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I don't believe we had any illusions about the short-lived and much-maligned period of *détente*. I certainly have no embarrassment about my own part in that process, bred in a conjuncture of geopolitics, economic aspirations, and collective leadership on both sides.

But the process too soon became part of the problem. The main achievements of the late Sixties and early Seventies were carried forward with difficulty, perhaps with an overload of linkage. Historians may reflect on the reasons why 1975 was the year which saw both the high point of the formal structure of *détente* in the conclusion of the Helsinki Final Act — and the imminent erosion of its broader purpose as a result of Soviet-Cuban adventurism in Angola.

*Détente* rapidly showed signs of a process being drained of its substance. Core issues were held hostage by one side or the other — human rights, economic co-operation, hegemony in key spheres of influence. *Détente* became both divisible, and reversible.

And yet, I am not ready to call *détente* a failure. There were clear benefits of stability and co-operation. Its long-term impact, for example on Soviet elites, cannot yet be judged. Moreover it did coincide with, or provoke, an important impulse in the early Seventies which seems to have been lost without trace. It is the impulse toward political dialogue, toward regular consultation at the most senior levels of the East-West system.

This was not talk for the sake of talk. It led to a set of interlocking bargains or understandings on strategic arms, on Vietnam, on the place of China in the world, on co-operation in outer space. Techniques of crisis management were put tenuously in place. It was an impulse in which elements of mutual respect contended with the search for advantage — which is to say it was high politics in action.

With the loss of that impulse, and in the absence of high politics in the East-West relationship, it is not surprising that any shred of trust or confidence in the intentions of the other side appears to have vanished as well. Also missing, and this troubles me deeply, is much trace of political craft and creativity directed at ameliorating the intentions of the other side. There is a disturbing complacency, a readiness to adapt to the worse rather than to exert our influence for the better. We are, in short, de-politicizing the most important political relationship we have.

The responsibility for this lies partly, but by no means exclusively, with both superpowers. The United States and the Soviet Union outstrip the rest of us in their global reach, their armaments, and their leadership responsibilities. Naturally, they differ greatly — and I am not committing the fallacy of describing them as equals in any moral sense at all. Nevertheless, they breathe an atmosphere common to themselves, and share a global perception according to which even remote events can threaten their interests or their associates.

And there are some other features which both powers have in common: continental land-mass and considerable economic self-sufficiency; ambivalent relationships with Europe and with Asia; complexities of demography; a central focus on each other in their policies; spasms of unilateralism and isolationism.