

*Address by the President (Carter) at the U.S. Naval Academy's Commencement Exercises, Annapolis, June 7, 1978 (Excerpt)*<sup>5</sup>

## Confrontation or Cooperation With the Soviet Union

Today I want to discuss one of the most important aspects of that international context—the relationship between the world's two greatest powers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

We must realize that for a very long time our relationship with the Soviet Union will be competitive. That competition is to be constructive if we are successful. Instead it could be dangerous and politically disastrous. Then our relationship must be cooperative as well.

We must avoid excessive swings in the public mood in our country—from eupho-

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1978, pp. 1052-1057.

ria when things are going well, to despair when they are not; from an exaggerated sense of compatibility with the Soviet Union to open expressions of hostility.

Détente between our two countries is central to world peace. It is important for the world, for the American public, and for you as future leaders of the Navy to understand the complex and sensitive nature.

The word *détente* can be simplistically defined as "the easing of tension between nations." The word is, in practice, further defined by experience, as those nations evolve new means by which they can live with each other in peace.

To be stable, to be supported by the American people, and to be a basis for widening the scope of cooperation, *détente* must be broadly defined and truly reciprocal. Both nations must exercise restraint in troubled areas and in troubled times. Both must honor meticulously those agreements which have already been reached to widen cooperation, naturally and mutually limit nuclear arms production, permit the free movement of people and expression of ideas, and to protect human rights. Neither of us should entertain the notion that military supremacy can be attained or that transient military advantage can be politically exploited.

Our principal goal is to help shape a world which is more responsive to the desires of people everywhere for economic well-being, social justice, political self-determination, and basic human rights.

We seek a world of peace. But such a world must accommodate diversity—social, political, and ideological. Only then can there be a genuine cooperation among nations and among cultures.

We desire to dominate no one. We will continue to widen our cooperation with the positive new forces in the world.

We want to increase our collaboration with the Soviet Union but also with the emerging nations, with the nations of Eastern Europe, and with the People's Republic of China. We are particularly dedicated to genuine self-determination and majority rule in those areas of the world where these goals have not yet been attained.

Our long-term objective must be to convince the Soviet Union of the advantages of cooperation and of the costs of disruptive behavior.

We remember that the United States and the Soviet Union were allies in the Second

World War. One of the great historical accomplishments of the U.S. Navy was to guide and protect the tremendous shipments of armaments and supplies from our country to Murmansk and to other Soviet ports in support of a joint effort to meet the Nazi threat. In the agony of that massive conflict, 20 million Soviet lives were lost. Millions more who live in the Soviet Union still recall the horror and the hunger of that time.

I am convinced that the people of the Soviet Union want peace. I can't believe that they could possibly want war.

Through the years, our nation has sought accommodation with the Soviet Union, as demonstrated by the Austrian peace treaty, the Quadripartite Agreement concerning Berlin, the termination of nuclear testing in the atmosphere, joint scientific explorations in space, trade agreements, the antiballistic missile treaty, the Interim Agreement on strategic offensive armaments, and the limited test ban agreement.

Efforts still continue with negotiations toward a SALT II agreement, a comprehensive test ban against nuclear explosives, reductions in conventional arms transfers to other countries, the prohibition against attacks on satellites in space, an agreement to stabilize the level of force deployment in the Indian Ocean, and increased trade and scientific and cultural exchange. We must be willing to explore such avenues of cooperation despite the basic issues which divide us. The risks of nuclear war alone propel us in this direction.

The numbers and destructive potential of nuclear weapons has been increasing at an alarming rate. That is why a SALT agreement, which enhances the security of both nations, is of fundamental importance. We and the Soviet Union are negotiating in good faith almost every day because we both know that a failure to succeed would precipitate a resumption of a massive nuclear arms race. I am glad to report to you today that the prospects for a SALT II agreement are good.

Beyond this major effort, improved trade and technological and cultural exchanges are among the immediate benefits of cooperation between our two countries. However, these efforts to cooperate do not erase the significant differences between us.

What are these differences?

To the Soviet Union, détente seems to mean a continuing aggressive struggle for

political advantage and increased influence in a variety of ways. The Soviet Union apparently sees military power and military assistance as the best means of expanding their influence abroad. Obviously areas of instability in the world provide a tempting target for this effort and all too often they seem ready to exploit any such opportunities. As became apparent in Korea, in Angola, and also, as you know, in Ethiopia more recently, the Soviets prefer to use proxy forces to achieve their purposes.

To other nations throughout the world, the Soviet military buildup appears to be excessive, far beyond any legitimate requirement to defend themselves or to defend their allies. For more than 15 years, they have maintained this program of military growth, investing almost 15% of their total gross national product in armaments, and this sustained growth continues.

The abuse of basic human rights in their own country, in violation of the agreement which was reached at Helsinki, has earned them the condemnation of people everywhere who love freedom. By their actions, they have demonstrated that the Soviet system can't tolerate freely expressed ideas, or notions of loyal opposition, and the free movement of peoples.

The Soviet Union attempts to export a totalitarian and repressive form of government, resulting in a closed society. Some of these characteristics and goals create problems for the Soviet Union. Outside a tightly controlled bloc, the Soviet Union has difficult political relations with other nations. Their cultural bonds with others are few and frayed. Their form of government is becoming increasingly unattractive to other nations, so that even Marxist-Leninist groups no longer look on the Soviet Union as a model to be imitated.

Many countries are becoming very concerned that the nonaligned movement is being subverted by Cuba, which is obviously closely aligned with the Soviet Union and dependent upon the Soviets for economic sustenance and for military and political guidance and direction.

Although the Soviet Union has the second largest economic system in the world, its growth is slowing greatly, and its standard of living does not compare favorably with that of other nations at the same equivalent stage of development.

Agricultural production still remains a serious problem for the Soviet Union, so that in times of average or certainly adverse

conditions for crop production, they must turn to us or turn to other nations for food supplies.

We in our country are in a much more favorable position. Our industrial base and our productivity are unmatched; our scientific and technological capability is superior to all others; our alliances with other free nations are strong and growing stronger; and our military capability is now and will be second to none.

In contrast to the Soviet Union, we are surrounded by friendly neighbors and wide seas. Our societal structure is stable and cohesive, and our foreign policy enjoys bipartisan public support which gives it continuity.

We are also strong because of what we stand for as a nation: the realistic chance for every person to build a better life; protection by both law and custom from arbitrary exercise of government power; the right of every individual to speak out, to participate fully in government, and to share political power.

Our philosophy is based on personal freedom, the most powerful of all ideas, and our democratic way of life warrants the admiration and emulation by other people throughout the world. Our work for human rights makes us part of an international tide, growing in force. We are strengthened by being part of it.

Our growing economic strength is also a major political factor, potential influence, for the benefit of others. Our gross national product exceeds that of all nine nations combined in the European Economic Community and is twice as great as that of the Soviet Union. Additionally, we are now learning how to use our resources more wisely, creating a harmony between our people and our environment.

Our analysis of American military strength also furnishes a basis for confidence. We know that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union can launch a nuclear assault on the other without suffering a devastating counterattack which could destroy the aggressor nation.

Although the Soviet Union has more missile launchers, greater throw-weight, and more continental air defense capabilities, the United States has more warheads, generally greater accuracy, more heavy bombers, a more balanced nuclear force, better missile submarines, and superior antisubmarine warfare capability.

A successful SALT II agreement will give both nations equal but lower ceilings on missile launchers and also on missiles with multiple warheads. We envision in SALT III an even greater mutual reduction in nuclear weapons.

With essential nuclear equivalence, relative conventional force strength has now become more important. The fact is that the military capabilities of the United States and its allies are adequate to meet any foreseeable threat.

It is possible that each side tends to exaggerate the military capability of the other. Accurate analyses are important as a basis for making decisions for the future. False or excessive estimates of Soviet strength or of American weakness contributes to the effectiveness of the Soviet propaganda effort.

For example, recently alarming news reports of the military budget proposals for the U.S. Navy ignored the fact that we have the highest defense budget in history and that the largest portion of this will go to the Navy. You men are joining a long tradition of superior leadership, seamanship, tactics, and ship design. And I am confident that the U.S. Navy has no peer, no equal, on the high seas today, and that you, I, and others will always keep the Navy strong.

Let there be no doubt about our present and future strength. This brief assessment which I have just made shows that we need not be overly concerned about our ability to compete and to compete successfully. Certainly there is no cause for alarm. The healthy self-criticism and the free debate which are essential in a democracy should never be confused with weakness or despair or lack of purpose.

What are the principal elements of American foreign policy toward the Soviet Union? Let me outline them very briefly.

We will continue to maintain equivalent nuclear strength because we believe that, in the absence of worldwide nuclear disarmament, such equivalency is the least threatening and the most stable situation for the world.

We maintain a prudent and sustained level of military spending, keyed to a stronger NATO, more mobile forces, and undiminished presence in the Pacific. We and our allies must and will be able to meet any foreseeable challenge to our security from either strategic nuclear forces or from conventional forces. America has the capa-

bility to honor this commitment without excessive sacrifice on the part of our citizens. And that commitment to military strength will be honored.

Looking beyond our alliances, we will support worldwide and regional organizations which are dedicated to enhancing international peace, like the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Organization of African Unity.

In Africa we and our African friends want to see a continent that is free of the dominance of outside powers, free of the bitterness of racial injustice, free of conflict, and free of the burdens of poverty and hunger and disease. We are convinced that the best way to work toward these objectives is through affirmative policies that recognize African aspirations.

The persistent and increasing military involvement of the Soviet Union and Cuba in Africa could deny this hopeful vision. We are deeply concerned about the threat to regional peace and to the autonomy of countries within which these foreign troops seem permanently to be stationed. That is why I have spoken up on this subject today. And this is why I and the American people will support African efforts to contain such intrusion, as we have done recently in Zaire.

I urge again that all other powers join us in emphasizing works of peace rather than the weapons of war. In their assistance to Africa, let the Soviet Union now join us in seeking a peaceful and speedy transition to majority rule in Rhodesia and in Namibia. Let us see efforts to resolve peacefully the disputes in Eritrea and in Angola. Let us all work not to divide and to seek domination in Africa but to help those nations to fulfill their great potential.

We will seek peace, better communication and understanding, cultural and scientific exchange, and increased trade with the Soviet Union and with other nations.

We will attempt to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons among those nations not now having this capability.

We will continue to negotiate constructively and persistently for a fair strategic arms limitation agreement. We know that no ideological victories can be won by either side by the use of nuclear weapons.

We have no desire to link this negotiation for a SALT agreement with other competitive relationships nor to impose other special conditions on the process. In a democratic society, however, where public opin-

ion is an integral factor in the shaping and implementation of foreign policy, we do recognize that tensions, sharp disputes, or threats to peace will complicate the quest for a successful agreement. This is not a matter of our preference but a simple recognition of facts.

The Soviet Union can choose either confrontation or cooperation. The United States is adequately prepared to meet either choice.

We would prefer cooperation through a détente that increasingly involves similar restraints for both sides, similar readiness to resolve disputes by negotiations and not by violence, similar willingness to compete peacefully and not militarily. Anything less than that is likely to undermine détente. And this is why I hope that no one will underestimate the concerns which I have expressed today.

A competition without restraint and without shared rules will escalate into graver tensions, and our relationship as a whole with the Soviet Union will suffer. I do not wish this to happen, and I do not believe that Mr. Brezhnev desires it. And this is why it is time for us to speak frankly and to face the problems squarely.

By a combination of adequate American strength, of quiet self-restraint in the use of it, of a refusal to believe in the inevitability of war, and of a patient and persistent development of all the peaceful alternatives, we hope eventually to lead international society into a more stable, more peaceful, and a more helpful future.

You and I leave here today to do our common duty—protecting our nation's vital interests by peaceful means if possible, by resolute action if necessary. We go forth sobered by these responsibilities, but confident of our strength. We go forth knowing that our nation's goals—peace, security, liberty for ourselves and for others—will determine our future and that we together can prevail.

To attain these goals, our nation will require exactly those qualities of courage, self-sacrifice, idealism, and self-discipline which you as midshipmen have learned here at Annapolis so well. That is why your nation expects so much of you, and that is why you have so much to give.

I leave you now with my congratulations and with a prayer to God that both you and I will prove worthy of the task that is before us and the nation which we have sworn to serve.

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