carefully prepared in advanced. “We’ve got to figure out some way not to blow each other up,” Baker said. See “White House Rejects Call for Annual Summits,” *Boston Globe*, June 13, 1984.

⁸⁶ During the election Reagan began to modify his stance on a summit, saying he was “willing to meet and talk any time.” And though he claimed he would not “play political games with this summit,” to most it seemed that this change in tone was very much about politics. After reelection, a U.S.-Soviet summit was at the top of the agenda. Reagan began to think ahead of his legacy, and his landslide assured him of an abundance of political capital (at least temporarily). And for the Soviets, any hopes of a more dovish American president were on hold for at least the next four years, thus if they wanted to make progress on arms control they would have to deal with Reagan. See Hedrick Smith, “Summit Fever: Reagan Move Alters Terms of Play on the ‘Peace Issue,’” *New York Times*, July 17, 1984; James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 2009), 224.

Gromyko. In November, Reagan welcomed Kohl for a visit. The chancellor, for partly selfish reasons, pushed Reagan to meet with his Soviet counterpart. An easing of tensions between the United States and Soviet Union would benefit West Germany economically by making it easier to deepen its ties with Eastern Europe. As one of Kohl's foreign policy advisers recalled, "'our main interest was to get the second Reagan administration back to a summit with the Soviets, because we had learned that [West] Germany's room for maneuver was dramatically restricted by this stalemate between the two superpowers.'"⁸⁷

Thus throughout 1984, out of public view, Reagan and Chernenko corresponded. In March, the president received a lengthy letter from the Soviet leader. "First of all," he wrote, "I would like to emphasize that, like yourself, I value the importance of our correspondence which makes possible a direct exchange of views on the cardinal problems of relations between our countries and the international situation." The Soviet leader then went on to describe his view of U.S.-Soviet relations and survey the state of world affairs. Reagan was impressed with the letter. "I think this calls for a very well thought out reply," he wrote on the message, "not just a routine acknowledgment that leaves the status quo as is."⁸⁸

Reagan's early experience writing a letter to Brezhnev, and the push back from some of his advisers, made him acutely aware that elements within his Administration could prevent the type of progress he desired. "Whenever I wanted to send a message to a foreign leader...copies of my message were usually first circulated to a half-dozen or more agencies at the State Department, the Pentagon, the Commerce Department, and elsewhere for comment and suggestions," Reagan recalled. "And often the bureaucrats down the line...would try to add or change something—whether it was needed or not. The result: often a blurring of my original

⁸⁷ As quoted in Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 225.

⁸⁸ Letter, Chernenko to Reagan, March 19, 1984, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Chernenko; Box 39: USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko—USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

intentions.”⁸⁹ Starting with his reply to Chernenko’s March letter, Reagan decided to keep his letters to Soviet leaders outside the bureaucracy. Rather, he would draft letters with just a small group of close advisers. He wanted “a more hands-on approach—without help from the bureaucrats.”⁹⁰ This type of direct exchange, often outside diplomatic channels, not only gave the president more control, but also helped ensure the message was taken more seriously. “It is important to recognize that the purpose of establishing a White House-Kremlin channel was to get results,” National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane noted, because “the Soviets had not taken traffic in normal diplomatic channels as authoritative.” Rather, they believed “anything we said [through traditional channels] was simply grandstanding for domestic consumption.”⁹¹

In April 1984, Reagan sent a letter to Chernenko. He sought to reassure the Soviet leader that the United States was “ready for a turning point in our relations with the Soviet Union,” but it needed to be met halfway. In a handwritten postscript, Reagan acknowledged the psychological trauma of past Soviet history. “I have reflected at some length on the tragedy and scale of Soviet losses in warfare through the ages. Surely those losses, which are beyond description, must affect your thinking today. I want you to know that neither I nor the American people hold any offensive intentions toward you or the Soviet people... Our common and urgent purpose must be... a lasting reduction of tensions between us. I pledge to you my profound

⁸⁹ Reagan, *An American Life*, 595.

⁹⁰ Ibid. At the time, Secretary of State Shultz also thought that the bureaucracies should be left out of the process. “Based on previous experience,” he told the president, “reaching consensus... on anything specific will take weeks if not months.” Shultz, though head of a bureaucracy, also stated, “I believe strongly that, as a general rule, the drafting of Presidential correspondence should not become the province of the bureaucracy.” In addition to the struggle to find consensus, letters drafted through the bureaucratic process were “devoid of personality,” according to Jack Matlock, “and this for a president whose personality and charm were his greatest assets.” See Memorandum, Shultz to Reagan, n.d., “Response to Chernenko’s March 19 Letter,” Folder: Head of State Correspondence (US-USSR) March 19484 (2 of 2); Box 64: Head of State Correspondence (UK-US) 10/86--H/S Correspondence (US-USSR) July 1984; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL; Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 62.

⁹¹ McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 298.

commitment to that goal.”⁹² If Reagan hoped for a breakthrough he was disappointed. While Chernenko’s response was “correct and non-polemical,” according to Shultz, it did not move relations or arms negotiations forward. “In sum, then,” the secretary of state said, “the Soviets have given us a mixed but, on balance, a poor showing. The tone is defensive, and so is the content.”⁹³ Jack Matlock recalled that Chernenko’s reply “made clear that a summit meeting was out of the question, and showed no give on any of the traditional Soviet positions.”⁹⁴

Reagan was undeterred. “His reply to my letter is in hand & it lends support to my idea that while we go on believing & with some good reason, that the Soviets are plotting against us & mean us harm, maybe they are scared of us & think we are a threat,” he wrote in his diary. “I’d like to go face to face & explore this with them.”⁹⁵ But Reagan never got the chance. For the third time in less than three years the head of the Soviet Union died. The question once again arose whether the president should attend the funeral. Though he wanted to meet the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Reagan thought better of it. If he went, his meeting with Gorbachev would be brief, and he would be competing for time with other foreign visitors. He decided to wait.⁹⁶

*“I’ll Have to Get Him in a Room Alone and Set Him Straight”: Reagan and Gorbachev*⁹⁷

Vice President Bush once again went to Moscow to represent the United States at

⁹² Letter, Reagan to Chernenko, April 16, 1984, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Chernenko; Box 39 USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko—USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL. Reagan’s recognition of this psychological dimension was evident weeks before the letter was sent. At an NSC meeting on March 27, Reagan said, “My letter to Chernenko is an opportunity to get their attention. Have we given enough attention to the fact that they have a climate of insecurity?” See Jason Saltoun-Ebin, ed., *The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Council* (Lexington, KY: Seabec Books, 2014), 291.

⁹³ Memorandum, Shultz to Reagan, “Chernenko’s June 6 Letter and Dobyryn’s Talking Points: Analysis,” June 14, 1984, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Chernenko; Box 39 USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko—USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁹⁴ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 89.

⁹⁵ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 247.

⁹⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 108.

⁹⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, 632.

Chernenko's funeral, and he carried a letter from Reagan inviting Gorbachev to visit. "You can be assured of my personal commitment to work with you...in serious negotiations," the president told the new Soviet leader. "I want you to know that I look forward to a meeting that could yield results of benefit to both our countries and to the international community as a whole."⁹⁸

Gorbachev responded in a "non-polemical tone," according to Shultz, and was favorably disposed to a summit.⁹⁹ "First of all," Gorbachev said, "I would like to say that we deem improvement of relations between the USSR and USA to be not only extremely necessary, but possible, too." Regarding a face-to-face meeting, he had a "positive attitude." Such a gathering would not have to involve the signing of a major agreement he noted, rather "the main thing is that it should be a meeting to search for mutual understanding."¹⁰⁰

While both sides professed a desire to meet, location and timing became an issue. Reagan initially invited Gorbachev to Washington, but the Soviet leader stalled in accepting. This led some in the Administration to begin thinking about possibly having a summit somewhere other than United States. But hardliners—not wanting a summit at all—took issue. "Uncomfortable with the president's desire to have a face-to-face meeting with the Soviet leader," Matlock recalled, hardliners "kept insisting that the summit be held in Washington if it was to take place at all." These anti-summit forces cited protocol in support of their position. Since the last two summits involved American presidents traveling to the Soviet Union, it was the Soviet leader's turn to come to the United States they argued. According to Matlock, however, "their real reason

⁹⁸ Letter, Reagan to Gorbachev, March 11, 1985, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev; Box 39: USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko-USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

⁹⁹ Memorandum, Shultz to Reagan, March 25, 1985, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev; Box 39: USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko-USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL. See also Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 534.

¹⁰⁰ Letter, Gorbachev to Reagan, March 24, 1985, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev; Box 39: USSR: Gen. Sec. Chernenko-USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL. Reagan also cites part of the letter in his memoir, along with his thoughts on this early exchange. See Reagan, *An American Life*, 612-614.

was to create an image of a Soviet leader begging for concessions.”¹⁰¹ With a meeting in Washington seeming less and less a possibility, Reagan seriously considered going to Moscow. When the Soviets proposed a neutral site, the president accepted. Shultz worried that if Reagan did not, the prospects for a summit would dim. And with the president “eager, above all, to go head-to-head with the Soviet leader,” Matlock recalled, he “accepted Shultz’s advice.”¹⁰²

Geneva was chosen as the site for the first meeting between a U.S. president and Soviet general secretary since 1979. But before the November talks, Reagan had to prepare. His National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane worried about the president’s grasp of details, thus had Matlock design “Soviet Union 101,” which consisted of twenty-one papers, eight to ten pages each, covering Soviet history and psychology.¹⁰³ Never one for extensive preparation, Reagan took a special interest in readying himself for his encounter with Gorbachev. He “became a near-Russophile over the course of the next six months, studying each paper throughout and waiting eagerly for the next,” McFarlane recalled. “President Reagan was clearly determined to be thoroughly prepared...He worked hard, and by the time he reached Geneva, was thoroughly in command of his brief.”¹⁰⁴ Matlock concurred. Reagan knew exactly “what he wanted to say and how he would say it.”¹⁰⁵

The Administration at large also prepared. It outlined the themes and perceptions it wanted to highlight publically, and put together a schedule of speeches, events, and meetings

¹⁰¹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 124. At times Reagan could have a disdain for protocol, and would not let it stop him if he really wanted to do something. As he said to Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney once, ““Brian, it’s protocol—spelled bullshit.”” As quoted in Jim Kuhn, *Ronald Reagan in Private: A Memoir of My Years in the White House* (New York: Sentinel, 2004), 145.

¹⁰² Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 127.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 96; Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 133-135.

¹⁰⁴ McFarlane, *Special Trust*, 308.

¹⁰⁵ The day before meeting with Gorbachev, Reagan did a bit of role-playing. Matlock played the role of Gorbachev and even spoke in Russian to give the president a feel for what it would be like face-to-face. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 134-135.

with foreign leaders in the lead-up to the summit.¹⁰⁶ The public relations side was just as important as the actual issues involved, and the Administration spent as much time on imagery and its public message as it did on other matters.¹⁰⁷ This was not a frivolous pursuit. As Dana Rohrabacher, a senior speechwriter, noted a little over a month before the summit, “The world has witnessed one of the most professional public relations efforts ever made by the Soviet Union. They have brought into play everything in their propaganda arsenal, from supposedly new arms proposals, to the stylish cut of Gorbachev’s suit. Their propaganda campaign, clearly aimed at giving themselves leverage at the upcoming summit, reflects an appreciation of the power of public diplomacy.”¹⁰⁸ Reagan recognized this as well, telling Margaret Thatcher that he had spent much time thinking of the “public climate,” and that it was important to prevent “unreasonable expectations.” But this was made more complicated by the Soviets, who had “been conducting a propaganda campaign designed to place great pressures on the Western Democracies.”¹⁰⁹

Privately, Shultz told the president that the talks “will not be an easy task.” He questioned how willing Gorbachev and his associates would be to softening their positions. Overall, he told Reagan, “We can take a substantial step forward in Geneva if you can develop a personal relationship with Gorbachev, fully discuss our differences, and agree on a process for negotiating

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum, Donald T. Regan and Robert C. McFarlane to Reagan, “Approaching Geneva: Current Assessment,” n. d., Folder: FO 006-09 (Begin-326934); Box 1; WHORM: Subject Files; RRL.

¹⁰⁷ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 145, 147.

¹⁰⁸ Rohrabacher felt that the Administration was not doing enough to combat the Soviet’s public relations push. While the media focused on the notion of a “PR war,” he believed that it was “a one-sided” battle. Part of Rohrabacher’s analysis though was probably skewed by the fact that he felt he and his fellow speechwriters and others in White House communications had been left out of the summit preparations by other bureaucracies like the NSC. See Memorandum, Dana Rohrabacher to Pat Buchanan, “Summit,” October 7, 1985, Folder: FO 006-09 35675-358139; Box 6; WHORM: Subject Files; RRL.

¹⁰⁹ Letter, Reagan to Thatcher, September 17, 1985, Folder: United Kingdom: Prime Minister Thatcher; Box 36: United Kingdom-PM Thatcher—United Kingdom-PM Thatcher; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

and resolving problems in the future.”¹¹⁰ McFarlane sent the president a memo prepared by Matlock along similar lines. It noted that the summit would give Reagan a chance to “get a feel for Gorbachev’s intentions,” as well as give the Soviet leader the chance to do the same. “He is likely to try to gain [a] psychological advantage by making vigorous charges against American actions,” the memo warned. At the same time, however, Gorbachev wanted a “‘successful’ summit” in order to bolster his image and political position back home. He wanted to show that he could “deal as an equal” with the American president. Overall, the summit provided “the occasion to initiate a process of dialogue which can be used, over time, to manage the relationship in a more stable and predictable manner than has been the case in the past.”¹¹¹

Another issue that surfaced on the road to Geneva was how to record the summit. The State Department prepared in advance a joint statement that could be issued after the president’s talks with Gorbachev. Reagan, however, did not like this approach. He did not want a “‘pre-cooked’ summit...He wanted the meeting in Geneva to be *his* meeting,” according to Matlock. Rather than have issues already decided before the two leaders even met, Reagan wanted any statements to reflect what actually took place. “This, of course, made bureaucracies on both sides nervous,” Matlock recalled. “The very idea! Reagan was insisting that they do what he and Gorbachev decided! In the mind of bureaucrats in both countries, neither had the knowledge and experience to be trusted with decisions. But the fact was that our respective bureaucracies had spun their wheels for years without tangible result. It was time for the president and general

¹¹⁰ Memorandum, Shultz to Reagan, “Your Meetings with Gorbachev in Geneva,” n. d., Folder: Briefing Book Material [Talking Points] (1 of 3); Box 46: Talking Points for Plenary Sessions--[C. Briefing Books:] Study on US-USSR Summits 1972-1979; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL.

¹¹¹ Memorandum, McFarlane to Reagan, “Your Meeting with Gorbachev in Geneva,” n. d., Folder: President’s Trip to Geneva November 19, 1985 (3/4); Box 46: Talking Points for Plenary Sessions--[C. Briefing Books:] Study on US-USSR Summits 1972-1979; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL.

secretary to take charge.”¹¹²

Given his reputation, Reagan taking charge was out of character. Yet in his engagement with Soviet leaders, this is what he sought to do. Though he could be extremely detached, on major issues that captivated him, he “could prove to be more actively engaged and more involved in minute details than even such notorious micromanagers as Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter.”¹¹³ Thus, in the weeks leading up to Geneva, the president was determined to make the summit his own. But this was never an easy process, as he had to battle hardliners both within and outside his Administration who viewed negotiations with the Soviets as foolish. On the eve of the summit, these hardline forces were still at work. On November 15, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger publically released a letter he had sent to Reagan urging him to take a tough stance with the Soviets. He advised the president to resist pressure to continue adhering to SALT II, as well as any attempts to put restrictions on SDI. Weinberger was also very concerned about Soviet failure to live up to past arms control agreements, and urged the president to put an end to the practice. A weak U.S. response to “violations can only encourage them to commit more—and more significant—violations.”¹¹⁴ Press Secretary Larry Speakes labeled the letter “almost treasonous, since it was designed to ruin the summit.”¹¹⁵ And indeed, Reagan was angered by it. “He should have been,” Matlock recalled, “since the letter was a public display of Weinberger’s lack of confidence in the president’s judgment.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 143, 144. Shultz makes the same point about Reagan not liking a “fully stage-managed” summit. See Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 751.

¹¹³ Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 90. Reagan, for instance, used Suzanne Massie, an author of works on Russian history and culture, as an official backchannel to Soviet leaders. Some in the Administration disapproved of Massie’s proximity to the president and her involvement, but for Reagan she played an important part of his diplomacy with the Soviet Union. See Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 111-114.

¹¹⁴ “Weinberger Letter to Reagan on Arms Control,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1985.

¹¹⁵ Larry Speakes, with Robert Pack, *Speaking Out: The Reagan Presidency from Inside the White House* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988), 127.

¹¹⁶ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 150. In his diary, however, Reagan downplayed the letter, saying he agreed with Weinberger, and “it is not as the press would have it an in house battle.” See Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 369.

Regardless of the defense secretary's faith in the president, Reagan was confident in his own abilities to persuade Gorbachev.¹¹⁷ In two days of talks they met for about eight hours, half that time one-on-one with just interpreters.¹¹⁸ In their first private meeting, the president told the Soviet leader that they "could really talk now." Rather than discuss arms control specifically, which they would do in plenary sessions, Reagan told Gorbachev that in their private talks they should focus on "eliminat[ing] the suspicions which each side had of the other. The resolution of other questions would follow naturally after this."¹¹⁹ In their following talks the two men jostled over a variety of issues such as human rights and each nation's global activities, but the biggest area of contention was SDI. Neither side would budge, thus any substantial progress on arms reductions was elusive.

But the main storyline coming out of Geneva highlighted the intense personal diplomacy that had occurred. When Reagan and Gorbachev's first private meeting went well beyond the scheduled fifteen minutes it "excited the hell out of the Press," the president wrote in his diary.¹²⁰ The fact that the two leaders spent more time in private, informal talks than in sessions with aides was "perhaps the most intriguing development" of the summit according to one journalist.¹²¹ Another noted that this occurred because of Reagan's "initiative," with the result being "the most extensive personal diplomacy between an American president and Kremlin

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 98.

¹¹⁸ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 155. Prior to the summit Reagan made clear that he did not want his private meetings with Gorbachev to be called a "tête-à-tête." "If we're not careful, we're going to go from *tête-à-tête* back to *détente*," Reagan said. Instead he preferred the term "one-on-one." As quoted in Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 90.

¹¹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Reagan and Gorbachev, "First Private Meeting," November 19, 1985, Folder: Geneva Negotiations-Summary Comments (4/5) November 19, 1985 [Geneva Memcons]; Box 54: Geneva Mtg: Themes for Talking Points—Summit 1986; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL.

¹²⁰ Reagan, *Reagan Diaries*, 369.

¹²¹ Raymond Coffey, "Hint of Progress at Summit: Soviet Leader, Reagan Likely to Trade Visits," *Chicago Tribune*, November 21, 1985.

leaders since World War II.”¹²² Officials in Geneva went one step further, claiming Reagan and Gorbachev’s personal diplomacy “had no equals in the annals of previous summit meetings.”¹²³

Publically, Gorbachev said he was “‘optimistic’” after his talks with Reagan, the “‘world has become a safer place.’”¹²⁴ Privately he was less sanguine about his negotiating partner. “‘The man does not seem to hear what I am trying to say,’” he lamented.¹²⁵ Returning home, he said, “‘Reagan is maneuvering...the essence of his policy—the policy of the military-industrial complex—has not changed, there was no increased love toward us.’”¹²⁶ At the same time, however, he thought the president “‘was a man you could do business with.’”¹²⁷ Reagan felt the same way, and on a personal level felt more of a connection than the general secretary did. “‘Reagan returned from Geneva with respect for Gorbachev,’” Matlock remembered. “‘In fact, he liked the man.’”¹²⁸ But the president was under no illusions. Writing to a friend soon after the summit, he said the talks were “‘worthwhile, but it would be foolish to believe the leopard will change his spots. [Gorbachev] is a firm believer in their system...and he believes the propaganda they peddle about us.’” But Reagan also recognized that the general secretary was “‘practical” and could be convinced to make a deal.”¹²⁹

After Geneva, Reagan wanted to quickly follow-up with the Soviet leader and told Matlock to draft a letter. “‘Eager to avoid the delays of interagency consideration and bickering between Shultz and Weinberger,’” Matlock recalled, “‘Reagan intended to copy my draft in his

¹²² Terry Atlas, “‘The Geneva Summit: Summit Was a Personal Matter,’” *Chicago Tribune*, November 21, 1985.

¹²³ Joseph Lelyveld, “‘Leaders are Leaving the Fine-Tuning to Others,’” *New York Times*, November 22, 1985.

¹²⁴ Jack Nelson, “‘‘Constructive’ Steps Toward Peace Taken, President Says: ‘Understand Each Other Better’ Now,’” *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1985.

¹²⁵ As quoted in Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2008), 64.

¹²⁶ Conference at the Central Committee on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in preparation for the 27th Congress of the CPSU, November 28, 1985, Doc. 27, Electronic Briefing Book, No. 127, National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB172/Doc27.pdf>.

¹²⁷ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 405.

¹²⁸ Reagan, *An American Life*, 639; Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 169.

¹²⁹ Letter, Reagan to George Murphy, December 19, 1985, in *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, Skinner, Anderson, and Anderson, eds., 415-416.

own handwriting.” And the president did, believing that a letter presented in his own handwriting would meet less resistance from the bureaucracies. Thus, a week after Geneva, a presidential letter was on its way to Gorbachev. If the normal procedure for correspondence had been followed, going back and forth between the various agencies, it might “have taken weeks if not months.”¹³⁰

The message Reagan sent noted that a formal letter through official channels would be forthcoming as well, but he “wanted to waste no time in giving you some of my initial thoughts on our meetings...[because] there are some things I would like to convey very personally & privately.” The letter highlighted the value of their talks, which allowed both men to better understand each other. Of particular importance were their private sessions. “Both of us have advisers & assistants,” Reagan wrote, “but, you know, in the final analysis, the responsibility to preserve peace & increase cooperation is ours.” The letter also tried to assuage Soviet fears over SDI.¹³¹ Gorbachev took almost a month to respond, and it was not encouraging. From the Administration’s view, it was combative and seemed to simply rehash old Soviet arguments.¹³²

Despite this tepid response, Reagan still looked forward to meeting with Gorbachev again. “President Reagan wanted to negotiate the key elements [of arms reduction] personally,” according to Matlock, thus he was keen to set a date for the next summit.¹³³ The two had agreed that Gorbachev would come to the United States for their next meeting, but when that would be was anyone’s guess. Arms control negotiators at Geneva were going nowhere, and the Soviet leader had difficulties at home, including a nuclear accident at Chernobyl and trouble implementing perestroika. Then there was the arrest of a Soviet spy in the United States, which

¹³⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 169, 170.

¹³¹ Letter, Reagan to Gorbachev, November 28, 1985, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev; Box 40: USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev—USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

¹³² Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 172.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 175.

caused the Soviets to retaliate by arresting an American journalist for espionage. Thus, prospects for a U.S. summit seemed dim.¹³⁴

But both men still wanted to make progress. In September 1986, Gorbachev wrote to Reagan. Negotiations “will lead nowhere unless you and I intervene personally,” and he proposed “a quick one-on-one meeting...to engage in a strictly confidential, private, and frank discussion.”¹³⁵ A month later the two men were face-to-face. Rather than a summit in Washington, the two men again met at a neutral site, this time in Reykjavik, Iceland.¹³⁶ Prior to the meeting, Gorbachev made a litany of concessions, moving far toward the American position on an INF agreement.¹³⁷ Yet, public opinion in Western Europe thought it was Reagan who had made the concessions. The view was that “Gorbachev scored a success because he maneuvered the President into a preliminary meeting that President Reagan had initially said he did not want.” The president appeared “more eager for a summit than Gorbachev,” the U.S Information Agency reported.¹³⁸

Regardless of who made the most concessions, both sides did not have much time to prepare for a meeting that the Administration insisted was not a full-blown, formal summit, but rather a “pre-summit.”¹³⁹ While prep time was limited, Matlock did not see this as problem. He

¹³⁴ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 389-391.

¹³⁵ Letter, Gorbachev to Reagan, September 15, 1986, Folder: USSR: General Secretary Gorbachev; Box 40: USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev—USSR: Gen. Sec. Gorbachev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

¹³⁶ Once the decision to go to Reykjavik was made, the Administration quickly notified allies. “Mr. Gorbachev proposed this meeting not to take the place of his visit to the United States, but to make concrete preparations for the meetings here,” the message said. “I felt that it was important for me to agree to the meeting, in order to stress my commitment to real progress in U.S.-Soviet relations.” The message was sent to the leaders of Britain, West Germany, France, Italy, Canada, and Japan. See “Privacy Channel Message to Allies,” n.d., Folder: United Kingdom: Prime Minister Thatcher; Box 37: United Kingdom: PM Thatcher—USSR: Gen. Sec. Brezhnev; Executive Secretariat, NSC: Head of State File; RRL.

¹³⁷ Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 111.

¹³⁸ Foreign Media Analysis, “West European Press on Reykjavik: Gorbachev Outmaneuvered President Reagan,” USIA, October 8, 1986, Folder: Reykjavik-Press Reaction & FBIS; Box 57: Reykjavik Summit Cables-Items for Briefing Book (Carlucci) [Post-Reykjavik]; Jack F. Matlock Files; RRL.

¹³⁹ This notion of a “non-summit” meeting was actually something the Administration had publically mentioned in April 1985, months before Reagan ever met with Gorbachev. The idea of a less formal meeting was designed to

told the president the key was going to be his one-on-one talks with Gorbachev, and he reassured Reagan that the Soviets saw him as a “‘real leader,’” and that in “Soviet eyes a real leader does not need to be propped up by a lot of ‘advisers.’”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, during his time at Reykjavik, Reagan would go further than any of his advisers imagined. Gorbachev proposed to cut strategic arms by fifty percent and eliminate both nations’ intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe. SDI, however, continued to be a problem—Gorbachev wanted it relegated to the laboratory. This was a non-starter for the president.

On the second day talks became more heated. Gorbachev felt that Reagan was not making any concessions, while Reagan could not understand Soviet concerns about SDI. But after their third session together—which was scheduled to be the last of the summit—it was announced that they would meet for a fourth time. This news shocked some in the American delegation. As one U.S. arms control expert recalled, when Reagan and Gorbachev announced another meeting, “I knew Reykjavik had changed. No longer were the President of the United States and General Secretary of the Soviet Union reading staff papers to one another. No longer were they blessing what their arms control teams had worked out. They would move from headquarters in base camp to the front lines. They would become negotiators-in-chief.”¹⁴¹

This unscheduled fourth meeting would become the “‘the highest stakes poker game ever

allow the two men to meet and better understand each other, while at the same time lower public expectations. It also shows how eager Reagan was to meet with Gorbachev. According to a White House official, the president had come to see personal diplomacy as increasingly important after his meeting with Gromyko in 1984. “‘This notion of personal diplomacy,’” the official said, “‘is big with him [Reagan].’” See George Skelton and Richard E. Meyer, “‘Non-Summit’ Talks Proposed: Reagan Oks Less Formal Meetings,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1985.

¹⁴⁰ As quoted in Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 112. Despite the limited time before the summit, Matlock felt that Reagan “went into the meeting with a clear idea of what he wanted: an understanding regarding one or two major agreements that would permit Gorbachev to come to the United States for a full-fledged summit.” See Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 213.

¹⁴¹ Kenneth L. Adelman, *The Great Universal Embrace: Arms Summitry—A Skeptic’s Account* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 63. However, for all the one-on-one negotiating, some argue that the failure to come to agreement at Reykjavik was because Reagan and Gorbachev’s aides prevented both leaders from making crucial compromise on SDI. See Jay Winik, *On the Brink: The Dramatic, Behind-the-Scenes Saga of the Men and Women Who Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 515; Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 261-262.

played,” according to Shultz.¹⁴² Indeed, as the two men went back and forth they proposed something radical. “It would be fine...if we eliminated all nuclear weapons,” Reagan said. “We can do that,” Gorbachev replied. “We can eliminate them.” But again, SDI divided the two men, and they could not bridge the gap. Reagan implored Gorbachev to do him a “favor” and accept his view on SDI, but the Soviet leader refused to budge.¹⁴³ “I don’t know when we’ll ever have another chance like this and whether we will meet soon,” the president lamented as they parted. “I don’t either,” Gorbachev responded.¹⁴⁴

The main image from the talks was the somber faced leaders going their separate ways. “Something had gone wrong,” Nancy Reagan recalled thinking after seeing her husband on television. “He looked angry, very angry. His face was pale and his teeth were clenched.”¹⁴⁵ This was not the image the Administration wanted to present to the world. As Reagan’s Press Secretary Larry Speakes recalled, the Administration went on an “unprecedented news blitz” to avoid the perception of failure.¹⁴⁶ U.S. public opinion was with Reagan, while leaders in Western Europe bristled at the president’s proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons without consulting them first.¹⁴⁷

But the situation was not as dire as the two leaders’ body language suggested. Speaking to reporters after Reagan had left, Gorbachev said, “It’s not a failure; it’s a breakthrough.” On the plane ride back to the Soviet Union he expounded on this view. “We need not fall into

¹⁴² As quoted in Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 351.

¹⁴³ Memorandum of Conversation, Reagan, Gorbachev, et al, 3:25-4:30, 5:30-6:50, October 12, 1986, Doc. 15, Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/Document15.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ These parting words are in the Soviet transcripts of the talks, but not in the U.S. version. See Russian transcript of Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Reykjavik, October 12, 1986 (afternoon), Doc. 16, Electronic Briefing Book No. 15, National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/Document16.pdf>.

¹⁴⁵ Nancy Reagan, *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1989), 345.

¹⁴⁶ Speakes, *Speaking Out*, 148.

¹⁴⁷ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 239.

despair,” he said. “I am even more of an optimist after Reykjavik.” He believed that his talks with Reagan had led to an even firmer understanding of each other’s positions, and it was clear that agreement could be reached.¹⁴⁸ Initially Reagan and Shultz were extremely disappointed, but assistants like Matlock told them Reykjavik was far from a failure. The Soviets were closer to the U.S. position on arms control than ever before. They appeared ready to make a deal.¹⁴⁹

Upon returning home, however, the Reagan Administration became ensnared by the Iran-Contra scandal, and arms control talks went on the backburner for the rest of the year. But in February 1987, Gorbachev restarted the arm control process. He once again signaled his willingness to negotiate along American lines, separating an INF treaty from START and SDI, and invited Shultz to Moscow for talks. Over the ensuing months both sides came to an agreement on intermediate nuclear forces, and Gorbachev visited Washington in December 1987 to sign it. The Soviet leader’s visit was the culmination of a long process for Reagan, who had desired a U.S. summit for sometime. The president had talked so much about a Gorbachev visit that he eventually irritated Shultz—who was a summit supporter. After learning of the president’s idea to have Gorbachev visit his California ranch for Thanksgiving, Shultz recalled saying, “ ‘Oh, stop...Let the summit idea alone; quit pressing.’ ”¹⁵⁰

Gorbachev’s visit came at propitious moment for Reagan, as it helped give him positive headlines after months dominated by the Iran-Contra affair. But Reagan still found himself parrying conservative attacks like those from the head of the Conservative Caucus, who called Reagan a “ ‘useful idiot for Soviet propaganda.’ ”¹⁵¹ In the days leading up to the summit the

¹⁴⁸ “Gorbachev's Reflections on Reykjavik on the Flight to Moscow,” October 12, 1986. Doc. 19, Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, National Security Archive, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB203/Document19.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Leffler, *Soul of Mankind*, 395; Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 114.

¹⁵⁰ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 904.

¹⁵¹ As quoted in Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 276; Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 778-781.

president took a hardline in public, hoping to assuage such critics. While asserting that Gorbachev was “different than past Soviet leaders,” he also said that he would walk away from a “bad deal,” and a White House spokesman said the summit should be seen not as “a session to be taken lightly between old friends,” but rather “a summit between old enemies.”¹⁵²

More than in their past two meetings, public relations took center stage over their private talks, and the two leaders spent more time doing public events than meeting one-on-one.¹⁵³ And this was probably a good thing, because private talks did not go particularly well, as Reagan retreated to his usual anti-Soviet jokes and stories. This greatly irritated Gorbachev, who felt the president did not appreciate the serious changes he had begun to implement in the Soviet Union. Reagan’s advisers were alarmed by his performance, and the president himself recognized his error. In his next private meeting with Gorbachev he performed much better.¹⁵⁴

While Reagan might not have done well behind closed doors, publically he excelled. “The Washington summit was a milestone for its ceremony, symbolism, and public impact,” James Mann has written. “The event dramatized to the American public, in a way that no other event had, that the Cold War was subsiding...[and] in all of this Reagan led the way. When it came to shaping the public mood, particularly about the Cold War, he was the driving force for his own administration.”¹⁵⁵ And this focus on public diplomacy paid off. Despite pockets of conservative dismay, the majority of the American public was enamored with the summit in general and Gorbachev in particular. “Gorby fever” gripped the capital. There, was an “air of

¹⁵² Tom Redburn, “Gorbachev Is ‘Different,’ Reagan Asserts,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1987; George de Lama and Terry Atlas, “Reagan: I’ll Avoid a ‘Bad Deal’ on Arms,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 1, 1987; Lou Cannon, “Reagan Toughens Tone on Summit to Reassure Right,” *Washington Post*, December 3, 1987.

¹⁵³ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 273. When National Security Adviser Colin Powell tried to brief Reagan for Gorbachev’s visit, he found that while Reagan was focused on the upcoming summit, it was “not in the same way his advisers [were]. He was preoccupied with the ceremonial and personal aspects of the summit,” Jack Matlock recalled. See Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 267.

¹⁵⁴ Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 776.

¹⁵⁵ Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 272.

excitement and drama,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported. The *Washington Post* said the city was “charged with electricity.” It was expected that six thousand journalists would descend on the capital to cover the event.¹⁵⁶ Vice President George H. W. Bush, who would be mounting his own bid for president the following year, tried to tap into this public excitement. He made sure to be seen with the Soviet leader as much as possible, meeting with him three times.¹⁵⁷

Five months later Reagan was in Moscow. Yet, as he left for the first presidential visit to the Soviet Union in over ten years, the Senate still had not ratified the INF treaty. A failure to ratify would have been a serious rebuke of Reagan’s personal diplomacy with Gorbachev. But in the end it was ratified 93 to 5, but not until after conservative elements tried to add crippling amendments.¹⁵⁸ No substantive agreements were reached during these talks in Moscow, as each side rehashed their standard arguments. But both sides did so “without heat,” as their meetings were “pale and largely ceremonial.”¹⁵⁹ Like in Washington, the public aspects of the Moscow summit were paramount.¹⁶⁰ Particularly for Gorbachev, who was still in the midst of a colossal struggle to reform the Soviet Union. A successful summit would strengthen his domestic position, allowing him to show that his policies had led to peace and enhanced Soviet prestige. Challengers to his rule would be silenced.¹⁶¹

To achieve this, Gorbachev wanted help from Reagan. He hoped the president would tone down his rhetoric. But Reagan had his own domestic audience to play to, and kept up

¹⁵⁶ Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 774; “Gorbachev Arrives in U.S.; Summit Fever Grips Capital,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1987; John Mintz and Sandra Saperstein Torry, “Summit Fever Electrifies, Snarls Washington: City That Has Seen It All Is Overwhelmed by Security and Traffic,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 1987; Eleanor Randolph, “NBC’s Coup on Gorbachev Interview Sends Rival Journalist Scrambling: Summit Is Expected to Draw 6,000 to Washington,” *Washington Post*, December 1, 1987.

¹⁵⁷ Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 276-277.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 290; Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 284; Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 780-781.

¹⁵⁹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 298; Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 787.

¹⁶⁰ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 300; Wilson, *Triumph of Improvisation*, 140, Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 272.

¹⁶¹ Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 290.

attacks on the Soviet Union. The general secretary was not pleased, but once in Moscow, Reagan had a different tone.¹⁶² He said that Gorbachev was a different type of leader, and that while differences between the two nations remained, they were waning. And when asked who should get the credit for advancements in relations, Reagan replied that most of it should go to Gorbachev. “Reagan’s comments in Moscow in 1988 probably did more than any other single event to build support in the Soviet Union for Gorbachev’s reforms,” Matlock recalled.¹⁶³

The iconic moment from the Moscow summit was the two leaders’ stroll through Red Square. When the president was asked whether he still considered the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” Reagan replied, “No, I was talking about another time and another era.”¹⁶⁴ Indeed, in less than three years the president and Soviet leader had met four times. “Summitry no longer requires some wrenching act of will. To meet with the Soviet leader will now be the expected thing for American presidents, rather than the exceptional,” a former State Department official noted after Moscow. Reagan had given meetings with the head of the Kremlin a “routine quality.”¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

No one would accuse Ronald Reagan of being a workaholic or micromanager. During the 1980 election he once complained about having to get up early to campaign, to which one of his advisers said, “You better get used to it... When you’re president, that fellow from the National Security Council will be there to brief you at seven thirty every morning.” Reagan had other

¹⁶² Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 284-285.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 304-305; Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*, 302.

¹⁶⁴ Mann, *Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 304.

¹⁶⁵ Hodding Carter, “Reagan’s Triumph: Summitry Becomes a Habit,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 1988.

thoughts, replying, ““he’s going to have a helluva long wait.””¹⁶⁶ But on issues of great importance that were close to his heart, he could exhibit great interest and a desire to manage and control. Though having contradictory impulses, improving relations with the Soviets in order to reduce nuclear stockpiles was one such issue. If Reagan was going to make progress, he felt the need to personally engage with his Soviet counterparts. And though he did not get everything he wanted, as a strategic arms agreement remained elusive, the INF treaty was more than many thought possible at the start of his presidency. None of this would have happened without Gorbachev, who was in many ways the key player in these events. But Reagan’s willingness to engage through personal diplomacy was also crucial.

“Starting with Brezhnev,” Reagan recalled, “I’d dreamed of personally going one-on-one with a Soviet leader because I thought we might be able to accomplish things our countries’ diplomats couldn’t do because they didn’t have the authority. Putting that another way, I felt that if you got the top people negotiating and talking at a summit and then the two of you came out arm in arm saying, ‘We’ve agreed to this,’ the bureaucrats wouldn’t be able to louse up the agreement.”¹⁶⁷ Though an idealized vision of personal diplomacy, Reagan describes the rationale of many presidents. Personal diplomacy became an attractive option because it was often seen as the best instrument to advance both American foreign policy aims as well as more personal objectives.

“Although much has been accomplished by the President’s leadership...to meet the challenge of this crossroad in mankind’s destiny, the President must take personal command of the foreign policy agenda for the 1980s.”¹⁶⁸ This was the analysis of NSC staffers in 1984.

¹⁶⁶ As quoted in Cannon, *Role of a Lifetime*, 144.

¹⁶⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, 634.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum, Richard S. Beal, William F. Martin, and Roger W. Robinson to Robert C. McFarlane, “Foreign Policy Background for the President’s Trip to Europe,” May 18, 1984, Folder: Foreign Policy Background for

Though self-congratulatory, it encapsulates a vision of the presidency that many have. The image of a president boldly charting a foreign policy and actively pursuing it is appealing. Yet, all postwar presidents have met resistance, whether it was international developments beyond the White House's control, hostile elements within the United States, or bureaucrat stagnation. With all that could stymie a president, a more hands-on approach became desirable. Controlling not only the strategy of foreign policy but the tactics as well became a trend, and one way presidents achieved this was through direct engagement with foreign leaders. Personal diplomacy allowed presidents to give impetus to their agendas, circumvent unresponsive bureaucracies, and send stronger, clearer messages that were taken more seriously than statements at lower diplomatic levels. It was also a way for presidents to take their quest for a legacy into their own hands. At the end of day, regardless of who is involved in the strategy and tactics of foreign policy, it is the president who will ultimately be held responsible. Thus there is an incentive for presidents to take more control. While not always effective, presidents saw personal diplomacy as a tool that helped them in this area and allowed them to better manage the foreign policy process.

President's Trip to Europe Notebook (1 of 2) (RAC Box 8); Box 5 (RAC Boxes 8,9); Trip File; Executive Secretariat, NSC; RRL. The report also noted that one of the accomplishments of Reagan's first term was that he "demonstrated U.S. leadership at its finest through personal visit[s]...throughout the Americas, the Pacific Basin, and Europe."

CONCLUSION

PERSONAL DIPLOMACY: PROMISE AND PERIL

The Revolutions of 1989 heralded the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was the denouement. But if the Soviet threat was regulated to the ash heap of history, presidential personal diplomacy was not. When Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, George H. W. Bush was determined to challenge Iraqi aggression. He quickly met with his National Security Council and sought to get the United Nations involved. Though as Bush recalled, “I was prepared to deal with this crisis unilaterally if necessary.”¹ The president also deployed personal diplomacy. On the day of the attack he talked to leaders in the region such as King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. “I wanted to tell you our thinking,” he told the monarch, “and more importantly hear your views regarding the terrible invasion.”² Within five days Bush had been on the telephone with world leaders at least forty-eight times.³ King Fahd, however, was the crucial element in any U.S. response.

As a key Arab state and Kuwait’s neighbor, Saudi Arabia’s views were central, and Bush needed them to align with American thinking. But in an “emotional” call with Fahd, Bush sensed vacillation. He worried that Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region might cut a deal with Saddam Hussein rather than forcefully resist. When Bush offered to send F-15s to Saudi Arabia, Fahd hesitated. This “rang alarm bells in my head” the president recalled.⁴ His objective, then, was to bolster Fahd’s resolve and convince him that the United States intended to see things through, which was a concern that no doubt weighed on the King’s mind, as the U.S. response to

¹ George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 303.

² Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “Telecon with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia,” August 2, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-08-02--Fahd.pdf>.

³ Herbert Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 451.

⁴ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 320, 321.

the fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979 and Ronald Reagan's withdrawal of Marines from Lebanon in 1983 following the barracks bombing did not inspire confidence. Thus Bush's pledge to Fahd: "Another point I want to make here involves my word of honor. The security of Saudi Arabia is vital—basically fundamental—to US interests and really to the interests of the western world. And I am determined that Saddam will not get away with this infamy. When we work out a plan, once we are there, we will stay until we are asked to leave. You have my solemn word on this."⁵ In the days that followed Fahd did more than accept U.S. weaponry. He allowed American troops into his country.

For Bush, personal diplomacy came naturally. Reflecting on his time as U.S. envoy to China in the 1970s, he said, "I was a big believer then, and still am, that personal diplomacy can be very useful and productive."⁶ Indeed, in dealing with the Kuwait crisis, personal diplomacy paid huge dividends, allowing him to form a global coalition. And again in overcoming Soviet concerns over German reunification in 1990. Without multiple meetings and frequent dialogue, Bush told Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that coming to agreement on the German issue "would have been difficult." But they "achieved all this because we understood each other's position. We tried to take into account each other's views."⁷

But if Bush is remembered for his successful personal diplomacy, other post-Cold War presidents have been less lucky with the practice. Bill Clinton closely embraced Russian President Boris Yeltsin, seeing in him the best chance for America's former Cold War enemy to transition to democracy. "You've got democracy in your heart. You've got the trust of the

⁵ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telecon with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia," August 4, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-08-04--Fahd.pdf>.

⁶ Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), xv.

⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, "Telecon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union," July 17, 1990, George Bush Presidential Library, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1990-07-17--Gorbachev.pdf>.

people in your bones. You've got the fire in your belly of a real democrat and a real reformer," Clinton told the Russian leader.⁸ Many others, however, did not see what the president saw and thought Russia floundered under Yeltsin's leadership. They could not understand why Clinton personally supported him so vigorously. In his last year in office, hoping to follow in Jimmy Carter's footsteps, Clinton tried his hand at Middle East peacemaking. He invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to Camp David for two weeks, but the president went away empty-handed and placed the blame on Arafat—his most frequent White House visitor. In one of his last conversations with the Palestinian leader Clinton recalled that Arafat "thanked me for all my efforts and told me what a great man I was. 'Mr. Chairman,' I replied, 'I am not a great man. I am a failure, and you have made me one.'"⁹

When George W. Bush pondered how deep he should personally dive into Middle East peace he was not thinking of Carter-like success but Clinton-like failure.¹⁰ In other parts of the world, however, Bush—like his father—championed personal diplomacy. But where did that get him? When he first met Russian President Vladimir Putin he famously (infamously) said, "I looked the man in the eye...I was able to get a sense of his soul." Based on this Bush found the Russian leader "trustworthy."¹¹ But by the end of his term, after Russia invaded Georgia, U.S.-Russian relations were in doldrums. In other areas as well, Bush's personal diplomacy failed him. In trying to build support for invading Iraq he telephoned numerous world leaders, but "discover[ed] the limitation of his brand of personal diplomacy," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. He faced an "uphill quest for votes at the United Nations," which showed "in bold relief

⁸ As quoted in Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2003), 7.

⁹ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 944; Tony Karon, "Clinton Saves Last Dance for Arafat," *Time*, January 2, 2001.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Bumiller, "Presidents Try and Try Again for Mideast Peace," *New York Times*, June 15, 2003.

¹¹ Press Conference by Bush and Putin, June 16, 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010618.html>.

that personal affinity, Bush-style, cannot compensate fully for differences with other aspects of his administration's diplomacy."¹² In his last year in office the *Washington Post* ran a story with a similar thrust: "More than many of his predecessors, President Bush has invested heavily in trying to forge a strong bond with key foreign leaders. But as his term winds down, new crises in Georgia and Pakistan are underscoring the limits of Bush's personal diplomacy."¹³

Barack Obama has not exuded the same zeal for leader-to-leader diplomacy that Bush did. Usually when his relationships with foreign leaders are mentioned it is only to say how bad they are. The personal relationship between Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister of U.S. ally Israel? "This is the most dysfunctional relationship between an American president and any Israeli prime minister in the history of the relationship," according to an old Middle East hand.¹⁴ With Vladimir Putin? Interactions between the two leaders are so tense and awkward that *The New Yorker's* satirist Andy Borowitz wrote an article titled, "Obama and Putin Agree Never to Speak to Each Other Again."¹⁵ When the president invited Arab leaders to Camp David to discuss the Iranian nuclear accord most passed on the offer, most importantly King Salman of Saudi Arabia. As one analyst noted, "when a close partner essentially says he has better things to do than go to Camp David with the president, just a few days after the White House announced he'd have a private meeting before everything got underway" was quite remarkable.¹⁶

But focus on the lack of warmth in many of Obama's relationships obscures a larger fact. As Jeffery Goldberg of *The Atlantic* has written, the president "is famously transactional when it

¹² Edwin Chen, "Bush Finds His Kind of Diplomacy Goes Only So Far," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2003.

¹³ Michael Abramowitz, "Crises Reveal Limits of Bush's Personal Diplomacy on World Stage," *Washington Post* August 27, 2008.

¹⁴ George E. Condon Jr., "Personal Frictions Loom Over Obama's Trip to Israel," *National Journal*, March 19, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/03/personal-frictions-loom-over-obamas-trip-to-israel/443088/>.

¹⁵ Andy Borowitz, "Obama and Putin Agree Never to Speak To Each Other Again," *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/humor/borowitz-report/obama-putin-agree-never-to-speak-to-each-other-again>.

¹⁶ Helene Cooper, "Saudi King Plans to Skip Meetings in Washington," *New York Times*, May 11, 2015.

comes to relations with other leaders...[he has a] strong belief that countries tend to act in what their leaders perceive to be their core interests, and I've come to see that Obama doesn't place enormous value in the notion that well-developed personal relationships between leaders could ever trump the cold-eyed pursuit of those interests."¹⁷ For Obama, personal diplomacy is not personal. In this sense he is the anti-George H. W. Bush. For the latter personal diplomacy was about attempting to form sincere relationships at the personal level with the goal of leveraging them in the future. But Obama's view is closer to an old associate of Bush's, Henry Kissinger. The former secretary of state once told Bush, "It doesn't matter whether they [foreign officials] like you or not."¹⁸ More important were shared interests.

Whether postwar presidents were in the Bush or Obama mold, they fit into a pattern of presidential personal diplomacy. Since Franklin Roosevelt, American presidents have felt the pull of engagement at the highest-level. As this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, this was not about personality or personal preferences. Rather, all modern presidents were influenced by the same set of factors: 1) the challenges of the international environment; 2) domestic political incentives; 3) the desire of foreign leaders for presidential time; and 4) the never-ending quest for control of foreign policy. Rarely was one of these elements the sole cause leading presidents to engage with their foreign counterparts. Rather there was often a confluence of factors that nudged presidents along. And as the pace of presidential personal diplomacy quickened throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the practice became a key feature of how the United States carried out its foreign policy. At the same time, the practice became embedded in the presidency. It became part of the job description. This is not to say that the use

¹⁷ Jeffrey Goldberg, "How Obama Views the Men and Women Who (Also) Rule the World," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/obama-goldberg-world-leaders/473367/>.

¹⁸ George H.W. Bush, with Victor Gold, *Looking Forward* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1987), 142. See also Jon Meacham, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York: Random House, 2015), 182-183.

of the practice developed in a straight, upward line. There were fits and starts, but over the second half of the twentieth century it became an indelible feature of U.S. foreign relations and the presidency.

From FDR to Barack Obama, presidents have acted remarkably similar in inviting foreign leaders to the United States, traveling abroad to meet with them, and engaging in correspondence. Personal diplomacy has become routine. It has become “a way of life” in international relations.¹⁹ If anyone doubts the centrality of the practice to international politics today they need only look at recent events. When Paris found itself victim of terrorist gunmen and suicide bombers in November 2015, French President François Hollande moved quickly to confer with his counterparts. Within a week he met with the leaders of Britain and Germany and flew to the United States to see the president. As the French president’s whirlwind bout of personal diplomacy shows, contemporary world challenges such as terrorism, cyber-threats, nuclear proliferation, immigration, and climate change all fall within the purview of the practice. It is hard to imagine these issues being dealt with effectively if world leaders did not interact, be it face-to-face or through other means. But engagement at the highest-level is not a panacea.

Public, Private, Policy

Debates over the risks and advantages of presidential personal diplomacy have existed from the beginning. Since Woodrow Wilson announced he would attend the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the wisdom and utility of the practice have been continually questioned.²⁰ This study has illustrated some of those risk and advantages, such as the danger of raising public

¹⁹ This is how David Reynolds describes summitry—one aspect of personal diplomacy—in the twenty-first century, but the sentiment applies to personal diplomacy at large. See David Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings That Shaped the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 401-435.

²⁰ For domestic debates surrounding Wilson’s trip, see Richard J. Ellis, *Presidential Travel: The Journey from George Washington to George W. Bush* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2008), 177-193.

expectations, the substitution of pomp and ceremony for actual substance, the possibility that presidents might be unprepared or uninformed, and rather than help matters, personal diplomacy might make situations worse. On the plus side, the practice has allowed leaders to become better acquainted, and even if it is not a warm relationship, they at least might gain insight and understanding. And diplomacy at the highest-level has facilitated quicker decision-making, helping to breakthrough stagnation at lower levels.²¹

Rather than go into detail about the advantages and risks, I want to offer a larger observation about the nature of personal diplomacy. In the last half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, personal diplomacy has consisted of three central elements that can best be described as public, private, and policy. The public aspect has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation. When world leaders meet, the ceremonies, state dinners, and media coverage that often accompany such gatherings combine to at times create a spectacle.²² This can detract from the seriousness of world diplomacy, but at the same time can play an important role. Diplomacy is a type of theater, and heads of government are the leading actors on the global stage. Raymond Cohen has stated, “as a national symbol, however far-fetched the conclusion sometimes drawn from this, the leader is placed in an unrivalled position to perform the role of dramatic communicator.”²³ Thus how they interact with one another matters. Facial expressions, body language, handshakes, and embraces are all imbued with symbolism. They send signals to the public about the state of relations, as well as send signals to other nations, both friend and foe alike. And while these face-to-face encounters are the most salient feature of the public aspect of

²¹ For a more extensive discussion of the risk and advantages, see Elmer Plischke, *Diplomat in Chief: The President at the Summit* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 455-473.

²² On this notion of spectacle, see Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). For notions of leadership and the role of the media specifically, see pp. 37-65, 90-102, 120-130.

²³ Raymond Cohen, *Theatre of Power: The Art of Diplomatic Signalling* (London: Longman, 1987), 44.

personal diplomacy, other forms of communication such as correspondence and telephone conversations have a public element as well, as governments often publicize when leaders talk on the phone or send letters, sometimes going so far as to release the text of the message.

The private element connotes the interaction behind closed doors that the public does not see. This is where the true nature of personal relationships comes out. Away from the glare of the camera, private tête-à-têtes are where personalities and emotions become important. Despite the face they put on for world audiences, if two world leaders do not like each other, the tension and disdain is likely to manifest itself in some manner. The psychological element discussed in this dissertation comes to the fore in these private interactions as well. It is where intangibles such as trust and understanding (misunderstanding) are built. And confidential engagement, be it face-to-face, through correspondence, or phone calls, allows, in theory, world leaders to discuss matters more frankly than they could through formal diplomatic channels.

The last element is policy. For all the focus on public spectacle and interpersonal relationships, at the end of the day world leaders engage one another in order to advance their foreign policy agendas. American presidents and their foreign counterparts interact because they see it as an important part of international politics. The United States, as well as other nations, could attempt to conduct foreign relations without diplomacy at the highest-level, but the fact that since WWII it has chosen to do the opposite illustrates the important policymaking role that personal diplomacy is believed to play.

Writing in the mid-1950s, Clinton Rossiter articulated ten functions that a president performs. Five were constitutionally mandated, the other five added over the nation's history. In the midst of the Cold War, he said that the president's constitutional role as Chief Diplomat had

“become the most important and exacting of all those we call upon the President to play.”²⁴ One can debate whether this was true, but as the threat of nuclear war hung over the nation for almost half a century, how a president managed international affairs was vital. The burden of global leadership required presidents to marshal every available resource, and personal diplomacy was, for better or worse, one such tool. But has the practice been a net positive or negative for U.S. foreign relations and the presidency? As this dissertation has shown, modern presidents turned to personal diplomacy for a variety of reasons. And while the focus has been on demonstrating why presidents engaged with other leaders—not on whether it was a good idea or whether they were successful in their endeavors—the issue of success and failure runs through the chapters.

The dangers and harmful effects of the practice on U.S. foreign relations are often easier to delineate than the benefits. Contentious encounters like John F. Kennedy’s 1961 meeting in Vienna with Nikita Khrushchev raised tensions and led both leaders to take steps to bolster their nation’s defense postures in case of war. The critique of Franklin Roosevelt’s dealings at the Yalta Conference in 1945 points to another danger—presidents are not trained diplomats, and when they are on the diplomatic frontlines they may make mistakes. Such is the criticism of FDR at Yalta: he made a bad deal, made too many concessions, and sacrificed Eastern Europe. As Dean Acheson argued, “When a chief of state or head of government makes a fumble, the goal line is open behind him.”²⁵ On the other hand, there is something intuitive in the idea that world leaders who engage and get to know each other can develop understanding that might be useful in dealing with international problems. This does not always occur, however, and even when it does, understanding and trust are intangible and demonstrating their impact not always a simple task.

²⁴ Clinton Rossiter, *The American Presidency*, rev. ed. (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), 25.

²⁵ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987 [1969]), 480.

History shows, however, that presidential personal diplomacy can be effective—think Jimmy Carter at Camp David. But the dramatic Israeli-Egyptian peace is the exception. Engagement with world leaders usually leads to less spectacular gains. What personal diplomacy can do, as Dwight Eisenhower believed, is serve as a “valuable lubricant to the wheels of world diplomacy.”²⁶ Thus, when done strategically and with caution, the practice can provide a boost to a president’s foreign policy agenda. It has never been a cure-all, and it will rarely be the overriding factor in successful foreign relations. Rather, it has generally worked best on the margins. All things equal, the use of personal diplomacy can help tip decisions and positions in a president’s preferred direction. But for the practice to be effective, leaders’ interests must align. No amount of presidential engagement is going to work if a foreign leader does not believe it is in his or her nation’s interests (or their own political benefit) to agree with the president.

Reviving Presidential History

Writing in the *American Historical Review* in 1948, Thomas Cochran implored historians to “sweep away the presidential structure” of history. Rather than focus on individual presidents and their administrations, he sought to move the profession toward examination of the “fundamental forces” of change.²⁷ And indeed, postwar historians moved in this direction. Presidential history specifically—and political history in general—lost standing in the historic profession as social and culture history came to the fore. One of the last bastions of presidents in the historic profession was the field of diplomatic history. Like presidents themselves, however, the field became seen as increasingly old fashion and out of touch. But by incorporating the interests and methodologies of the mainstream of the profession, diplomatic history underwent a

²⁶ Cabell Phillips, “Talks With Nehru Typify U.S. ‘Personal Diplomacy,’” *New York Times*, December 23, 1956.

²⁷ Thomas C. Cochran, “The ‘Presidential Synthesis’ in American History,” *American Historical Review* 53, no. 4 (July 1948): 759, 753.

renaissance of sorts and morphed into the study of U.S foreign relations and U.S in the World.²⁸
But where has that left the presidency?

The de-emphasis of the office allowed for the development of new approaches and the telling of important stories that had been neglected. In the rush to sideline the presidency, however, scholars overlooked what the study of the institution had to offer. But if a recent edited volume by Brian Balogh and Bruce Schulman on new historical approaches to the presidency is any indication, studying the office does not necessarily mean a “great man” view of history or a dutiful if dull recitation of events with little analysis. Rather it can be a window into numerous aspects of American history that are of interest to more than just presidency scholars.²⁹ I see this dissertation as fitting into that mold. Study of presidential personal diplomacy provides an avenue of exploration for threads in both U.S and international history, illuminating larger issues of psychology and emotions, the impact and use of media and television, the relationship between executive power and democratic governance, and even issues of race and culture.³⁰

This study also provides a springboard for future studies of presidential personal diplomacy. As we have seen, the focus here has been on personal diplomacy in the Cold War era, demonstrating how that period saw the rise of the practice. Post-Cold War presidents, I would argue, still engage in personal diplomacy for similar reasons as their Cold War predecessors. At

²⁸ For these changes in the field, see Thomas W. Zeiler, “The Diplomatic History Bandwagon: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1053-1073. For a classic critique of diplomatic history, see Charles S. Maier, “Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, Michael Kammen, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1980), 355-382.

²⁹ Brian Balogh and Bruce J. Schulman, eds., *Recapturing the Oval Office: New Historical Approaches to the American Presidency* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

³⁰ While not explicitly explored in this study, personal diplomacy lends itself particularly well to the study of issues of race and culture, as each leader brings a particular set of values and outlooks that have been shaped by the social and cultural milieu they were raised in. For the nexus of culture and diplomacy, see Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1991); Michele Gelfand and Naomi Dyer, “A Cultural Perspective on Negotiation: Progress, Pitfalls, and Prospects,” *Applied Psychology* 49, no. 1 (January 2000): 62-99; David Reynolds, “Summitry as Intercultural Communication,” *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (January 2009): 115-127.

the same time, however, the nature of foreign policy and what it meant changed after the demise of the Soviet Union. To what extent did international imperatives continue to drive presidents toward personal diplomacy? How did domestic benefits of the practice change? Did foreign leaders seek presidential time to the same degree? How has new technology such as videoconferencing influenced the practice? Additionally, the focus in this study has been less about the style and personality of individual presidents than the presidency as an institution. Going forward, exploration of how each president carried out personal diplomacy is a prime area for research. While all presidents engaged with foreign leaders for similar reasons, how those interactions were shaped and affected by the personal attributes of individual presidents is an important element in studying the workings of personal diplomacy and an integral part in evaluating presidents as Diplomat in Chief. And while this study has centered on the American presidency, focused examinations of other nations' leaders would provide further insight into the global phenomenon that was postwar personal diplomacy.

Edward Corwin famously wrote that the Constitution “is an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy.”³¹ But since 1945, if there as been a fight between the presidency and Congress, it has been mostly shadowboxing. The president’s dominance of foreign policy has been—with exceptions of course—almost complete.³² In Arthur

³¹ Edward S. Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers, 1787-1957* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 171.

³² In the 1960s Aaron Wildavsky introduced the “two presidencies” theory, arguing that there is a domestic presidency and a more powerful presidency for foreign affairs. See Wildavsky, “The Two Presidencies,” *Trans-Action* 4 (December 1966): 7-14. For a recent study, see Brandice Canes-Wrones, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis, “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis,” *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-16. For studies examining the impact of Congress in foreign affairs, see Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); William G. Howell and Jon C. Pevehouse, *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Schlesinger's words, this gave rise to the "imperial presidency."³³ The roles of Commander in Chief and Diplomat in Chief have proven resilient and hard to assail.

It has become a truism, then, that the presidency is the dominant branch of government—and not just in foreign affairs. The American public looks to the office above all others to deal with pressing issues at home and abroad. This view, the expectations for the office it engenders, and the power that has flown to the presidency from it, is a regrettable development for some, a threat to American democracy: "The mesmerizing power of presidentialism—the way we look to the sitting president for national security and unity—encourages citizens to believe that their democratic agency depends on presidential power; instead of the other way around."³⁴ But in the end this only leads to disillusionment. For all the power presidents have accumulated, it is argued, they still never meet the demands placed on them. The result has been, in Theodore Lowi's words, "power invested, promise unfulfilled."³⁵ For others, however, the aggrandizement of presidential power is anything but unconstitutional. Rather, the power and authority of modern presidents is not a perversion of the Framers' intent but rather its fulfillment.³⁶

But whether a power grab by presidents or constitutionally sanctioned, there is a logic for White House occupants to seek power. As Andrew Rudalevige has argued, this has to do with "positionality," not the personality or ideology of particular presidents. "Presidents since the beginning of the republic," he writes, "have sought to better their status in the constitutional

³³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973).

³⁴ Dana D. Nelson, *Bad for Democracy: How the Presidency Undermines the Power of the People* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

³⁵ Theodore J. Lowi, *The "Personal" President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

³⁶ For proponents of the "unitary theory of the executive," see John Yoo, *The Powers of War and Peace: The Constitution and Foreign Affairs after 9/11* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); Steven G. Calabresi and Christopher S. Yoo, *The Unitary Executive: Presidential Power from Washington to Bush* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

order.”³⁷ I would argue that interactions with other world leaders were one-way presidents sought to improve their positionality—both in domestic and foreign policy—as well as handle the rising expectations of the office.

Personal diplomacy was an instrument of foreign policy, and as such it could help strengthen presidents’ image as Commander in Chief, Diplomat in Chief, and World Leader, though it could also hurt a president if he was perceived as weak or unsuccessful in his leader-to-leader encounters.³⁸ But when those roles were bolstered, presidents further strengthened their position against Congress in foreign affairs. At the same time this boosted presidents’ power and authority domestically. Greater stature abroad made it harder—though not impossible—for Congress to challenge the executive at home. And the political theater and spectacle that personal diplomacy could generate further enhanced a president’s image and political capital. Thus this study has implications for how we conceptualize the basis of presidential power and authority in postwar America. Personal diplomacy’s role in the aggrandizement of presidential power and its use to confront the rising expectations of the office is something scholars have neglected.

Moving beyond the presidency specifically, this study makes contributions to the subfield of American Political Development (APD). As Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek define it, APD is the study of “durable shifts in governing authority” in the United States.³⁹ Personal diplomacy indeed marked a shift for the presidency’s conduct of foreign affairs, which affected not only the international sphere but the home front as well. Documenting presidential personal

³⁷ Andrew Rudalevige, *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power after Watergate* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 13. On this drive for power, see also William G. Howell, *Thinking About the Presidency: The Primacy of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

³⁸ For those three roles, see Rossiter, *The American Presidency*, 20-26, 36-38.

³⁹ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123.

diplomacy adds to our understanding of the progression of American politics in the postwar period. To understand debates on presidential power, executive-congressional relations, the conduct of foreign affairs, and democratic governance, understanding of the processes that shaped the institution of the presidency is vital. And personal diplomacy is part of that story.

2017 and Beyond

When a new occupant moves into the White House in 2017, will personal diplomacy continue to play a role in the conduct of U.S foreign relations? Undoubtedly yes. As first lady and secretary of state, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton has amassed a wealth of experience in dealing with foreign leaders, and one would expect her to put it to good use.⁴⁰ On the other hand there is Republican nominee Donald Trump, who has made headlines (as is his wont) by proclaiming that in contrast to Barack Obama, he would get along very well with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He would also like to sit down and personally negotiate with North Korean leader Kim Jung Un. As this dissertation has shown, Trump's professed intention to personally engage with world leaders is not new. He may fancy himself a dealmaker, a unique, anti-establishment agent of change. But when it comes to the use personal diplomacy, he would be following in other presidents' footsteps. What Trump envisions doing in those interactions and how he would use those relationships might be a perversion of what has become standard practice, but the basic impetus for leader-to-leader diplomacy is not new, and this study shows how we got to this point. For the foreseeable future, presidential personal diplomacy will

⁴⁰ For Clinton's diplomacy as first lady, see Glenn P. Hastedt and Anthony J. Eksterowicz, "First Lady Diplomacy: The Foreign Policy Activism of First Lady Clinton," *Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* (Summer/Fall 2006): 57-67, http://blogs.shu.edu/diplomacy/files/archives/06Hastedt_Eksterowicz.pdf. For her personal diplomacy as secretary of state, see Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

continue to be of interest and concern, and intricately connected to a president's political and personal fortunes.

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