

Brezhnev unthinkingly fell into the trap of repeating Khrushchev's fatal error. He, too, came to believe that he could achieve a significant improvement in East-West relations and a major increase in the Soviet Union's global power at one and the same time. Like Khrushchev, he assumed that "realists" in US policy-making circles would pragmatically adapt to the changing "correlation of forces" and calmly accept a decline in the American position in the world because the only other alternative — a violent and ultimately futile attempt to resist the tide of history — promised even worse consequences for the United States.

Brezhnev valued the SALT I agreement and the 1972 Basic Principles Agreement precisely because he saw them as embodying his dual policy. To him they signified improved relations with the United States based upon American acceptance of the Soviet Union's vastly expanded world power.⁶⁷ This was not the US view, and as the divergence in Soviet and American perspectives subsequently became clearer both in Moscow and in Washington, detente inevitably unraveled. Soviet foreign policy paid a high price for Brezhnev's unwillingness to rethink traditional Soviet attitudes and doctrines.

By 1977, Soviet policy-makers realized that East-West relations were definitely on a downward slide and detente was threatened. They wanted to salvage their policy of detente but lacked a strategy for doing so. The Soviet leadership was unwilling to exercise self-restraint in Asia and Africa, since they felt that the Soviet Union, as one of the world's two superpowers, was fully entitled to a greater role in the Third World. They felt that their on-going military buildup was the foundation of Soviet global power and were unwilling to halt it. They ruled out any change in their basic policies and opted instead for a strategy of verbal reassurance.

⁶⁷ Harry Gelman, "The Rise and Fall of Detente," in Arnold L. Horelick, ed., *US-Soviet Relations*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 55-85; Coit D. Blacker, "The Kremlin and Detente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations," in Alexander L. George, ed., *Managing US-Soviet Rivalry*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1983, pp. 119-137.