

Envisioning Détente: The Johnson Administration and the October 1964 Khrushchev Ouster*

On October 14, 1964, Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksei Kosygin, and Nikolai Podgornii deposed Premier and First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Nikita Khrushchev in a palace coup.¹ Unthinkable during Stalin's regime, this bloodless ouster exemplified the new phase in the Cold War to which Khrushchev himself had contributed.² Outside the Soviet Union, the incorporation of West Germany into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the successful conclusion of the Cuban and Berlin crises, and the Limited Test Ban Treaty demonstrate that the Cold War had become a competition between two essentially *status quo*, risk-averse powers over the course of Khrushchev's time in office.³ Lyndon Johnson's presidency is not remembered as a moment that ushered in a new era of U.S.-Soviet rapprochement; Johnson's legacy is bound up in the United States' war in Vietnam. But, the Johnson administration's response to the change in Soviet leadership, as well as the predictions made by its constituent organs regarding the future of U.S.-Soviet relations, led to increased stability. Washington and Moscow both accepted and sought to preserve this new reality. Soviet and U.S. leaders viewed their counterparts pragmatically. Emotional and ideological opposition to the other's way of life did not preclude reducing tensions, nor did it stop

* I wish to thank Frank Gavin, Mark Lawrence, Jeremi Suri, Scott Wolford, Susan Colbourn, and the anonymous reviewers at *Diplomatic History* for their comments and suggestions. I received valuable input at workshops hosted by the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History at the University of Toronto, the Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Toronto, and the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas at Austin; I thank the participants and organizers. Adam Chapnick kindly provided me with archival materials from the National Archives of the United Kingdom, for which I am grateful. It is my pleasure to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The remaining shortcomings are mine alone.

1. Georgii Arbatov, *Zatianuvsheesia vyzdorovlenie, 1953–1985: Svidetel'stvo sovremennika [The Delayed Recovery, 1953–1985: Testimony of a Contemporary]* (Moscow, 1991), 102; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 193.

2. Sergei Khrushchev, *Khrushchev on Khrushchev: An Inside Account of the Man and His Era*, trans. William Taubman (Boston, MA, 1990), 154.

3. See for example Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 352, 379–402.

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Advance Access publication on August 14, 2015

policy-makers from seeing their counterparts as rational.⁴ This article demonstrates that U.S. diplomats, intelligence analysts, and policy-makers came to accurate conclusions regarding the future of the Cold War, envisioning the already-emerging foundations for U.S.-Soviet détente during the brief window of transparency precipitated by the Soviet leadership change. The Johnson administration first and foremost sought stability in the international system, and the Soviet Union proved a willing partner in that endeavor.

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, it begins by examining U.S. analysis of Soviet internal politics prior to October 1964 and outlining how the Johnson administration responded to the leadership change and managed the U.S.-Soviet relationship during a period of plasticity. Second, it considers the analytical efforts of various arms of the U.S. government following the coup, dealing with both internal and external factors that led to the decision to remove Khrushchev. Finally, it offers an assessment of the post-October 1964 course of superpower relations, demonstrating how the Khrushchev ouster shaped future U.S. policy. U.S. officials quickly grasped the nature of the changes taking place, and set foreign policy on a course that facilitated détente and recognized this new Cold War *status quo*.⁵

While scholars acknowledge the 1964 ouster as a turning point, it remains under-analyzed.⁶ Nevertheless, historians of U.S. foreign relations have for some time offered a more balanced assessment of the Johnson administration which does not solely focus on the Vietnam War, especially regarding relations with the Soviet Union.⁷ John Dumbrell, for example, gives an excellent account of the leadership transition, arguing that the period from 1963 to 1964 constituted a “*petite détente*,” which informed U.S. foreign policy-makers’ predictions of future rapprochement with the Soviet Union. In general, as H. W. Brands points out, “it was Lyndon Johnson’s peculiar bad luck to preside over American foreign policy at the moment when the scales of world power were tipping away from the United States.”⁸ Both the Soviet Union and France under Charles de Gaulle challenged the United States’ global position as the administration’s strategy of “graduated pressure” drew the United States further into an intractable conflict in Vietnam.⁹ The U.S. balance-of-payments deficit constrained the Johnson

4. Anatolii Cherniaev, *Moia zhizn' i moe vremia [My Life and Times]* (Moscow, 1995), 292; John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester, 2004), 11–2.

5. John Huizenga memorandum, October 19, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, Country Files (hereafter CF), National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Lyndon B. Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL); William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man, His Era* (New York, 2003), 364; Carl Linden, “Khrushchev: An Era of Coups,” in *Flawed Succession: Russia’s Power Transfer Crises*, ed. Uri Ra’anan (Lanham, MD, 2006), 59–70.

6. One notable exception is Paul Du Quesnoy, “The Role of Foreign Affairs in the Fall of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964,” *International History Review* 25 (2003): 334–56.

7. H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York, 1995); Thomas Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

8. Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, vii.

9. James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963–1968* (Basingstoke, 2007), 188–99; Garret Joseph Martin, *General De Gaulle’s Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963–1968* (New York, 2013), 17; Fredrik

administration's foreign policy.¹⁰ Though neither ignorant nor apathetic regarding international relations, Johnson could scarcely be considered a worldly president.¹¹ As John F. Kennedy's vice president, Johnson did take a keen interest in international affairs.¹² However, he preferred the international *status quo* to volatile transformations.¹³ Historians of the Soviet Union have also advanced a more nuanced portrait of Brezhnev, moving past the overarching theme of stagnation (*zastoi*) and portrayals of Brezhnev as only interested in "the guards of honor, the grand receptions for foreign leaders in the Kremlin, [and] the fulsome publicity" that came with high office (though he certainly did relish them).¹⁴ This ignores Brezhnev's political acumen and understanding of the problems facing the Soviet Union in 1964, which proved crucial to staging the ouster and maintaining power until late 1982.¹⁵ On the topic of the Khrushchev ouster, scholars enjoy access to candid Presidium meeting minutes and a wealth of memoirs by Soviet policy-makers, even if Brezhnev's own autobiography is disappointingly silent on this period.¹⁶ Finally, historians and political scientists have undertaken important studies of leadership changes both in general and with specific reference to the Soviet Union and other communist states but have yet to incorporate the 1964 ouster, a historiographical pattern that this article seeks to correct.¹⁷

Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 222–51.

10. Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), 118.

11. Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 257; Robert Dallek, "Lyndon Johnson as a World Leader," in *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam*, ed. H. W. Brands (College Station, TX, 1999), 7; Schwartz, *Johnson and Europe*, 7.

12. Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York, 1990), 331.

13. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York, 1971), 24; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York, 2006), 367; Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 24–28.

14. Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, 1995), 130.

15. New York, *Brezhnev Maisurian, Drugoi Brezhnev [The Other Brezhnev]* (Moscow, 2004); Leonid Mlechin, *Brezhnev* (Moscow, 2008); Sergei Semanov, *Brezhnev: Pravitel' "Zolotogo Veka" [Brezhnev: Leader of the "Golden Age"]* (Moscow, 2004); Ian Thatcher, "Brezhnev as Leader," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (Basingstoke, 2002).

16. Aleksandr Fursenko, ed., *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954–1964: Chernovye protokol'nye zapisi zasedanii stenogrammy [The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1954–1964: Rough Stenographic Meeting Minutes]*, vol. I (Moscow, 2003); Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniia diplomata, sovetnika Gromyko, i pomoshchnika Brezhneva, Andropova, Chernenko i Gorbacheva [From Kollontai to Gorbachev: Memoirs of a Diplomat, Advisor to Gromyko, and Assistant to Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev]* (Moscow, 1994); Arbatov, *Zatianusheshaia vyzdorovlenie*; Cherniaev, *Moia zhizn'*; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*; Khrushchev, *Khrushchev on Khrushchev*; Georgii Kornienko, *Kholodnaia voina: Svidetel'stvo ee uchastnika [The Cold War: Testimony of a Participant]* (Moscow, 2001); Leonid Brezhnev, *Vospominaniia [Memoirs]* (Moscow, 1983).

17. Ra'anan, *Flawed Succession*; Myron Rush, *How Communist States Change their Rulers* (Ithaca, NY, 1974); Raymond C. Taras, ed., *Leadership Change in Communist States* (Boston, MA, 1989); Scott Wolford, "The Turnover Trap: New Leaders, Reputation, and International Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (2007): 772; Scott Wolford, "Incumbents,

Events in Moscow in October 1964 echoed events in the United States roughly one year beforehand: an unexpected change in superpower leadership following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Initially, Johnson feared that a major Soviet attack could follow the assassination and that the Kremlin had a hand in Kennedy's death. He soon rejected this notion and shifted his focus to demonstrating stability at home and abroad.¹⁸ In the estimation of U.S. policy-makers, the Soviets had been as helpful as possible regarding Kennedy's assassin's Soviet ties.¹⁹ U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Foy Kohler reported to the State Department the "apparently genuine and deep Soviet reaction of concern, grief and sympathy . . . shown not only at highest level but by [the] man in [the] street."²⁰

Johnson hoped that the 1964 ouster could shift U.S.-Soviet relations to a more productive and amicable course during his unexpected presidency.²¹ He would, however, have to overcome serious Soviet misgivings regarding his foreign policy preferences, as official Kremlin commentary, according to the CIA, "cast him in the role of representative of the conservative element in the Soviet stereotype of the the [U.S.] political spectrum."²² U.S. analysts rightly predicted, "Khrushchev's immediate . . . concern will be to discover whether the détente in U.S.-Soviet relations will continue."²³ Stability constituted the Kremlin's foremost concern; Soviet leaders sought reassurances regarding continuity of policy in meetings with senior U.S. policy-makers. Soviet specialist Llewellyn Thompson made it clear to the Kremlin that "President Johnson would continue the broad policies established by President Kennedy."²⁴

Successors, and Crisis Bargaining: Leadership Turnover as a Commitment Problem" *Journal of Peace Research* 49 (2012): 517; Fiona McGillivray and Alastair Smith, *Punishing the Prince: A Theory of Interstate Relations, Political Institutions, and Leader Change* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 200; Alexandre Debs and H. E. Goemans, "Regime Type, the Fate of Leaders, and War," *American Political Science Review* 104 (2010): 430; Giacomo Chiozza and H. E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (Cambridge, 2011), 195.

18. Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 32–33.

19. George Ball–Dean Rusk memorandum of conversation, December 1, 1963, "USSR II," box 6, Papers of George W. Ball (hereafter PGWB), LBJL.

20. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, November 26, 1963, "USSR Cables 11/63–12/63," box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

21. Thomas A. Schwartz, "Moving Beyond the Cold War: The Johnson Administration, Bridge-Building, and Détente," in *Beyond the Cold War: Lyndon Johnson and the New Global Challenges of the 1960s*, eds. Francis J. Gavin and Mark Atwood Lawrence (Oxford, 2014), 79.

22. CIA memorandum, "The Past Soviet Propaganda Assessment of President Johnson," November 25, 1963, "USSR Cables 11/63–12/63," box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

23. Thomas Hughes memorandum, "Mikoyan's Mission to Washington," November 23, 1963, "USSR Cables 11/63–12/63," box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

24. Llewellyn Thompson–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, November 24, 1963, in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1961–1963, vol. V, Soviet Union, eds. Charles S. Sampson and John Michael Joyce (Washington, DC, 1991), doc. 397.

In a meeting, Johnson and Anastas Mikoyan, the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, affirmed that “contacts could be maintained and mutual understanding brought about.” Johnson assured Mikoyan that “Kennedy’s foremost thought every day had been what steps could be taken . . . to bring about a better understanding between the peoples of the world” and that “this policy had been fully embraced by him and would be respected and continued. The United States would meet anyone more than half way.”²⁵ Secretary of State Dean Rusk later reinforced the “continuity of U.S. policy” to Mikoyan.²⁶ The Johnson administration took it as a good sign that Khrushchev sent “a trusted associate and experienced trouble shooter (such as Mikoyan) to take the measure of President Johnson.”²⁷ Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko later made it clear that the Kremlin had understood these assurances. He affirmed the “desirability of progress toward relaxation of tensions” and acknowledged that the “new administration intended to follow foreign policy lines laid down by Kennedy.”²⁸

Kennedy’s assassination made clear the importance of communication between the superpowers, especially during times of potential crisis. Reassurance of policy continuity proved vital in maintaining productive U.S.-Soviet relations. In fact, relations between the two became even more productive. The United States and Soviet Union began taking “step-by-step moves, designed to ease international tension.” Johnson and Khrushchev began exchanging frequent “pen pal” letters between the White House and Kremlin. The two signed the first bilateral U.S.-Soviet treaty in June 1964, providing for exchanges of consulates. Significant progress in civil aviation negotiations also opened up the prospect of direct air travel between the two countries. As a result of these and other measures, the two superpowers made tangible progress towards détente and the Kremlin suggested publicly that, under Johnson’s leadership, the United States and Soviet Union had the best chance of restoring relations since World War II.²⁹

Despite this progress, U.S. policy-makers observed the extent to which Khrushchev’s leadership alienated Soviet political elites. U.S. intelligence assets accurately reported discontent at the highest levels of the Soviet leadership over Khrushchev’s “adventurism” in foreign policy and erratic, authoritarian leadership

25. Lyndon Johnson–Anastas Mikoyan memorandum of conversation, November 26, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, vol. V, doc. 380.

26. Telegram from Dean Rusk to Foy Kohler, November 26, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, vol. V, doc. 382.

27. Thomas Hughes memorandum, “Mikoyan’s Mission to Moscow,” November 23, 1963, “USSR Cables 11/63–12/63” folder, box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

28. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, December 3, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, vol. V, doc. 383.

29. Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 35–40; Schwartz, “Beyond the Cold War,” 79–83.

style.³⁰ In the estimation of Georgii Arbatov, a senior Kremlin international affairs advisor, the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba and the continued challenge to Soviet leadership within the international communist movement posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) cast grave doubts on Khrushchev's leadership abilities in the eyes of his Presidium colleagues.³¹ As Walt Rostow put it, the situation constituted a "quiet crisis in Moscow."³² As early as March 1964, some analysts noted signs that Khrushchev's Presidium colleagues might attempt to remove him from office.³³ The CIA predicted that Brezhnev or Podgornii would most likely succeed Khrushchev. W. Averell Harriman, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, who had also served as U.S. ambassador to Moscow from 1943 to 1946, posited that either Brezhnev or Kosygin would be natural successors. Brezhnev, despite his experience, "resembled a weaker version of Khrushchev" to U.S. analysts—"a master [only] at embracing astronauts."³⁴

U.S. policy-makers learned of the events of October 14 in the Kremlin from TASS, the Soviet wire service, which announced that "in view of advanced age and deterioration of health" Khrushchev had resigned, succeeded by Brezhnev as CPSU First Secretary and Kosygin as Premier.³⁵ The news of Khrushchev's removal reached Johnson in New York on the campaign trail. He bemoaned the fact that "all the careful work, the exchanges of letters, and the gradual understanding of Khrushchev's thinking and reactions had been undone by the change in leadership."³⁶ At his next campaign event that evening, Johnson suggested that the ouster "may be a sign of deeper turmoil or may be a sign of changes in policies to come."³⁷

30. John Huizenga memorandum, October 19, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

31. Arbatov, *Zatianuvsheesia vyzdorovlenie*, 104; Linden, "Khrushchev," 73.

32. Memorandum from Walt Rostow to Lyndon Johnson, November 18, 1963, "USSR Cables 11/63-12/63," box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

33. CIA memorandum, "The Coming Struggle for Power in the USSR," March 19, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

34. Memorandum from Averell Harriman to Lyndon Johnson, October 19, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "The Brezhnev-Podgornii Relationship in the Soviet Leadership," August 7, 1964, "USSR Cables & Memos 7/64-9/64," box 218, CF, NSF, LBJL.

35. Telegram from Dean Rusk to Foy Kohler, October 15, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Kohler to Rusk, October 16, 1964, "USSR Cables & Memos 7/64-9/64," box 218, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "The Post-Khrushchev Collective," November 16, 1964, CIA Records Search Tool (hereafter CREST), National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

36. Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 469.

37. Lyndon Johnson remarks, Madison Square Garden, New York, NY, October 15, 1964, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson* (hereafter PPP:LBJ), 1963-1964, vol. II, ed. Warren R. Reid (Washington, DC, 1965), doc. 669.



Figure 1: President and Lady Bird Johnson, with supporters, at Madison Square Garden, New York, NY on October 14, 1964. Photograph by Cecil Stoughton, Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

The United States quickly amassed accurate intelligence regarding the Presidium meeting that removed Khrushchev.³⁸ Brezhnev and his co-conspirators summoned Khrushchev to Moscow from his *dacha* to a meeting beginning on October 13 that continued through the next day. The minutes from these meetings show Khrushchev's colleagues lambasting him at length for his failures as a leader.³⁹ Most policy-makers, including the British, French, and West German experts consulted by the State Department, viewed the news from Moscow that Khrushchev resigned for health reasons with considerable skepticism.⁴⁰ The Presidium still included Frol Kozlov, after all, who was paralyzed and gravely mentally ill.⁴¹ In the U.S. and elsewhere, "the line that Khrushchev voluntarily passed the torch to

38. Dean Rusk memorandum, October 23, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

39. Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Presidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 862-68; Presidium meeting record, October 14, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL, 868-72; Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 532-40; Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 3-17.

40. Dean Rusk memorandum, October 17, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64" folder, box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Arthur Woodruff to Dean Rusk, November 5, 1964, folder "Government USSR 11/1/64," box 2887, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG 59), NARA; John Bovey to Dean Rusk, November 5, 1964, folder "Government USSR 11/1/64," box 2887, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 469.

41. CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and its Consequences," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

his heirs was considered and discarded.”⁴² The situation in Moscow, Under Secretary of State George Ball concluded, “would be a hard one to read.”⁴³

The new Soviet leadership dispatched Ambassador Anatolii Dobrynin to the White House to meet with Johnson and assure him of policy continuity despite the change in leadership.⁴⁴ Dobrynin was not alone, as Soviet ambassadors worldwide met with foreign leaders to deliver this same message. In London, the Foreign Office (FO) reported to Washington that Soviet Ambassador Aleksandr Soldatov “stress[ed] most firmly and emphatically that the basic lines of Soviet policy would remain unchanged.”⁴⁵ Even within the Soviet Union, the new leadership offered reassurances in public pronouncements that they had “no intention of repudiating the fundamental doctrines and policies developed since the Twentieth Party Congress,” which had repudiated Stalinism.⁴⁶ Kosygin emphasized this to Kohler, assuring him that “the government would remain the same except for the fact that the former Chairman of the Council of Ministers had retired.”⁴⁷

As the Kremlin stressed the continuity of Soviet policy, Johnson and his advisors also asserted that U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union would not change because of the new leadership or the circumstances by which Brezhnev came to power—a clear echo of the events surrounding Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963.⁴⁸ Johnson insisted, and his advisors agreed, that “it is of the utmost importance that there be continuity and stability in [U.S.] policies . . . during this period of international change.”⁴⁹ The administration stressed the importance of maintaining peace and remaining flexible in the immediate aftermath of the coup, and recognized that the Soviet Union shared these goals.⁵⁰

42. USIA memorandum, “Foreign Media Reaction to the Soviet Shakeup,” October 18, 1964, “USSR Memos 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

43. George Ball–Thomas Hughes memorandum of conversation, October 15, 1964, “USSR II,” box 6, PGWB, LBJL.

44. Lyndon Johnson–Anatolii Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, October 16, 1964, “Dobrynin–Thompson Conversations,” box 218, CF, NSF, LBJL; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 469; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 128–29.

45. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 17, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64” folder, box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Harold Wilson–Aleksandr Soldatov memorandum of conversation, October 16, 1964, PREM 13/2405, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

46. CIA memorandum, “Implications of Khrushchev’s Downfall,” October 17, 1964, “USSR,” Robert Komer Files (hereafter RKF), box 54, NSF, LBJL; Central Intelligence Bulletin, October 19, 1964, CREST, NARA.

47. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 23, 1964, “CO 303,” box 12, Confidential File, White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF), LBJL.

48. Telegram from Dean Rusk to Foy Kohler, October 16, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 6; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 129.

49. Lyndon Johnson remarks, The White House, Washington, DC, October 20, 1964, in *PPP: LB7, 1963-1964*, vol. II, doc. 689; NSC meeting record, October 16, 1964, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XIV, Soviet Union, eds. David Humphrey and Charles Sampson (Washington, DC, 2001), doc. 54.

50. Lyndon Johnson–Anatolii Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, October 16, 1964, “Dobrynin–Thompson Conversations” folder, box 218, CF, NSF, LBJL; Lyndon Johnson remarks, The White House, Washington, DC, October 16, 1964, in *PPP: LB7, 1963-1964*, vol. II, doc. 674.

Johnson cancelled campaign events to remain in Washington for briefings on the latest developments and personally tasked the various organs of the Executive Branch with analyzing the causes and consequences of the ouster.⁵¹ Regarding concrete policy options, however, Johnson had few choices. Certainly none of his advisors suggested that the coup merited any offensive action, unlike one proposed response to the PRC's first nuclear test.⁵² Johnson sought to control as many variables as possible in crafting policy, but he could scarcely control events unfolding in Moscow. U.S. policy could either agitate or placate the new Soviet leaders, but little more. A calm response remained Johnson's best option to ensure that the international *status quo* tacitly agreed upon by the Soviet Union and United States remained in place.

U.S. analysts focused initially on fleshing out their biographies of Brezhnev and Kosygin, the new Soviet leaders.⁵³ Kosygin, they predicted, would be the *de jure* but not *de facto* leader of the Soviet Union. Brezhnev, on the other hand, would lead the CPSU and handle substantive policy matters—his predictability constituted his main appeal as Khrushchev's successor.⁵⁴ To determine which of the two really led the Kremlin, the Moscow embassy conducted a quantitative analysis of portraiture, tabulating the ranking of Presidium members in arrangements of their portraits in public spaces (which, so close to the anniversary of the October Revolution, abounded). Of twenty-one such arrangements, Brezhnev's portrait hung in the most prominent position nineteen times. In the two outlying examples, Brezhnev and Kosygin's portraits hung on either side of Lenin's, an arrangement that made it impossible to divine precedence.⁵⁵ Though Brezhnev orchestrated the coup against Khrushchev, he played a major role in carrying out the latter's major policies beforehand. As first secretary in Kazakhstan, Brezhnev led the implementation of Khrushchev's failed Virgin Lands campaign. Furthermore, he endorsed the 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, championed by Khrushchev, before any of his skeptical Presidium colleagues.⁵⁶

51. Memorandum from Carl Rowan to McGeorge Bundy, October 19, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; NSC meeting record, October 16, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 54.

52. Francis J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), 76.

53. CIA memorandum, "Factors in the Fall of Khrushchev and the Behavior of the New Soviet Regime," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

54. CIA memorandum, "Views of Pavel Lukyanov on Khrushchev Displacement," October 23, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Factors in the Fall of Khrushchev and the Behavior of the New Soviet Regime," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; George Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London, 1982), 148; Thatcher, "Brezhnev," 24-5.

55. Malcolm Toon memorandum, "Protocol Listings of Soviet Presidium Members for November 7," December 11, 1964, folder "Head of State USSR 11/1/64," box 2887, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA.

56. CIA memorandum, "Factors in the Fall of Khrushchev and the Behavior of the New Soviet Regime," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

Brezhnev had built his authority by cultivating a reputation as a pragmatic problem-solver who would increase efficiency in the Soviet Union without sacrificing the CPSU's power.⁵⁷

U.S. and foreign analysts concluded that both domestic and international policy disputes must have contributed to Khrushchev's downfall.⁵⁸ Initial analysis focused primarily on the structural and political instability in the Soviet Union that had made a coup possible. Analysts in both the CIA and State Department quickly concluded that no single issue caused the ouster. Instead, they emphasized the "gradual process of alienation" between Khrushchev and major interest groups in the Soviet Union.⁵⁹ Attacks on Khrushchev in the Presidium confirmed the gradual alienation emphasized by the U.S. intelligence community. "Khrushchev became different," Presidium member Dmitrii Polianski declared, "during the first five years he conducted himself well. In recent years he sought to rise above the [CPSU structure] and became coarse."⁶⁰ Deposing Khrushchev required a sizable coalition, but such a coalition proved easy to construct.⁶¹

Most importantly, Khrushchev constrained the powerful Soviet military-industrial complex.⁶² He viewed the military as a political tool and therefore focused on strategic nuclear forces, pursuing conventional force reductions to offset defense expenditures.⁶³ The military had not enjoyed direct representation in the Presidium since Khrushchev had removed Marshal Georgii Zhukov in 1957, but nevertheless had played a major role in Soviet politics and the economy. Brezhnev accordingly cultivated a strong relationship with the upper echelons of the military leadership, who sympathized with the Presidium's desire to remove Khrushchev.⁶⁴ One analyst noted the "fundamental conflict of interests between

57. INR memorandum, October 17, 1964, "New Regime Seeks Return to Soviet Traditionalism," "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, 157; Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 242.

58. Telegram from David Ormsby-Gore to FO, October 16, 1964, PREM 13/2405, TNA.

59. CIA memorandum, "Factors in the Fall of Khrushchev and the Behavior of the New Soviet Regime," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, "The Fall of Khrushchev," November 4, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Implications of Khrushchev's Downfall," October 17, 1964, "USSR," box 54, RKF, NSF, LBJL; NSC meeting notes, October 17, 1964, "543rd NSC Meeting 10/17/64," box 30, Papers of Bromley Smith (hereafter PBS), LBJL.

60. Presidium meeting record, October 14, 1964, in *Presidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 868.

61. Memorandum from Chester Cooper to McGeorge Bundy, October 20, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Kohler to Rusk, October 17, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Humphrey Trevelyan to FO, October 16, 1964, PREM 13/2405, TNA. Breslauer, *Khrushchev to Brezhnev*, 153.

62. NIE 11-14-64, "Capabilities of Soviet General Purpose Forces, 1964-1970," December 10, 1964, "USSR," box 3, NIEs, NSF, LBJL.

63. NIE 11-4-64, "Main Trends in Soviet Military Policy," April 22, 1963, "USSR," box 3, NIEs, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Implications of the Fall of Khrushchev for Soviet Military Policy," November 4, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

64. INR memorandum, "Checklist of Urgent Issues that Confront the New Soviet Leaders," October 15, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy

the Khrushchev circle and the bulk of the officer corps.”⁶⁵ The military did not play an active role in the coup, but it made the coup possible by not protecting Khrushchev’s position.⁶⁶ Brezhnev’s first Five Year Plan, approved in March 1965, rewarded this necessary passivity with significant increases in military investment, linked to a condemnation of both Khrushchev’s past neglect and the U.S. escalation in Vietnam.⁶⁷ According to U.S. analysis, this military buildup would neither right the strategic imbalance that favored the United States nor cause problems for the United States. In fact, with the deeply conservative military leadership exercising greater influence in Soviet policy-making after the coup, Moscow’s military adventurism worldwide would be curtailed.⁶⁸

After the slapdash explanation of infirmity had been rejected, the Kremlin changed its official line to focus, accurately, on Khrushchev’s style of leadership as a reason for his removal. Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, a leading foreign policy-maker who would become a key advisor to Brezhnev, described Khrushchev as “imperious, quick-tempered, passionate, rough (including to his closest colleagues), arrogant, and highly susceptible to flattery”—Khrushchev led with excessive “aplomb.”⁶⁹ Khrushchev’s self-defense in his final Presidium meeting belied an understanding that his colleagues’ motivations included a profound sense of frustration with his leadership style.⁷⁰ Brezhnev, on the other hand, was consistent and predictable. According to Dobrynin, he “wanted to be liked, loved to tell stories, and enjoyed having a drink with his cronies.”⁷¹ This predictability extended to foreign policy: U.S. analysts recognized that Brezhnev focused primarily on avoiding war at all costs.⁷² He promised the Soviet people and the international community a return to “normalcy in reaction to Khrushchev’s excessive dynamism.”⁷³

Kohler to Dean Rusk, November 10, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64–11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Alexandrov-Agentov, *Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 125.

65. CIA memorandum, “Recent Trends in Soviet Strategic Thought on Future War,” November 16, 1962, “USSR,” box 2, NIEs, NSF, LBJL.

66. Letter from Blair Butterworth to William Tyler, November 3, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64–11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, “Views of Pavel Lukyanov on Khrushchev Displacement,” “USSR Cables 10/64–11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Central Intelligence Bulletin, October 22, 1956, CREST, NARA.

67. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev*, 143.

68. CIA memorandum, “Implications of the Fall of Khrushchev for Soviet Military Policy,” November 4, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64–11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

69. Alexandrov-Agentov, *Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 117.

70. Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 862–67; CIA memorandum, “Views of Pavel Lukyanov on Khrushchev Displacement,” October 23, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64–11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Linden, “Khrushchev,” 71–76.

71. Alexandrov-Agentov, *Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 118; Thatcher, “Brezhnev,” 24–25; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 130.

72. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 201–2.

73. INR memorandum, “New Regime Seeks Return to Soviet Traditionalism,” October 17, 1964, “USSR Memos 10/64–11/64” folder, box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Anatoly Dobrynin–Averell Harriman memorandum of conversation, November 13, 1964, folder “US-USSR 8/1/64,” box 2870, 1964–1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA.

Substantive policy disagreements also motivated the coup plotters, particularly regarding economic prioritization and mismanagement, according to U.S. analysts.⁷⁴ The Kremlin's policy goals under Khrushchev far exceeded available resources, resulting in "absolute chaos."⁷⁵ Khrushchev attempted to solve these economic problems with abrupt administrative change on a local level, which only further exacerbated the problem.⁷⁶ In 1963, Khrushchev announced that he planned to freeze investment in all sectors of the economy except for agriculture, which his U.S. interlocutors recognized as "an attack on traditional [Soviet] economic doctrine." U.S. analysts expected Khrushchev to press a decision at the November CPSU plenum encouraging an increase in the production of consumer goods at the expense of heavy industry. Khrushchev's colleagues sought to prevent such a policy.⁷⁷ CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence Ray Cline wrote to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy predicting, "a number of new problems for the Soviet economy growing out of the decision [to shift agricultural and economic policy] and some of the claimed benefits of the program are clearly exaggerated."⁷⁸ Khrushchev's colleagues complained throughout the Politburo meeting that removed him that they had been shut out of economic planning.⁷⁹

In addition to questions of leadership style, U.S. analysis of domestic factors in Khrushchev's ouster identified three trends that became central to the emergence of détente. Crucially in terms of domestic politics, the Soviet Union's economic woes motivated Brezhnev to reduce tensions with the West. International trade appealed to Brezhnev's desire to avoid making the same unpopular decision to cut defense spending as Khrushchev had. Imports from the West could improve consumer satisfaction at a time when the standard of living, growth rates, and productivity levels continued to fall.⁸⁰ Economic intercourse between the United States and Soviet Union would become a major part of Johnson's initial approach to the Soviet Union following Khrushchev's ouster, since an examination of the reasons for Khrushchev's removal made it patent just how dire Soviet economic circumstances had become.

74. CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and its Consequences," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

75. John Huizenga memorandum, October 19, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Letter from Blair Butterworth to William Tyler, November 3, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

76. Llewellyn Thompson-Anastas Mikoyan memorandum of conversation, November 6, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

77. CIA memorandum, "Implications of Khrushchev's Downfall," October 17, 1964, "USSR," box 54, RKF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Comments of Soviet Official on Khrushchev Downfall," October 27, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64" folder, box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Presidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 863.

78. Memorandum from Ray Cline to McGeorge Bundy, December 24, 1963, "USSR Cables 11/63-12/63," box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

79. Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Presidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 863-65.

80. Mike Bowker, "Brezhnev and Superpower Relations," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (Basingstoke, 2002), 90-91.

Against this backdrop of economic stagnation, Bolshevik revolutionary zeal had waned among the Soviet populace and leadership. Reaching an accommodation with the United States required such a dampening of revolutionary *élan* in the Soviet Union for it to be palatable to the Soviet population.⁸¹ This process, U.S. experts explained, began during Khrushchev's tenure: "his record in power consists of a series of agitational campaigns offering ever new promises and gimmick programs." Even before the ouster, Mikoyan's son confided, Khrushchev's "prestige and reputation had been suffering both with the people and with the Presidium." U.S. policy-makers predicted that the ouster would lead to an "increase [in] popular skepticism, even cynicism, toward their communist rulers" and noted (with approval) that the Soviet people manifested "widespread apathy to recent events."⁸²

U.S. diplomats in Moscow later noted the "absence [of] several initial general hortatory slogans" for the anniversary of the October Revolution. Instead, all were focused on concrete objectives with a dearth of communist rhetoric. They predicted that this pattern would continue, the Soviets having clearly demonstrated that they had "lost their revolutionary *élan*." Beijing, not Moscow, would be the wellspring of militant international communism. Soviet leaders embraced this new image of the Kremlin under Brezhnev. Dobrynin, for example, "spent considerable time in attempting to convince [U.S. policy-makers] of the democratic nature of the [Soviet] method of arriving at policy decisions such as in the ouster of Chairman Khrushchev."⁸³

Despite economic and public opinion woes, the Kremlin leaders continued to require popular support as a check against a coup by their peers, as evidenced by their efforts to legitimize the ouster to the Russian public in the press. *Détente* and the promise of superpower summits conferred legitimacy to the Brezhnev regime in the eyes of the world, but also of its own citizens, which Brezhnev used to cement his power.⁸⁴ The new regime made it clear, for example, that it would address the question of output-based financial incentives for workers "without concern for ideological factors." This led to a decision to experiment with economic liberalization in Soviet light industry.⁸⁵ Brezhnev's first speech after the

81. Cherniaev, *Moia zhizn'*, 292; Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relation from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC, 1994), 46–47.

82. John Huizenga memorandum, October 19, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Letter from Blair Butterworth to William Tyler, November 3, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 28, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

83. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 18, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 28, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.; William Fister–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, October 28, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

84. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 5.

85. CIA memorandum, "Domestic Economic Aspects of Brezhnev's Speech on 6 November," November 9, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

coup focused on economic issues affecting Soviet consumers. On behalf of the new Kremlin leadership, he pledged to increase production of high-quality consumer goods and the availability of services, housing, and foodstuffs.⁸⁶ The new Kremlin leaders recognized, as Khrushchev had, that their position depended on at least the acquiescence of the Soviet populace in a time when the economy faced serious problems. Except in rhetorical excoriations, they could not do away with Khrushchev's consumer-oriented economic priorities after October 1964.⁸⁷

These three strains did not constitute a sufficient basis for détente. Both Soviet foreign and domestic policies would have to change in order for superpower détente to be possible. In the Presidium meetings that led to Khrushchev's removal, foreign policy failures did not feature prominently in his colleagues' excoriations.⁸⁸ U.S. analysts acknowledged, however, that intra-communist relations (and the increasing heterogeneity of the global communist movement) played a role in Khrushchev's removal.⁸⁹ Acrimony between the Soviet Union and the PRC constituted the core of this conflict. "Relations between [the two] have deteriorated so far," one CIA document suggested, "that we can say with validity that they are now engaged in their own Cold War." U.S. analysts and their Soviet counterparts considered the conflict predominantly ideological, centered on disagreements between Moscow and Beijing over economic development, de-Stalinization, and the validity of détente as opposed to agitating for global communist revolution. The PRC could not countenance subordination to the Soviet Union, which Soviet policy-makers recognized; and unlike Soviet vassal states in Eastern Europe, the PRC could be considered a major power with vast resources of its own.⁹⁰ French diplomatic recognition of Beijing in January 1964 and the PRC's nuclear test the day after Khrushchev's removal exposed the folly of ostracizing the PRC, which the United States would later exploit in its push for détente.⁹¹ The PRC's successful nuclear test

86. Leonid Brezhnev remarks, Moscow, October 19, 1964, in *Leninskim kursom: rechi i stat'i* [*The Leninist Course: Speeches and Articles*], vol. I, ed. A. M. Aleksandrov (Moscow, 1970), 5–10; CIA memorandum, "Domestic Economic Aspects of Brezhnev's Speech on 6 November," November 9, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

87. John Huizenga memorandum, October 19, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64–11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

88. Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 862–68; Presidium meeting record, October 14, 1964, in *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 868–72.

89. NIE 11-9-65, "Main Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy," January 27, 1965, "USSR," box 3, NIEs, NSF, LBJL; Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to Lyndon Johnson, October 21, 1964, "McGeorge Bundy 10/1–12/31/64," box 2, Memos to the President (hereafter MP), NSF, LBJL.

90. CIA memorandum, "The Deterioration of Sino-Soviet Relations: 1956–1966," April 22, 1964, "Codeword," box 231, CF, NSF, LBJL; Anatoly Dobrynin–Llewellyn Thompson memorandum of conversation, September 11, 1964, folder "US-USSR 8/1/64," box 2870, 1964–1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA; Alexandrov-Agentov, *Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 167; Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 345; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 49–84; Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC, 2009), 206–7.

91. Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China During the Johnson Years* (Manchester, 2008), 53–78; Ellison, *Transatlantic Crisis*, 16.

demonstrated that the United States and Soviet Union had a shared interest in containing Mao's much more aggressive brand of communism, albeit for different reasons. The Johnson administration even considered the possibility of joint U.S.-Soviet military action against the PRC's nuclear program.⁹²

Analysts noted that Brezhnev and his co-conspirators used the worsening Sino-Soviet split to retroactively justify Khrushchev's removal.⁹³ Khrushchev's ouster created an opportunity for Brezhnev to ameliorate the Soviet Union's waning influence in the international communist movement, both with the PRC and those states (especially in the developing world) that found the Chinese strain of communism more animating than the Kremlin's.⁹⁴ The new leadership issued prompt statements stressing the need for communist unity. In particular, they reframed the planned meeting of communist governments on December 15, 1964 to broaden (and thereby dilute) its aims so that the PRC would consider them palatable.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Soviet Union did not condemn the PRC's October nuclear test, as the communist regimes in East Germany and Yugoslavia did, despite the fact that Soviet opposition to a nuclear PRC contributed significantly to the Sino-Soviet split beforehand.⁹⁶ Khrushchev's downfall presented Soviet foreign policy-makers with an opportunity to redefine policy towards the PRC, but none of the regime's initial statements indicated a change in basic policy, only in tone.⁹⁷ Brezhnev's speech on the anniversary of the October Revolution, for example, contained many items unpalatable to Beijing, including support for further nuclear test ban treaties, global disarmament, and improved East-West relations and the need for peaceful coexistence.⁹⁸ The PRC showed little inclination to turn over a new leaf following Khrushchev's ouster; Beijing's ambassador in Moscow derided the idea, reminding his French counterpart that Khrushchev alone did not bring about the Sino-Soviet split. In his opinion, the entire Soviet leadership, including Brezhnev and Kosygin, bore responsibility.⁹⁹

92. Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 38; Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 76.

93. CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and its Consequences," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

94. Memorandum from Benjamin Read to McGeorge Bundy, October 17, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 28, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

95. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 17, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

96. INR memorandum, "Sino-Soviet Relations and Soviet Disarmament Policy," November 13, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

97. INR memorandum, "Checklist of Urgent Issues that Confront the New Soviet Leaders," October 15, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, "Sino-Soviet Relations and Soviet Disarmament Policy," November 13, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 28, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

98. Leonid Brezhnev remarks, Moscow, November 6, 1964, in *Leninskim kursom*, vol. I, 11-36; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, November 7, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

99. Central Intelligence Bulletin, October 22, 1964, CREST, NARA.

U.S. analysts predicted that the Soviet Union would follow one of two courses regarding the future of the Sino-Soviet relationship: “paper over the problem” through some superficial accord or “let the chips fall where they may,” essentially allowing the issue to fester.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the new leaders in the Kremlin began a campaign to reassert their position within the international communist movement, which U.S. analysts failed to predict, one of their few errors in anticipating and interpreting Soviet post-coup behavior in late 1964. The Kremlin dispatched “an unusually strong delegation” headed by Kosygin to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).¹⁰¹ Under Brezhnev, Soviet policy towards the conflict in Vietnam evolved considerably. The Kremlin still hoped the conflict would end, ceasing to be an obstacle to reducing Cold War tensions. In the meantime, however, they sought to build credibility with other communist states through increased support for the DRV.¹⁰² According to U.S. analysts, the Kosygin visit indicated “a Soviet estimate that . . . a communist victory is drawing near . . . [and that] such a victory . . . would redound excessively to Chinese advantage.”¹⁰³ In the short run, this hampered the amelioration of U.S.-Soviet relations.¹⁰⁴ Analysts accurately predicted, however, that the Soviet Union might begin “a new search for agreements with the West” to offset their acrimonious relationship with the PRC.¹⁰⁵

In Eastern Europe, U.S. analysts recognized that Khrushchev’s ouster created enormous difficulties for the new Brezhnev regime. The Eastern European communist governments saw Soviet politics as unstable. They could therefore expand and cement their economic and political contacts with the West while attempting to reclaim “chunks of autonomy” from Moscow.¹⁰⁶ Intelligence analysts noted with pleasure that most Eastern European regimes rejected the official Kremlin line on Khrushchev’s ouster, many having recently hosted and publicly fêted Khrushchev, and made public commitments to carrying out his policies in their own countries. Eastern European leaders did not consider their own power secure

100. Memorandum from Ray Klein to McGeorge Bundy, October 16, 1964, “USSR Memos 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

101. CIA memorandum, “The Kosygin Delegation to North Vietnam,” February 1, 1965, “USSR Cables & Memos 11/64-2/65,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, “The Dimensions of Kosygin’s Trip,” February 5, 1965, “USSR Cables & Memos 11/64-2/65,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

102. SNIE 11-11-65, “Soviet Attitudes Toward the U.S.” May 26, 1965, “USSR,” box 3, NIEs, NSF, LBJL; Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 210-1.

103. CIA memorandum, “The Dimensions of Kosygin’s Trip,” February 5, 1965, “USSR Cables & Memos 11/64-2/65,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

104. Kormienko, *Kholodnaia voina*, 160.

105. NIE 11-9-65, “Main Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy,” January 27, 1965, “USSR,” box 3, NIEs, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Humphrey Trevelyan to FO, October 17, 1964, PREM 13/2405, TNA.

106. INR memorandum, “Checklist of Urgent Issues that Confront the New Soviet Leaders,” October 15, 1964, “USSR Memos 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, “Impact of Khrushchev’s Fall on Eastern Europe,” October 23, 1964, “USSR Memos 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

enough to repudiate years of pro-Khrushchev rhetoric in public.¹⁰⁷ Only Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov declared his fealty to the new Brezhnev regime. The leaders of the Polish, Hungarian, Czechoslovak, and East German regimes continued to praise Khrushchev's "many merits" as the Soviet press attacked the former leader who had played a major role in their installation.¹⁰⁸

The Czechoslovak regime of Antonín Novotný, U.S. analysts concluded, had been the most emboldened by Khrushchev's ouster to adopt a "new course" in relations with Moscow as Novotný refused to attend the events in Moscow to commemorate the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on November 7, 1964, an absence which could only be explained as an act of protest against Brezhnev's October coup.¹⁰⁹ Eastern European leaders refused to accept that Khrushchev's dismissal marked the end of an era and feared that the Khrushchev-era trend towards liberalization would be halted, as U.S. analysts appreciatively noted their "coming of age." Turbulence in Eastern Europe, however, was not something the Brezhnev regime was prepared to face; the immediate emphasis on continuity with Khrushchev's policies targeted not only the Johnson administration but also Moscow's Eastern European satellite states.¹¹⁰ The Johnson administration did not, however, take steps to encourage these relatively moderate Eastern European leaders in their resistance to the Kremlin line, recognizing that even slight encouragement coming to light could jeopardize the more important U.S.-Soviet relationship.¹¹¹

Finally, U.S. analysts turned their attention to the future of the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship. They hoped first of all to establish "which leader controls the Soviet nuclear trigger . . . [and] whose ear is at the Moscow end of the hot line," rapidly concluding that Brezhnev played both roles.¹¹² The United States had cause for concern in this matter: Khrushchev's colleagues attacked his "ill-conceived and absolutely utopian" enthusiasm for peaceful co-existence that, though not at all consistent, was thought to be the best chance for a relaxation in tensions between the

107. CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and Its Consequences," October 20, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, "Impact of Khrushchev's Fall on Eastern Europe," October 23, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

108. INR memorandum, "Eastern European Differences on Khrushchev Ouster," October 17, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Central Intelligence Bulletin, October 21, 1964, CREST, NARA.

109. CIA memorandum, "Czechoslovakia Tries New Role in the Soviet Bloc," December 24, 1964, CREST, NARA.

110. INR memorandum, "Impact of Khrushchev's Fall on Eastern Europe," October 23, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Matthew Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003), 67.

111. CIA weekly intelligence summary, November 20, 1964, CREST, NARA; Telegram from Outerbridge Horsey to Dean Rusk, November 10, 1964, "Government USSR 11/1/64," box 2887, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA.

112. INR memorandum, "Checklist of Urgent Issues that Confront the New Soviet Leaders," October 15, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

superpowers.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and his cadre of internationalists rose in stature under Brezhnev. Foreign policy-makers in Moscow saw détente with the West as a way to improve the Soviet system by allowing the regime to focus on internal affairs.¹¹⁴ U.S. analysts identified a clear desire to improve U.S.-Soviet relations in the new regime.¹¹⁵ This new attitude began shortly after Khrushchev's removal and continued until the crushing of the Prague Spring.¹¹⁶ U.S. policy-makers knew that the Soviet leadership preferred dealing with the Johnson administration to the potential administration of Barry Goldwater, whose nomination at the Republican National Convention Khrushchev had publicly compared to "a fascist rally in Nuremberg."¹¹⁷ Brezhnev lauded Johnson's victory in the 1964 election as evidence that the United States grew "tired of the Cold War" and that peaceful ties between the two superpowers could come to fruition.¹¹⁸

The Johnson administration thought extensively about the impact of the change in Soviet leadership throughout the 1964 electoral campaign. Even before the coup, Johnson's campaign advisors in the White House and Democratic Party sought to downplay the role of foreign policy as a deciding issue in the campaign and did not want to enter into a foreign policy debate with the Goldwater campaign.¹¹⁹ Though loath to bring the new situation in Moscow to the fore of the electoral campaign, Johnson did adjust some of his statements to acknowledge the change in leadership in the Kremlin and to emphasize the continuity of U.S. foreign policy during the transition period.¹²⁰ "You will see from your morning paper, or you will learn from

113. CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and its Consequences," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Presidium meeting record, October 13, 1964, in *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, vol. I, 865; Alexandrov-Agentov, *Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, 123.

114. Marie-Pierre Rey, "The Mejdunarodniki in the 1960s and the First Half of the 1970s: Backgrounds, Connections, and the Agenda of Soviet International Elites," in *The Making of Détente: Eastern and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965-1975*, eds. Wilfred Loth and Georges-Henri Soutou (London, 2008), 57-63; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 131.

115. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 17, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Khrushchev's Fall and its Consequences," October 22, 1964, "USSR Memos 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Humphrey Trevelyan to FO, October 20, 1964, PREM 13/2405, TNA.

116. Anatoly Dobrynin-Dean Rusk memorandum of conversation, October 20, 1964, "US-USSR 8/1/64," box 2870, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA.

117. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 23, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; CIA memorandum, "Soviet Propaganda on the U.S. Election," October 27, 1964, "Foreign Reaction to Election," box 41, Subject File (hereafter SF), NSF, LBJL.

118. Central Intelligence Bulletin, November 7, 1964, CREST, NARA. Other Soviet officials, such as Dobrynin, echoed this sentiment: Anatoly Dobrynin-Averell Harriman memorandum of conversation, November 13, 1964, "US-USSR 8/1/64," box 2870, 1964-1966 Central Foreign Policy Files, RG 59, NARA.

119. Memorandum from Henry Wilson to Lawrence O'Brien, July 8, 1964, "Campaign 1964," box 1, Henry H. Wilson Files (hereafter HHWF), Aides' Files (hereafter AF), WHCF, LBJL; Memorandum from Henry Wilson to McGeorge Bundy, July 18, 1964, "Campaign 1964," box 1, HHWF, AF, WHCF, LBJL.

120. Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to Jack Valenti, October 15, 1964, "Liberal Party Rally, New York City," box 27, Bill Moyers Files (hereafter BMF), AF, WHCF, LBJL.

your evening radio," he told a Madison Square Garden audience, "that changes and uncertainties in this big world in which we live give great weight to our own need for a stable and sure and steady course."¹²¹ Furthermore, the Johnson administration had to deal with an acute crisis with serious electoral political consequences in the Walter Jenkins scandal, which Johnson's advisors deemed more important to address than both the Kremlin coup and the PRC nuclear test, though many hoped that events in the Soviet Union would "blanket" the issue.¹²²

In its sanguinity regarding the change in Soviet leadership, the Johnson administration in fact mirrored the general public's outlook, an especially important consideration with an election imminent. A poll on the subject found that a majority felt war had become less likely after the leadership change. Most felt that the United States should either "wait and see" (33%) or "try to negotiate" (32%) with the new Kremlin leadership. A mere 13% advocated the tough policy towards the Soviet Union that Goldwater espoused and which the Johnson campaign sought to highlight and discredit through tactics such as the famously effective "Daisy" television commercial. Even though Johnson led by a comfortable margin, he had nothing to gain politically by emphasizing events in Moscow on the eve of the election, especially as the situation in Vietnam became increasingly unstable. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the PRC's development of nuclear capabilities, the U.S. public and their leaders were understandably risk-averse regarding foreign policy.¹²³

Johnson's first message to the new Soviet leaders following the coup emphasized that both countries "bear heavy responsibilities for the maintenance of world peace" and expressed his "hope that our governments will work constructively in attempting to resolve the urgent international problems facing the U.S. and the world."¹²⁴ Johnson's advisors predicted that the new leadership would be inclined to avoid crises in superpower relations akin to the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹²⁵ After Khrushchev's "free-wheeling" conduct of foreign policy, U.S.

121. Lyndon Johnson remarks, Madison Square Garden, New York, NY, October 15, 1964, in *PPP: LBJ, 1963-1964*, vol. II, doc. 669.

122. Memorandum from Chester Cooper to McGeorge Bundy, October 15, 1964, "Walter Jenkins," box 10, Intelligence File (hereafter IF), NSF, LBJL; George Ball-James Reston memorandum of conversation, October 16, 1964, "USSR II," box 6, PGWB, LBJL; Lyndon Johnson-Abe Fortas conversation transcript, October 15, 1964, in *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes*, ed. Michael Beschloss (New York, 2001), 77-80; Lyndon Johnson-Nicholas Katzenbach conversation transcript, October 15, 1964, *Reaching for Glory*, 81-84.

123. Polling data summary, October 17, 1964, "Dayton," box 27, BMF, AF, WHCF, LBJL.

124. Telegram from Lyndon Johnson to Foy Kohler, October 17, 1964, "Kosygin Correspondence," box 7, Head of State Correspondence (hereafter HSC), NSF, LBJL; Memorandum from Ray Klein to McGeorge Bundy, October 16, 1964, "Kosygin Correspondence," box 7, HSC, NSF, LBJL.

125. INR memorandum, "The Fall of Khrushchev," November 4, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, "Sino-Soviet Relations and Soviet Disarmament Policy," November 13, 1964, "USSR Cables 10/64-11/64," box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

policy-makers did not disguise their enthusiasm for a period of consistency and “a clearer understanding of Soviet positions, undiluted by Khrushchev’s bombast.”¹²⁶ The overwhelming majority of analysts foresaw U.S.-Soviet relations progressing towards a period of détente and found ample evidence to support this conclusion.¹²⁷ The new Soviet leadership looked favorably on the U.S. response to the transfer of power, sending a lengthy message to Johnson announcing that the Soviet Union had unilaterally reduced its ground forces by 15,000 troops. Brezhnev expressed his hope that Johnson would conduct future relations according to “the principle of mutual respect and understanding of the interests of one another.”¹²⁸ On the anniversary of the October Revolution, an occasion usually marked by bellicose anti-Western rhetoric, Brezhnev explicitly and publicly called for amelioration of East-West relations.¹²⁹ The new Brezhnev regime pledged to both its constituents and the United States that it would not bring about any fiascos such as Khrushchev’s October 1962 misadventure. Instead, the themes of continuity, predictability, and the maintenance of the *status quo* dominated Soviet discourse at home and abroad.

In analyzing the foreign policy implications of the Khrushchev ouster, the Johnson administration accurately identified three strains of thought that contributed to the future flourishing of détente. They recognized the intractable nature of the Sino-Soviet conflict, Moscow’s chief foreign policy preoccupation at the time. For Brezhnev, détente with the United States would deter the PRC, whose leaders he neither trusted nor wished to negotiate with, from continuing its provocation of the Soviet Union, especially along their shared border.¹³⁰ The Sino-Soviet split not only created a permissive context in the Kremlin for détente, but also afforded future U.S. policy-makers leverage with the Soviet Union to ease the process.¹³¹ In a similar vein, U.S. analysts recognized brewing discontent in Eastern Europe. This came to a head with the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968. Brezhnev’s handling thereof, however, and in particular his willingness to use violence to defend socialism, gave him the necessary credibility with his peers to later engage in peaceful dialogue with Western powers (though this was hardly the evolution in

126. John Huizena memorandum, October 19, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 23, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, October 28, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL; Memorandum from Benjamin Read to McGeorge Bundy, October 17, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

127. CIA memorandum, “Khrushchev’s Fall and its Consequences,” October 22, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

128. Letter from Leonid Brezhnev to Lyndon Johnson, November 3, 1964, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 67; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 133.

129. Leonid Brezhnev remarks, Moscow, November 6, 1964, in *Leninskim kursom*, vol. I, 11-36; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, November 7, 1964, “USSR Cables 10/64-11/64,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

130. Bowker, “Superpower Relations,” 92-93; Radchenko, *Two Suns*, 195-98; Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 209-10.

131. Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 226, 235.

intra-Warsaw Pact relations that the Johnson administration had in mind).¹³² Crucially, and despite this turbulence confronting the Kremlin, U.S. analysts saw a willingness to reach future agreements in the Brezhnev regime's initial conduct of relations with the U.S., though the full potential of this willingness would not be realized until the Soviet Union attained strategic parity with the United States in the 1970s.¹³³ In analyzing the implications and causes of the Kremlin coup, U.S. analysts identified many of the core trends in international relations that later made détente possible.

The Kremlin coup had the potential to destabilize the nascent U.S.-Soviet understanding about the Cold War. The Johnson administration's conduct, however, ensured a relatively smooth transition in U.S.-Soviet relations between the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes. Although Khrushchev's ouster came as a surprise, U.S. analysts quickly identified the core motivations behind his removal. They understood the instability in the Kremlin and the extent to which Khrushchev's policies and international misadventures damaged his leadership.

The Johnson administration displayed restraint throughout. U.S. leaders did not attack the Soviet Union's un-democratic processes, cast aspersions on the legitimacy of the new regime, or capitalize on the opportunity to make trouble in the Eastern bloc. The Johnson administration's handling of the Khrushchev ouster demonstrates how a policy of restraint can bear fruit and foster a future amelioration of relations. Furthermore, the Johnson administration did not rely on shoddy analogies from the post-Stalin power struggle in an attempt to simplify the situation they faced in October 1964. In fact, Johnson thought of the events of October 1964 as *sui generis*, recognizing the uniqueness of the circumstances in which foreign policy-makers had to operate at the time, and proceeded carefully.¹³⁴

The Johnson administration's pattern of restrained behavior and general sanguinity regarding the Kremlin coup was a pragmatic response. No good policy options presented themselves to U.S. policy-makers in October 1964, and certainly none could be counted upon to ensure that events unfolded in a manner favorable to U.S. interests. Absent any constructive options, the administration focused instead on gaining as much insight into the Soviet Union as possible, both generally and regarding the events unfolding in the Kremlin. Furthermore, with an election imminent, the Johnson campaign concluded that it redounded to their advantage not to provoke public concern. Johnson did not consider himself to be a foreign policy president. He preferred to devote his attention to domestic political issues over which he could exercise greater influence.¹³⁵ This basic proclivity, along with a lack of concrete options and concerns relating to electoral politics, led to a response characterized by calm and restraint.

132. Ouimet, *Brezhnev Doctrine*, 48–55; Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 207–9.

133. Garthoff, *Détente*, 41.

134. Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York, 1986), 57.

135. Brands, *Wages of Globalism*, 24–28.

The Johnson administration's successes in analyzing the coup paralleled successes in its management. In a relatively short period of time, the various organs of the U.S. government identified six key policy themes, which would later flower into superpower détente. Regarding Soviet domestic political concerns, U.S. analysts identified (1) the Soviet populace's waning revolutionary zeal, (2) the Soviet leadership's continued dependence on popular support, and (3) the Soviet Union's economic woes. From a foreign policy standpoint, they highlighted (4) the continued and seemingly intractable dispute with the PRC, (5) the rising discontent and commensurate increase in disobedience of Moscow in Eastern Europe, and (6) openness in the Soviet Union to reach accords with the United States. These six themes were not devoid of internal tensions and contradictions, however. Bridge-building with Eastern European states, for example, could easily foster suspicions in the Kremlin of U.S.-inspired disobedience, and even impending regime change, leading to a crackdown. At times, these tensions undermined the success of the Johnson administration's attempts at building a better relationship with the Soviet Union; a "healthy balance," as Johnson put it, had to be found.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, taken together, these six themes, identified individually by the U.S. government in October 1964, presaged and facilitated the rise of détente.

Going forward, the U.S. government would make frequent use of these six trends in Soviet politics. The second term president's first initiative to capitalize on the Khrushchev ouster was to convene a blue ribbon commission headed by industrialist J. Irwin Miller to explore the question of expanding trade with the Soviet Union. Johnson directed the Miller Committee to "explore all aspects of the question of expanding peaceful trade' in support of [his] policy of 'widening [U.S.] relations' with . . . the Soviet Union." The committee took as its premise that "communist countries are changing, in varying degrees and in different ways." The ensuing report exemplified the complex nature of the Cold War during this inchoate phase of détente. On the one hand, Miller, his fellow committee members, and the experts who provided testimony found ample evidence from the Khrushchev ouster to demonstrate that ties between the Kremlin and its vassal states grew increasingly weak, and U.S. policy-makers believed they could be further eroded through drawing Eastern European countries into trade relationships with the West. On the other, the report strongly encouraged further economic intercourse between the two nations, exhorting the administration to embrace "one of the few channels available to U.S. for constructive contacts with nations with whom we find frequent hostility. . . . Trade and government-to-government negotiations which set the framework for trade," the report continued, "can be means of reducing animosities" in and of themselves.¹³⁷ Johnson echoed this belief

¹³⁶ Lyndon Johnson remarks, National Conference of Editorial Writers, New York, NY, October 7, 1966, in *PPP: LB7, 1966*, vol. II, ed. Warren R. Reid (Washington, DC, 1967), doc. 503.

¹³⁷ Letter from J. Irwin Miller et al. to Lyndon Johnson, April 29, 1965, "Miller Committee," box 25, Committee File, NSF, LBJL.

that the flow of goods, ideas, and people through the Iron Curtain would ease U.S.-Soviet relations at a time when the Soviet Union clearly needed U.S. exports, but also embraced the idea of using trade as a means of weakening the Soviet Union. Though support from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce “helped quiet some of the thunder on the right” against expanding trade and contacts with the Soviet Union, and the committee’s members made the rounds of Washington to lobby lawmakers, the administration failed to persuade a reluctant Congress to pass the legislation.¹³⁸ The Johnson administration nevertheless took executive action to the same end: reducing export controls, helping to fund the Italian automaker Fiat’s proposed plant in the Soviet Union, and encouraging U.S. industry to participate in Soviet and Eastern European trade fairs.¹³⁹

Soviet leaders made it clear that the new leadership wanted to “work . . . at a détente” between the superpowers, and that many in the Kremlin “[were] convinced that a détente can and should be achieved.”¹⁴⁰ Both U.S. and Soviet leaders suggested a summit meeting in the future and an exchange of official visits.¹⁴¹ The Kremlin did not react bombastically to the U.S. escalation in Vietnam from the outset, responding with restraint to the Gulf of Tonkin retaliation. It was clear to U.S. policy-makers that the Soviets did not want to jeopardize or undo the progress in bridge-building between the superpowers at the time. This changed after U.S. Rolling Thunder bombing operations targeted the DRV while Kosygin visited Hanoi (though the airstrikes did not directly impact the city).¹⁴² “I can’t understand why you bombed when Premier Kosygin was there,” Dobrynin excoriated Vice President Hubert Humphrey. “Do you care about your relations with the Soviet Union? . . . Can you imagine the [Soviet Union] bombing another country being visited by President Johnson?”¹⁴³

The U.S. escalation in Vietnam led to a complex period in superpower relations, during which U.S. policy-makers would make use of the deeper understanding of the Soviet Union gleaned through the Khrushchev ouster. On the one hand, escalation led to a significant Soviet propaganda campaign at the United States’ expense, and the Kremlin ruled out an exchange of visits in the future. Understanding the Soviet Union’s complicated position within the international communist movement—particularly vis-à-vis the PRC—U.S. policy-makers worried that, as the situation in Vietnam became increasingly militarized, “pressures on [Moscow] to ‘put

138. Memorandum from Edward Fried to Francis Bator, April 30, 1965, “Miller Committee,” box 25, Committee File, NSF, LBJL; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, 470–73.

139. Thomas Niles memorandum, “Background Paper: U.S.-Soviet Trade,” June 16, 1967, “USSR Hollybush 6/67 I,” box 229, CF, NSF, LBJL.

140. Telegram from Yury Zhukov to Averell Harriman, December 21, 1963, “USSR Cables 11/63–12/63,” box 217, CF, NSF, LBJL.

141. Memorandum from Llewellyn Thompson to McGeorge Bundy, February 1, 1965, “USSR Cables & Memos 11/64–2/65,” box 219, CF, NSF, LBJL.

142. Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 91–130; Schwartz, “Beyond the Cold War,” 83–85.

143. Hubert Humphrey–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, March 12, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 103.

up or shut up' mount[ed] accordingly." Indeed, the Kremlin resented the fact that U.S. escalation compelled the Soviet Union to increase its support for the DRV to match the PRC and to preserve an image of international communist solidarity.¹⁴⁴

On the other hand, Johnson did not give up on his goal of improving superpower relations. He hoped the situation in Vietnam would further worsen Sino-Soviet relations and thereby have a positive impact on U.S.-Soviet relations. Furthermore, Johnson still entertained the possibility of "new breakthroughs" with the Kremlin, especially in trade.¹⁴⁵ Writing from Moscow, Kohler stressed the "desirability of keeping channels of communication open during fluid and critical period," echoing one of the core lessons of both the Kennedy assassination and Khrushchev ouster: the importance of communication and, where possible and desirable, reassurance.¹⁴⁶ Rusk confirmed to Dobrynin, "the United States would like to see improved relations with the Soviet Union. There had been no change in this policy."¹⁴⁷ Soviet leaders in fact reciprocated these sentiments. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko conveyed to Kohler "expressions of regret that [U.S.-Soviet] relations [were] affected by such unpleasant things" as Vietnam.¹⁴⁸ Dobrynin affirmed that "[the Soviets] are anxious to continue good relations with [the United States]" but warned that the military engagement risked putting the superpowers on a "collision course."¹⁴⁹

The new breakthroughs for which Johnson hoped did transpire. A meeting between Bundy and Dobrynin—"the most candid and cordial conversation of [their] three-year acquaintance"—proved to be a necessary turning-point in the Johnson administration's push for a non-proliferation treaty. Bundy left the meeting confident that headway could be made if U.S. policy-makers abandoned the proposed Multilateral Force (MLF), a fleet of nuclear-armed submarines and warships jointly crewed by NATO members, and instead adopted a solution that involved neither new weapon systems nor a nuclear-armed West Germany. "Since in fact no one now wants the MLF," Bundy advised Johnson, "I think we may well be able to make some money with Moscow if we tell them privately before we sink it publicly." Johnson placed U.S.-Soviet relations ahead of relations with West Germany, leading to the superpowers agreeing upon and signing the

144. Llewellyn Thompson–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, February 9, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 91; Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, February 11, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 93; Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 91–130; Schwartz, "Beyond the Cold War," 83–85.

145. Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 91–130; Schwartz, "Beyond the Cold War," 83–5.

146. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, March 5, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 101.

147. Dean Rusk–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, July 3, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 117.

148. Telegram from Foy Kohler to Dean Rusk, March 4, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 100.

149. George Ball–J. William Fulbright memorandum of conversation, March 10, 1965, "USSR II," box 6, PGWB, LBJL.

Non-Proliferation Treaty.¹⁵⁰ In a later meeting with Harriman, Dobrynin reasserted the Soviet desire to come to an agreement on nonproliferation, regardless of acrimony over Vietnam.¹⁵¹

On October 7, 1966, Johnson announced in a speech to editorialists—and to the world—his goal of setting a “healthy balance” between détente and deterrence in U.S.-Soviet relations, pledging to improve East-West relations. “We do not intend to let our differences on Vietnam or elsewhere ever prevent U.S. from exploring all opportunities,” Johnson assured his audience. “We want the Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe to know that we and our allies shall go step by step with them just as far as they are willing to advance” towards détente. Johnson outlined a host of steps his administration proposed to take, including relaxing trade restrictions and increasing cultural exchanges—echoing the recommendations of the Miller Committee. “The maintenance of old enmities,” Johnson concluded, “is not really in anyone’s interest.” Johnson’s speech was heralded at home and abroad as an important step towards East-West reconciliation. The speech reprised the theme of economic and cultural relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as a means of reducing tensions and the importance of “building a surer foundation of mutual trust” through cooperation.¹⁵²

Johnson’s meetings with Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey between June 23 and 25, 1967 seemed to be the culmination of these efforts. Despite tensions over Vietnam, Johnson had raised the subject of a top-level meeting in conversation with Gromyko. The fact that Kosygin would be traveling to the United States to visit the United Nations (to “dramatize Soviet diplomatic and propaganda support for the Arabs” after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, according to the CIA) as opposed to traveling to meet the president *per se* made such a meeting feasible. The two governments agreed to meet at Hollybush, the home of the president of Glassboro State College in New Jersey, a relatively neutral site proximate to the United Nations in New York City.¹⁵³ The Johnson administration took the Kremlin’s willingness to meet as a sign of Soviet interest in “bridge-building and a possible renewal of détente.” U.S. leaders recognized that the Brezhnev regime incurred significant costs by having Kosygin meet with Johnson. Such a public meeting would be, according to one diplomat, “deflating to the Arabs; it gives ammunition

150. McGeorge Bundy–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, November 24, 1965, “McGeorge Bundy 10/1–12/31/64,” box 5, MP, NSF, LBJL; Schwartz, “Beyond the Cold War,” 84–85.

151. Averell Harriman–Anatoly Dobrynin memorandum of conversation, December 12, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, doc. 143.

152. Lyndon Johnson remarks, National Conference of Editorial Writers, New York, NY, October 7, 1966, in *PPP: LB7, 1966*, vol. II, doc. 503; Schwartz, “Beyond the Cold War,” 86–87.

153. CIA memorandum, “Kosygin Delegation to the UN,” June 15, 1967, “USSR Hollybush 6/67 II,” box 229, CF, NSF, LBJL; Letter from Lyndon Johnson to J. William Fulbright, June 20, 1967, “FO 7/Kosygin—Glasboro, New Jersey,” box 69, SF, WHCF, LBJL; Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, 46–51.



Figure 2: Soviet Premier Kosygin and President Johnson meet at Glassboro, NJ on June 23, 1964. Johnson Library photo by Yoichi Okamoto.

to the Red Chinese; it makes Ho Chi Minh wonder; it leaves De Gaulle deep in despond; and it may even be worrisome to the Warsaw Pact allies.” Why incur such costs? According to U.S. analysts, echoing and reinforcing conclusions reached during the Khrushchev ouster, the question of prestige at home and abroad motivated the Kremlin. Brezhnev and his colleagues wanted to demonstrate that they could conduct international relations on par with Khrushchev. Ideological animosities notwithstanding, few actions conveyed as much prestige as a meeting on equal terms with the president.¹⁵⁴

In their meetings, Kosygin seemed exasperated. The Soviet Union, he confided, struggled to understand U.S. policy and actions. Johnson acknowledged that U.S. leaders “were poor communicators” at times, but insisted that the United States wanted to “live in peace and harmony with the Russian people” and that he hoped for a “new spirit of friendship between the two countries.”¹⁵⁵ Both leaders acknowledged that the PRC, in fact, “represented the greatest danger to both countries” and that face-to-face meetings between U.S. and Soviet

154. Memorandum from Nathaniel Davis to Walt Rostow, June 24, 1967, “USSR Hollybush 6/67 II,” box 229, CF, NSF, LBJL; INR memorandum, “Kosygin’s Reasons for Wanting to Meet the President,” June 22, 1967, “USSR Hollybush 6/67,” box 229, CF, NSF, LBJL.

155. Lyndon Johnson–Alexei Kosygin memorandum of conversation, 11:15–13:30 session, June 23, 1967, “USSR–Glassboro Memcons,” box 295, CF, NSF, LBJL; Lyndon Johnson–Alexei Kosygin memorandum of conversation, 13:30–14:45 session, June 25, 1967, “USSR–Glassboro Memcons,” box 295, CF, NSF, LBJL.

leaders played an important role in diminishing global tensions and should continue.¹⁵⁶ After the meetings, U.S. policy-makers were pleased with Johnson's encounter with Kosygin, especially its relative collegiality and the fact that Kosygin communicated with "no invective or threats."¹⁵⁷

Johnson and Kosygin had a fruitful meeting, but the Cold War did not end in Glassboro, New Jersey. Their summit was, however, the first of many such meetings between U.S. and Soviet leaders, which came to symbolize détente. Glassboro represented the culmination of the Johnson administration's efforts to put U.S.-Soviet relations on a new footing, beginning in the immediate aftermath of Kennedy's assassination. The path to détente was at times treacherous, but the Johnson administration—and, crucially, the Kremlin under Brezhnev, Kosygin, and the others who ousted Khrushchev—actively sought to reduce super-power tensions.

The ouster of Khrushchev proved to be a pivotal moment in this process. The leadership change both created a window of insight into Soviet policy and precipitated a period of deep reflection within the U.S. government on the past, present, and future of U.S.-Soviet relations. Identifying the six key trends that would lead to détente did not constitute a perfect understanding of the Soviet Union, to be sure; but by 1968 the outgoing Johnson administration had good reason to consider its relations with the Soviet Union a "qualified plus" relative to entering the White House in November 1963.¹⁵⁸

Many Cold War events have prompted historians and contemporary observers to ask why Sovietologists got it wrong or failed to predict the future course of events. This approach expects policy-makers and academics to see both the present and future of an opaque state and ignores the fact that most turning points in the Cold War, including the 1964 coup and its aftermath, were highly contingent phenomena.¹⁵⁹ In October 1964, as this article demonstrates, the Sovietologists for the most part got it right. Not only did they understand events in the Soviet Union, they successfully identified the aforementioned six trends that shaped the U.S. approach to détente.

In October 1964, détente was a distant vision in both Moscow and Washington, but one that both superpowers viewed as attainable. The Khrushchev coup and events surrounding it spurred U.S. and Soviet policy-makers to grow increasingly

156. Lyndon Johnson–Alexei Kosygin memorandum of conversation, 15:15–16:30 session, June 23, 1967, "USSR-Glassboro Memcons," box 295, CF, NSF, LBJL; Letter from Whitney Shoemaker to John Hester, July 18, 1967, "FO 7/Kosygin—Glassboro, New Jersey," box 69, SF, WHCF, LBJL.

157. Dean Rusk–Patrick Dean memorandum of conversation, June 29, 1967, "USSR Hollybush 6/67 II," box 229, CF, NSF, LBJL.

158. Memorandum, "Box Score of Soviet and Eastern European Developments 1963–1968," June 4, 1968, "Progress in Foreign Policy Since 1964," box 18, SF, NSF, LBJL.

159. For a discussion and rebuff of this school of thought, see Mark Kramer, review of *What Happened to the Soviet Union? How and Why American Sovietologists Were Caught by Surprise*, by Christopher Xenakis (Westport, CT, 2002), *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (2004): 688–90.

open to maintaining the Cold War *status quo* in a turbulent world, and to improving superpower relations. In response to Khrushchev's removal from office, the Johnson White House took stock of the United States' relations with the Soviet Union and committed itself to a policy of rapprochement with Moscow. Taken together, these actions set the tone for the next phase of superpower relations—détente.