

A Break With the Past: Nixon's Foreign, From Conflict to Detente With Communist Powers

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 8 — Richard M. Nixon said in 1968 that while he thought the United States could run itself domestically without a President, "you need a President for foreign policy." That seemed to be his credo until the Watergate scandals led him to apologize publicly for not having paid enough attention to domestic politics and for having devoted too much time on foreign affairs.

It was in the field of foreign affairs that Mr. Nixon made some of his main contributions as President.

Even his sharpest critics generally gave him good marks for the series of foreign-policy achievements that gradually moved the United States in the nineteen-seventies from confrontation with China and the Soviet Union to a more subtle relationship that held the promise of stabilizing international relations.

Despite the pressures of Watergate and impeachment inquiries, Mr. Nixon was also able to claim credit for transforming the United States into a major force for peace. This was dramatized by the two Middle East disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt and Syria, and by the active American efforts to avoid a war between Greece and Turkey.

Foreign policy, Mr. Nixon emphasized in his occasional interviews, was his chief interest.

From the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties he had the reputation of having been a fierce anti-Communist. But in the White House, he demonstrated an ability to break with the past and to move boldly toward better relations with the Communist giants.

Probably no President, except perhaps John F. Kennedy, was better prepared for dealing in foreign affairs when elected. As Vice President, Mr. Nixon had traveled widely, and out of office he continued his international contacts. It was Mr. Nixon's breadth of knowledge about foreign countries that persuaded Henry A. Kissinger to work for him.

Some skeptics, not aware of Mr. Nixon's background, believed that the President's foreign-policy achievements could be summed up in one word: "Kissinger." But in fact the two men seemed to share a pragmatic approach to policy and to work harmoniously.

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger also shared a penchant for secrecy and surprise that allowed American foreign policy initiatives to burst into the limelight: secret talks on Vietnam; the bold opening to China; the spirit

of improved relations with the Soviet Union, and the first steps to break the Middle East deadlock.

Neither the President nor Mr. Kissinger showed a special interest in the underdeveloped countries and, despite occasional pledges to pay more attention to Africa and Latin America, they gave those parts of the world relatively low priority.

In foreign affairs the high point of Mr. Nixon's Administration was reached in 1972 when he visited China and the Soviet Union, and Americans at home could watch on television as their President met in the Great Hall of the People with Chou En-lai and in the Kremlin with Leonid I. Brezhnev. It was also in 1972 that the break-in at the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate complex occurred. Despite the scandals, a rundown of Mr. Nixon's record would have to include the following achievements:

¶A negotiated Vietnam cease-fire in January, 1973. It did not succeed in halting the fighting, but led to the withdrawal of American combat forces and the removal of Vietnam as a major irritant in big-power relations.

¶An opening to China, the highlights of which were Mr. Kissinger's secret trip to Peking in July, 1971, and Mr. Nixon's journey there in February, 1972. These led to the establishment of so-called "liaison

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offices" in Peking and Washington, a first step toward formal diplomatic relations.

¶A decided improvement in relations with the Soviet Union, marked by numerous agreements with Moscow, and an important accord limiting strategic nuclear weapons—made up of a treaty on defensive weapons, and an interim arrangement on offensive ones.

¶A Berlin agreement, worked out with the Soviet Union, Britain and France in 1971 to insure access to and guarantees for West Berlin, in return for which the Western allies joined West Germany in recognizing the existence of East Germany. This resolved one of the longest-standing East-West disputes.

¶A move to find a Middle East settlement, spurred by the Arab-Israeli war of October, 1973, which placed the United States—through Mr. Kissinger

—in the middle-man's role.

¶A decision by the United States to reduce its worldwide involvements, thereby softening the ideological confrontation with the Communist world, and lessening its obvious presence in Latin America, Africa and other underdeveloped parts of the world.

Abroad, these achievements brought general acclaim for the United States, although from 1971 through 1973 they did lead to a sharp deterioration in relations with Japan because of a succession of Nixon "shocks." The most damaging involved the secrecy surrounding the moves toward China.

Within the Western alliance, the President's clear preference for big-power diplomacy, particularly with such traditional adversaries as China and the Soviet Union, also caused increased strains.

In mid-1973, Mr. Kissinger

delivered a major speech in New York, calling on the West Europeans to join with the United States—and Japan—to draft "a new Atlantic charter."

The proposal was based on the premise that the Europeans would welcome a move by the Administration to bring some vigor to the alliance. Mr. Nixon was planning a trip to the Continent late in 1973.

But the proposal aroused suspicion and haggling between Europe and the United States over how to discuss their differences.

Mr. Nixon's trip was postponed without any formal announcement, largely because the Middle East war erupted in October, 1973.

In May and June Mr. Nixon, despite growing domestic pressures, made trips to the Middle East and the Soviet Union. The Middle East trip increased American prestige but raised

questions about whether Washington was arousing unrealistic Arab expectations.

The Moscow meeting, Mr. Nixon's third with the Soviet leaders, was the least fruitful, for no further accord was reached on strategic arms. The best that could be achieved was agreement to press for another accord on offensive arms.

In the new Administration, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, overhauled the foreign-policy machinery, placing less emphasis on the State Department and more on the National Security Council staff.

This was largely a result of Mr. Kissinger's commanding presence in foreign affairs, and the White House's fear of State Department leaks to the press.

The one issue in which Mr. Kissinger, as a Jew, at first avoided involvement, was the Middle East. But in the fall of

1973, as Secretary of State, he became active in the search for a settlement.

After taking over as Secretary, Mr. Kissinger relied less and less on the National Security Council staff and brought some of his top White House aides to the State Department. With Mr. Nixon's approval, Mr. Kissinger set out to restore confidence in the very department he had helped weaken and to "institutionalize" foreign policy.

The Nixon approach to foreign policy was underscored by his handling of the most important issue facing him when he assumed the Presidency—the Vietnam war.

In 1969, the President ordered Mr. Kissinger to undertake a major study of the options open to the United States. The conclusion was that the United States should build up Saigon's military force and at the same time begin to withdraw American forces from Southeast Asia.

More than 500,000 Americans were stationed in Vietnam when Mr. Nixon took office; by the time the Vietnam agreement was signed, the American force had dwindled to less than 25,000.

Mr. Nixon coupled the decision to begin withdrawing from Vietnam with what became known as "the Nixon Doctrine." Under this policy, the United States was to provide its allies with necessary arms and political support, but would not—except in extraordinary circumstances—use its own forces to fight other countries' battles.

But the effort to secure a Vietnam settlement took longer than the President and Mr. Kissinger expected. Secret talks between Mr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's chief negotiator, in Paris, seemed to be making progress in the summer of 1971. But they broke down, and did not resume seriously until after a major North Vietnamese drive into South Vietnam in the spring of 1972.

That offensive turned out in retrospect to have been a turning point in the war. It

prompted Mr. Nixon to make several major decisions.

In May, 1972, on the eve of his visit to Moscow, he ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor, risking cancellation of his trip by the Russians. But Mr. Brezhnev, who had invested his reputation in better relations with the United States, did not postpone the visit. Nor did China seek to sever her new ties with the United States.

These developments were believed to have influenced Hanoi's decision in the fall of 1972 to make its most conciliatory negotiating offer to Mr. Kissinger, the one that ultimately led to the settlement.

Mr. Nixon took maximum credit for the negotiations and Mr. Kissinger's statement only a week before the election that "peace is at hand" contributed to Mr. Nixon's landslide victory. Actually, the negotiations were to drag on into 1973.

This final phase was interrupted by a vast bombing effort against Hanoi and Haiphong—the first time the major cities were struck by B-52's.

Mr. Nixon said the raids were necessary to prod Hanoi into an agreement because the talks had apparently broken down in mid-December.

The bombing, carried out through the Christmas holidays, created a storm of criticism, not only in the United States but also around the world.

The domestic scandals of his second term in office tended to overshadow Mr. Nixon's continuing interest in foreign affairs and to lead to increasing speculation in Washington that Mr. Kissinger was working independently of the President.

This was denied repeatedly by Mr. Kissinger, who said that even on his Middle East trips he sent back nightly reports to the White House.

But even if he was still in charge, Mr. Nixon could no longer say, as he did in 1968: "You need a President for foreign policy; no Secretary of State is really important; the President makes foreign policy."



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President Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, then an adviser, meeting with Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou en-Lai, left, in Peking in February, 1972. Woman is interpreter.



In May of 1972, President Nixon flew to Moscow and signed a nuclear arms limitation treaty with Soviet party chief Leonid I. Brezhnev

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