

The New Equilibrium

President Nixon was justifiably jubilant when he addressed Congress immediately upon his return from Moscow, Teheran and Warsaw. His negotiations with Leonid I. Brezhnev and his earlier negotiations with Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai are changing the political geography of the world. There is good warrant for his hope that they have "begun to free us from perpetual confrontation." Trouble spots and potential dangers remain—notably in Vietnam and the Middle East—and so do areas of intense ideological and political competition. But their menace is more than counterweighed by the promise of the new equilibrium and the new alignment now in the formative stage.

A decade or two ago some of the fiercest of America's cold warriors used to like to cite an alleged Leninist injunction that the path to Paris ran through Peking. Translated, this meant that Soviet strategy for conquering the West required the conquest of China first as a means of unifying the heart of Eurasia against the Free World. What Mr. Nixon has done is to demonstrate that the path to détente with Moscow ran through Peking. Before the American flag flew over the Kremlin last week, it flew over the Peking airport where Chou En-lai greeted the President last February; the one event virtually predetermined the other.

What the world has seen in the last four months is classic balance-of-power politics employed in the cause of peace. This maneuver became possible because in all three countries involved—the world's three major powers—leaders and masses alike had begun to abandon old stereotypes of either eternal friendship or eternal enmity. The Chinese had had their fill of the chaos of the "cultural revolution." The Soviet people, entering the automobile age, seem more interested in its long-denied delights than in spreading the Marxist-Leninist gospel with fire and sword. And Americans, emotionally exhausted by the Vietnam war and the internal strains it has fostered, are receptive to rapprochement with former enemies and to a respite from overseas tensions. President Nixon—with the expert aid of Dr. Kissinger—sensed this unusual conjunction of positive forces and moved effectively to capitalize on it.

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The concrete result is that the United States now has better relations with both the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic than at any time since the end of World War II. The package of agreements Mr. Nixon concluded in Moscow last month—notably the historic pacts putting the first limits on the nuclear missile race—has created islands of Soviet-American cooperation. With China, a long-interrupted dialogue has been resumed. American citizens are now again visiting that ancient land and citizens of the People's Republic are here. The ground has been cleared for further progress.

Implicit in all this has been the recognition by all involved that even Vietnam and the Middle East are side issues when compared to the imperatives of the new global equilibrium. Chairman Mao received President Nixon shortly after heavy bombing of North Vietnam had resumed; Secretary General Brezhnev received the President shortly after North Vietnam's harbors were mined. No words are needed for Hanoi to understand that the Chinese and Soviet leaders put their own interests first.

That demonstration should have a sobering effect on Hanoi's firebrands. But in Washington, too, the question must arise of a new look at Vietnam now that its secondary importance in the world strategic equation has been so abundantly exposed. The new equilibrium, after all, is dynamic rather than static, and it could be altered by future strains. Now, in the afterglow of his political and diplomatic feats this year, Mr. Nixon can afford better than ever to take another look at the world's tension areas and seek new ways in which the United States can contribute to genuine peace.