

Schlesinger

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In the early years of Vietnam, it was widely believed (a view that I found preposterous) that the Soviets were deeply concerned that Vietnam might get out of hand, and therefore were our partners in seeking a settlement of the issue. The possibility that the Soviets might positively enjoy watching the Americans stewing in their own juice was rejected out of hand. That the Soviets would immensely benefit from the refocusing of American attention on the supposed Chinese threat, and from the diversion of American resources away from Western Europe and the competition in strategic forces, was a reality all too rarely examined in Washington. Surely the Soviets would eagerly help extricate the American bacon from the Vietnamese fire. Given these preoccupations and these beliefs, it is hardly surprising that the conviction took hold that the Soviets also shared American objectives with respect to arms control. It was an article of faith that the Soviets sought *only* to match American strategic capability; their buildup would cease as they approached American force levels. That the Soviets do not think like American liberals has been a lesson very slowly learned.

The upshot was a growing faith in the inevitability of arms control and in the effectiveness of the arms control process. Collaboration on the Non-Proliferation Treaty (where super-power interests coincided) furthered such hopes. At the Glassboro summit in 1967, the Americans attempted to persuade Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin of the legitimacy of these views. Simultaneously they attempted to dissuade the Soviets from deploying strategic defenses—for that would result simply in the accelerated deployment of strategic offensive forces. Though they failed to move Kosygin on that occasion, they continued to believe that the logical force of their arguments would ultimately persuade the Soviets.

All these hopes, however, were suddenly dashed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. That invasion, which to less Utopian observers of Soviet conduct appeared inevitable in the circumstances, rather surprisingly caught the Administration by surprise. As in 1960, an external event had interrupted the arms control process. The American reaction to what in Soviet eyes should have been accepted as a fortuitous, if not irrelevant, event—later repeated in Angola and even more markedly in Afghanistan—makes sustained and unvarying participation in bilateral arms negotiations impossible for the American democracy.

① my views that USSR promoted US involvement