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Dan Caldwell. “The Legitimation of the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design and Grand Strategy.” 633-652. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00801.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00801.x>

Julian F. Zelizer. “Détente and Domestic Politics.” 653-670. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00805.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00805.x>

Douglas E. Selvage. “Transforming the Soviet Sphere of Influence? U.S.-Soviet Détente and Eastern Europe, 1969-1976.” 671-688. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00804.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00804.x>

Stephen R. Twigge. “Operation Hullabaloo: Henry Kissinger, British Diplomacy, and the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War.” 689-702. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00807.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00807.x>

Angela Romano. “Détente, Entente, or Linkage? The Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in U.S. Relations with the Soviet Union.” 703-722. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00802.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00802.x>

Kathleen Parthé. “The Politics of Détente-Era Cultural Texts: 1969-1976.” 723-734. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00803.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00803.x>

Effie G. H. Pedaliu. “‘A Sea of Confusion’: The Mediterranean and Détente, 1969-1974.” 735-750. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00806.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00806.x>

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Review by **Daniel Sargent**, University of California, Berkeley

Thirty years ago, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan brought down the curtain on a distinct phase of Cold War history that we now remember as the "era of détente": an interlude of coexistence in the long Soviet-American struggle. As it recedes into the past, the era of détente is coming into sharpened historical focus.

Accordingly, this special edition of *Diplomatic History* comes at an opportune juncture. It also covers much ground: from rebellious Cold Warriors to Soviet literary dissidents; from Anglo-American relations, to the pan-European CSCE negotiations, to the wave of political change that swept the Mediterranean in the mid-1970s.

The special edition begins with the United States and with two essays, by Dan Caldwell and Julian Zelizer.

Focusing on the Nixon years (1969-1974), Caldwell asks why détente failed to achieve durable public support in the United States. His answer is that its architects were unable to anchor Soviet-American détente to the bedrock of American "values and beliefs." Instead, they sought to justify their East-West policy through a circular logic according to which arms control justified détente and vice-versa. This act was sustained for a while, but, as Caldwell explains, it soon fell into disrepute.

After 1973, as Julian Zelizer argues in an essay that complements Caldwell's, the tensions enveloping détente within the United States sharpened. As Zelizer insists, to understand détente's drawn-out crisis from the mid-1970s, we shall have to take account of domestic politics. Détente in the 1970s crumbled at home, as critics on the political left and – more potently – the political right lambasted its amorality and accused its practitioners of defeatism.

The insurgency against détente, Zelizer suggests, propelled a rightward shift in American politics that became manifest in Ronald Reagan's election. Yet by 1976, as these two essays suggest, détente was already in crisis.

Caldwell and Zelizer both affirm the importance of domestic politics in high diplomacy. They also raise an implicit counterfactual that neither answers or even fully acknowledges. This is the question of whether détente could ever have been reconciled with "values and beliefs"?

Had Nixon and Kissinger been less prone to furtiveness (backchannels) and bristling displays of machismo (in Cambodia, the Middle East, Angola), might the public have been reconciled to détente? Or was tactical subterfuge vital to the execution of their foreign policy, as Kissinger himself has suggested.

More profoundly, could the American public have been persuaded to support an East-West co-existence predicated on a hard-headed division of interests? Or would voters prone to favor strategic formulae that emphasized such issues as human rights and the liberation of Eastern Europe – agenda items that were anathema to the Soviet leadership and inimical to détente?

Moving on from the United States, three essays explore the diplomacy of détente in particular regions. Douglas Selvage examines U.S. policy towards Eastern Europe; Angela Romano addresses the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE); and Effie Pedaliu considers U.S. policy towards the Mediterranean. None of them looks favorably upon détente's achievements.

In Eastern Europe, as Selvage explains, détente's capacity to promote peaceful change proved to be limited. While Nixon and Kissinger sought to foster an independent spirit among East European leaders, they downgraded the promotion of cultural, intellectual, and social contacts across the Iron Curtain. In this respect, their détente inverted the priorities of the *Ostpolitik* that German Chancellor Willy Brandt had pursued from 1969. Instead of seeking openness among societies, Nixon and Kissinger fixated on elites.

In Eastern Europe, the United States aimed to prod established leaders – most notably the Romanian despot Nicolae Ceausescu – to loosen their ties of subservience to the Soviet Union. Yet Nixon and Kissinger did not challenge Communist rule overtly, as Reagan would do; nor did they work to subvert it indirectly, as Brandt had done, through the promotion of social contacts and economic exchange.

Two contending visions of East-West coexistence – one emphasizing geopolitics and stability; the other human contacts and change – came into direct conflict in the multi-year Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) negotiations from 1972 through 1975.

As Angela Romano explains in her piece on CSCE, the “Helsinki process” (so called for the site of the final CSCE conference) revealed conceptual divisions within the Western Alliance. Whereas Nixon and Kissinger saw CSCE as a carrot that could be handed to the Soviet Union in exchange for Soviet concessions on more urgent issues, namely arms control, West European governments embraced the CSCE as a vehicle for liberalizing the East.

It was only in the last months of the Helsinki process that the Ford administration came around, grudgingly, to accepting a West European concept of détente. That it did so, Romano argues, owed less to conviction than to a confluence of unrelated circumstances (Angola and the fall of Saigon), which persuaded Kissinger to adopt a more confrontational pose towards the Soviet Union than he had previously been willing to strike.

The long-term consequences of this American shift towards a “European” line on CSCE would be consequential; some authors, after all, credit the inclusion of human rights elements within the Helsinki process with having helped end the Cold War. Yet American policy, Romano suggests, was more reactive than proactive throughout.

Moving south from Helsinki, Effie Pedaliu evaluates U.S. policy towards the Mediterranean in the era of détente. Despite an enthusiasm on the part of EEC leaders for bold and even transformative Mediterranean policies, Kissinger was “unable to rise above the rigidities of the Cold War” in his own approach to the Mediterranean basin.

The preoccupation of American policy with the Cold War, Pedaliu argues, was unfortunate. While the 1970s brought political upheaval from Portugal to Cyprus, American leaders were inattentive to the opportunities for liberalizing change that events around the Mediterranean littoral presented. This was evidently because, in their preoccupation with the East–West balance of power, they failed to take heed of the dramatic transformations that the 1970s brought in regional affairs – historical changes that could not be subsumed within Cold War categories.

Whether the stabilization of Soviet–American relations came at the expense of other international priorities was, of course, an urgent concern for the United States’ West European allies. This is quite evident in Stephen Twigge’s article, which examines Great Britain’s role in the drafting of the Soviet-American Prevention of Nuclear War agreement.

That a British diplomat served as the principal draftsman of a major Soviet-American treaty might be an oddity of Cold War history. Yet the episode, as Twigge renders it, reveals the tortuous path that British diplomacy walked in an era of détente. Firmly committed to the Special Relationship but concerned that détente would weaken the alliance, the British government proved itself a reliable but unenthusiastic and dubious junior partner in the diplomatic bargain that was détente.

While this special edition of *Diplomatic History* pays careful attention to U.S. policy, it devotes rather less attention to the Soviet side of the minuet. Only one essay, Kathleen Parthé’s article on Soviet dissenters in East-West relations, makes substantial use of Soviet sources.

Parthé’s essay pushes the intellectual envelope of this forum in two respects. At the same time as she emphasizes the historical role of Soviet actors, so too does she broaden the collection’s focus to embrace non-state actors and transnational linkages. This is to be welcomed. After all, East-West détente was not simply a matter of inter-elite accommodation; its repercussions reverberated through societies.

As Parthé demonstrates, the “tactlessness” of Soviet internal repression became an issue of international consternation during the era of détente. Focusing on literary dissidents, her article shows how non-governmental organizations and individual political leaders in the West made the mistreatment of Soviet dissidents an issue of global concern. This would be of great consequence for the international politics of détente.

By the mid-1970s, the abuse of human rights in the USSR had become a wellspring of anti-détente politics in the West. By revealing the transnational linkages that exposed détente to tough scrutiny on human rights grounds, Parthé reminds us that international relations involve more than the power of the powerful. Individuals and non-state actors disrupted the efforts that leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain made to stabilize the Cold War.

The basic problem with détente for many of its critics was that it purchased stability in the currency of values. Coexistence with totalitarianism, even the decrepit and half-hearted

totalitarianism that the Soviet Union had become by the 1970s, was inconsistent with the American people's self-image as a crusading and democratic nation. The dissident issue, to return to our point of departure, propelled détente's crisis of legitimacy within the United States.

At the same time, we should acknowledge that the stability which détente achieved, by muting fears of thermonuclear annihilation, helped open intellectual and political space for the reassertion of a crusading American idealism. It was ironic, of course, that the politics of idealism contributed in fairly short measure to the crisis of détente. Yet the ethical calculus remained complex. For sure, détente downgraded the plight of Soviet dissidents. But was peace in the atomic age, as Kissinger asked, not also a universal human right? Read in tandem, these seven essays strike interesting chords. They do not offer a coherent historical interpretation, but that is not the standard up to which they should be held. Strong as they are as individual essays, they have presumably been grouped together in a "special forum" for reasons of thematic similarity rather than those of interpretive congruence.

Collectively, these articles reveal common themes while leaving important questions unasked. By way of conclusion, we might reflect upon some of the issues, both explicit and implicit, that these essays do not directly address.

First, what precisely was détente? Was it a strategy for overcoming (even for winning) the Cold War or (as Pealiu implies) an effort to freeze the East-West status quo and thereby to mitigate the consequences of relative decline for the United States?¹ This is an obvious question, but it will likely remain a divisive issue among historians working on the international history of the 1970s. Answering it, in this historian's view, will require not only thoughtful analysis of strategic doctrine but also careful analysis of the interplay between the choices that leaders made and the international circumstances within which they operated.

Second, how did non-American actors shape détente's trajectories? This forum has given us some tantalizing glimpses into the discomfort with which West European leaders viewed Nixon and Kissinger's détente. It has also alluded to the divergent strategic outlooks that informed West European and American approaches to the East. But there is presumably more to say on these distinctions.

And what of the Soviet Union and China and their roles in the détente process? While there is an emerging historical literature on Soviet and Chinese diplomacy in the era of détente, the historiography (as this special forum reveals) still skews hard towards American perspectives.² This, too, will likely change in due course.

¹ Kissinger's 1979 memoir follows the first interpretation; his 1994 memoir introduces the second. For a brilliant analysis of Kissinger's interpretive discontinuities, see Robert Kagan, "The Revisionist: How Henry Kissinger Won the Cold War, or So He Thinks." *The New Republic* Vol. 220, no. 25 (1999), pp. 38-48.

² For example, Matthew Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003) and the relevant chapters of Vladimir Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the*

Third – and finally – we might ask how developments outside of the classic diplomatic arena affected East-West relations in the “era of détente.” After all, historians have in recent years come to see the 1970s as a crucible of global upheaval, especially in international economic relations but in world affairs more broadly.³ Let us consider just two examples.

The crisis of the dollar, the breakdown of Bretton Woods, the oil shocks, and stagflation; these political-economic developments were tumultuous for the West and consequential for the Cold War. The oil crisis, as Stephen Kotkin has shown, was as significant for the Soviet Union as it was for the West.⁴ How did this tumult within the global economy, to dwell on just one theme outside of the traditional diplomatic penumbra, shape the so-called “era of détente”?

How too, to take another such theme, did the emerging profile of human rights in the 1970s – including the rise of non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Freedom House – affect the diplomacy of détente. As Kathleen Parthé’s article suggests and as scholars such as Daniel Thomas and Sarah Snyder have proposed, the human rights transformations of the 1970s had important implications for Cold War history.⁵ But can the rise of human rights be satisfactorily understood as a sub-theme of Cold War politics? This reviewer, at least, is skeptical.

New frameworks may be required to encompass these and other themes in the international history of the 1970s: themes that intersect with the détente narrative but which cannot be subsumed within it. It may not be accurate, in other words, to take the rise and fall of détente as the narrative that defines an era.

For all the drama of East-West relations in the 1970s, it did not take long for events to expose the limits of détente as a framework for U.S. foreign policy in a complex era. On that point, these articles largely concur. Reading between the lines, we might reach a further inference. As a framework for historical understanding, détente may once again be nearing the end of its tether.

Daniel Sargent is Assistant Professor of History at the University of California,

Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007). The most comprehensive treatment of Soviet policy in the era of détente remains Raymond Garthoff’s magisterial *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*. (Washington, D.C.: 1994).

³ For an overview of the transformative 1970s, see the forthcoming *Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, edited by Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel Sargent (Cambridge, Mas.: 2010).

⁴ Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (New York: 2001).

⁵ Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ: 2001) and Sarah Snyder, “The Helsinki Process, American Foreign Policy, and the End of the Cold War,” Ph.D dissertation, Georgetown University, 2006.

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Berkeley. He is co-editor (with Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, and Erez Manela) of the forthcoming *Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Sargent graduated with his Ph.D from Harvard University in 2008. He is now working on a monograph on the United States and the politics and economics of globalization in the 1970s, which is under contract with Oxford University Press for anticipated publication in 2012-2013.

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