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978-0-521-08967-8 - The End of the Post-War Era: Documents on Great-Power Relations, 1968-1975

Edited by James Mayall and Cornelia Navari

Excerpt

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Introduction

For more than thirty years we have grown accustomed to thinking of the history of our times as ‘post-war’, the war itself standing for most people as a great barrier reef between an international order still dominated by the European great powers and the modern world of nuclear technology and super-power rivalry. In international relations some periods are demarcated by events of such momentous significance that their contours are obvious even to contemporaries. But there are other times when a combination of developments will alter decisively the major relationships involved in international politics, without any such obvious or cathartic break with the past. It is our belief that the period documented in this volume is of this kind. Between 1968 and 1975 a series of developments in the relations of the major world powers transformed the arrangements by which they had been governed since the end of the Second World War. The assumption on which the documents have been drawn together is that these years marked a definitive transition in the history of the contemporary states-system, after which it could no longer be described, except in a purely literal sense, as ‘post-war’. It was during this time that the great powers of the wartime alliance against the Axis finally evolved a kind of peace agreement, whose absence had shaped the basic pattern of their relations since 1945. The cold war finally came to an end and in consequence the framework of great-power relations was changed.

The centre-piece of the final Second World War ‘peace agreement’ involved the settlement of that most intractable of post-war problems – the future shape and political configuration of Germany. The *de facto* division of the former Reich into two states, each welded into and managed by a complex web of alliance relations, was finally confirmed *de jure* at the end of 1971. As a consequence of the German settlement both NATO and the Warsaw Pact were accorded an institutional permanence and, more important, since they were after all familiar features of the post-war scene, an institutional legitimacy. In the period covered by this volume the focus of great-power relations shifted from the confrontation of blocs to an agreement on spheres of influence, an agreement which was to underpin a super-power detente and an extended freedom of super-power action. At the same time, it was to limit and circumscribe the freedom of action of the super-powers’ respective allies. If up to 1968 the hope had persisted that the structure of the two blocs might be overcome, and that each ally might find a way to act in a convincing

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manner outside the framework of the alliances, after 1973 that was no longer the case. The two alliances became, and were recognised as becoming, the long-term living-space of the European states.

The end of the cold war

The turning-point for the settlement of the German question was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, a show of both weakness and strength which demonstrated to the Western powers that there could be no formal territorial revision of the post-war European settlement. Consequently, in a political sense, it also demonstrated that in the future no German leader would be able to use, however vaguely, an appeal to German unification as an obstacle to any East–West detente. Ironically, this was what the Soviet Union had always claimed, namely that a detente could not be achieved without some attention to the anomalous situation created by an unrecognised second Germany with its disputed borders. Until 1968, the detente policies pursued by the governments of France, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States had all attempted to circumvent what the Soviet government called ‘political facts’, by which it meant the explicit international recognition of East Germany and its new borders with Poland. Now, in the months that followed the invasion of Czechoslovakia, one after another the Western powers reversed their previous policies which had attempted to by-pass the German problem in favour of a more general relaxation of East–West relations, both politically and economically. Now, although their policies varied, they all focussed explicitly on legal status, borders, and above all on the German question. To these changes in Western attitudes and policy the Soviet Union also responded.

The first moves were essentially stabs in the dark. The United States attempted to open the question of Berlin (1)¹ while the Soviet Union offered to drop its campaign of vilification against the Federal Republic and to enter into some kind of long-term relationship.² But while the invasion appears to have shocked the Western powers into action, the critical event, which was subsequently to act as the linchpin between the various sets of East–West negotiations, had occurred the previous March. This was the speech of the then Federal German Foreign Minister, Willy Brandt, at an SPD party conference on 16 March 1968 in which he signalled a possible willingness to legitimise the Oder–Neisse frontier between East Germany and Poland, an offer which was seized upon by the Polish leader, Mr Gomulka, as a possible basis for the normalisation of relations between his own country and the Federal Republic (2). The significance of this speech was not only to lie in its implications for a real breakthrough in Polish–West German relations. It also signalled the beginning of a process in which the Federal Republic redefined its own position on the question of German reunification. This process was overseen

1 All bracketed numerals in the Introduction refer to the numbered documents in the collection.

2 See the speech by Mr Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, to the UN General Assembly, 3 October 1968: *Soviet News*, 8 October 1968.

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by Willy Brandt, when he succeeded to the Chancellorship after the victory of his Socialist Party in the elections of August 1969. The formal redefinition of German reunification, the issue which had been the single greatest obstacle to any recognition of the European *status quo* by NATO, was finally accomplished by Chancellor Brandt's statement of 28 October 1969 (5).

Between 1966 and 1968 there had been a virtual free-for-all in Western policies towards the Soviet bloc. The new West German and American initiatives were still separate and uncoordinated responses to a new situation, but during the summer of 1969 a certain coordination began to emerge. At a meeting in Washington between Chancellor Kiesinger and President Nixon, each agreed to 'pace' his policy towards the Soviet Union against the progress of the others (4). In specific terms, the conclusion of any German–Soviet treaty was to be made dependent on the 'successful' conclusion of the Berlin talks, an agreement which not only meant that the Soviet Union's relations with the Federal Republic were made subject to Soviet behaviour as one of the four occupying powers, but gave the Federal Republic a virtual veto over Four-Power provisions touching on Berlin, whose status it wished to preserve.

Despite being subjected to this exercise in 'pacing', the Soviet Union went ahead. The Soviet leaders agreed to talks on Berlin, which opened on 26 March 1970 (10) allowing the Federal Republic to announce its guidelines for a Soviet–German Treaty in July (13). A text was signed on 11 August, but its final ratification by the West German government awaited a Berlin settlement. What the American–West German agreement had done was to reciprocate, in a context of their own choice, the Soviet insistence on preconditions for detente. If it had to be conceded that no great-power detente was possible which did not include an explicit recognition of the post-war European settlement, nor was it now to be possible to resolve the German problem without preserving the special status of Berlin.

With the evidence of the success of their version of 'linkage' provided by the actual text of a treaty, an overall Western strategy on detente began to emerge. On one level this involved widening the link. Not only was the Soviet–German treaty to be made dependent on a successful outcome to the Berlin negotiations, but Berlin was made the testing ground of Soviet intentions over the whole range of East–West security questions. In the first instance this strategy required the forging of a further link between progress over Berlin and Western agreement to the proposed European Security Conference. This link was established by the NATO communiqué of 4 June 1971 (101). But more generally it also implied a policy of linkage between all East–West issues which were under negotiation, a policy managed through the NATO Council, which emerged after the June meeting as the central coordinating agency for the Western moves towards detente (e.g. 102).

By the summer of 1971 the Soviet Union was subjected to a series of multiple pressures: first, the prospective success of its own normalisation of relations with the Federal Republic; second, pressure applied by its own ally Poland; and third, the prospect of an overall East–West settlement which was being held out as a possibility through the proposed European Security Conference. But the consummation of all these successes depended on the Soviet government in turn legitimising the *status quo*

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of a divided Berlin. In effect, the tables had been turned. The Soviet leaders rejected any notion of 'links' but acted increasingly as if they accepted their existence.

First the Berlin problem was settled. After difficult negotiations turning essentially on the legal status of the city and the rights of Britain, France and the United States to hold on to their positions in the Western sectors, an agreement was reached in September which publicly acknowledged the legitimacy of the *status quo* and regularised contact between the western part of the city and the Federal Republic (20).

Next, the Soviet leaders tacitly backed the Western strategy against their own East German allies. As part of the Quadripartite Agreements certain measures regarding transit traffic from West Berlin to West Germany were delegated by the Four Powers to be worked out between the Federal Republic and the East German government. Through these provisions, which had to be completed before the Berlin Agreements themselves were complete, full ratification of the Soviet and Polish treaties was linked to the willingness of East Germany to negotiate directly on these matters with the government in Bonn and the West Berlin Senate.

At his meeting with Chancellor Brandt at Erfurt in March 1970, the East German Prime Minister, Mr Stoph, rejected the 'one nation, two states' formula (8). In the context of West German politics this reformulation of the West German position on unification had represented a major policy change, but for the East German regime its implications for the future were too ambiguous, particularly when linked, as it quite deliberately was, to the continuation of a Western presence in Berlin. (For Brandt, of course, the anomalous status of Berlin was the single point of reality in the 'one nation, two states' formula which is no doubt why he fought so hard to have it accepted.) Hence up to the point of the Quadripartite Agreements no progress had been made in the normalisation of political relations between the two Germanies. However, with their accomplishment in September 1971, the context changed dramatically; for the Berlin agreements and the Soviet and Polish treaties all now hung on what was in a sense a continuation of the Erfurt talks, and the Soviet Union had by implication accepted the responsibility for pushing its East German ally into normalising its relations with the Federal Republic. In this way the Western policy of linkage was assuming a dynamic of its own. The transit treaties were agreed on 17 December 1971;¹ the Bundestag ratified the treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland the following May (22), and within two weeks the final protocol of the Berlin Agreements was signed by the Four Powers, bringing them into force (23).

The final phase of the Federal Republic's *Ostpolitik*, as it had become, turned on completing the process of political normalisation, begun by these specific agreements, on the basis of the 'one nation, two states' formula, which despite Stoph's resistance, remained in West Germany the declared policy on which the whole exercise depended. Once again success at the centre was, in a practical sense, to be the precondition of detente further afield. On the normalisation of relations between the two Germanies depended the furtherance of any long-term relations between

¹ Not published here; for texts, see *Texte zur Deutschland politik*, Band 9 (German Federal Republic, Bundministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, Bonn, February 1972).

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the Federal Republic and Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. Brandt's policy, which emerged during his meeting with Brezhnev at Oreanda in the Crimea in September 1971, was to offer the Soviet Union the prospect of a deepened relationship with West Germany on condition that the Soviet leaders continued to bring pressure to bear on East Germany (21).

For a second time the Western strategy was successful. The treaty between the two Germanies, leaving unresolved the 'national question', was concluded in November 1972 (24). Soviet–West German relations expanded in response (27); a treaty normalising relations between West Germany and Czechoslovakia was signed in December 1973, as were also more limited agreements to enter diplomatic relations with Hungary and Bulgaria (30–32).

By the end of 1973 the Federal Republic's *Ostpolitik* was complete. What remained was the implementation of Brandt's promise to the West Germans, that is, the actual creation of better relations with East Germany, but that was no longer an 'international' question. With the official recognition by the Western powers of the post-war *status quo*, and with the decision by the Federal Republic to recognise East Germany and the borders surrounding it, and to leave West Berlin a protected enclave in the centre of East Germany, the territorial situation in the centre of Europe had been stabilised. Indeed there was probably no more stable set of borders in all of Europe. Given that stability, and so long as they remained independent states, the relationship between the two Germanies was no longer a question with wide ramifications. At least for the time being, the German question had been converted by the *Ostpolitik* into a question for the two German states alone.

Although it had taken two years to formalise this settlement, and although the Western use of linkage had presumably implied the possibility of setbacks, the prospect of a new stability in European relations was already, by the end of 1971, affecting great-power diplomacy. Indeed, the implications of intra-European stability for a super-power detente were recognised almost at once. It is unlikely, for example, that the United States government would have felt free to elaborate such a wide-ranging policy of 'engagement' during the Moscow summit meeting in June 1972, without the stability implied by the Berlin agreements and the Federal Republic's ongoing *Ostpolitik*. Once a European, or at least a German, settlement was in sight, certain benefits, particularly of strategic superiority, could be safely foregone. By the time a treaty between the two German states had actually been achieved at the end of 1972, both sides could agree, as they did during Brezhnev's visit to the United States in the following June, to do their utmost to prevent nuclear war (65).

Throughout the post-war period, Europe had always been the theatre where a nuclear war was most likely. In a sense, it was precisely the super-power freedom to threaten a nuclear exchange over Europe which had imparted, through the mechanism of deterrence, a paradoxical and precarious stability to the unresolved and hence intrinsically unstable European settlement. But with the international acceptance of the two Germanies, the ability of the United States and the Soviet Union to threaten, which had so long held this European instability in place, no longer *had* to be maintained at the cost of their mutual antagonism. There were of course other reasons

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besides Europe for Soviet–American tension, but with their traditional battleground neutralised, there was for the first time the prospect of a super-power condominium; the outstanding question to be settled concerned the rules of the game between them, and for the first time the opportunity existed to establish such rules on an essentially bilateral basis.

In a characteristically American fashion, the Nixon administration opened the bidding on this issue with a policy of ‘positive engagement’, which aimed at providing an overall ‘structure of peace’. The Grand Design has been a recurrent theme of American diplomacy ever since the United States self-consciously accepted the responsibility of international management after 1945. Whether this latest version was more than presentation, or rather a way of making political capital out of the dubious inheritance of some of the policies of the previous administration, is an open question. In any event, no ‘structure of peace’ could in fact be built merely on the basis of a German settlement. The cold war had always centred on Germany but never been confined there. Thus before there could be any wider normalisation of international relations, two other legacies of the cold-war period had to be dealt with. These were respectively the international status of the People’s Republic of China and the Vietnam war.

Although in its new strategy the Nixon administration claimed a link between the China and Vietnam questions, and indeed was right to do so in the sense that from 1949 onwards American policy-makers had consistently regarded the spread of communism as *the* major problem in Asian politics, their implications for great-power relations were nonetheless quite different. While American hostility to the Chinese communist regime has its own domestic history which goes a long way towards explaining the annual veto of Chinese membership of the United Nations, it is nonetheless possible to argue that during the cold war, China had also been a victim of a genuine Western confusion between Soviet actions in Europe and the effects of a worldwide confrontation between ‘communism’ and the ‘free world’. After all the Sino-Soviet dispute only finally emerged into full public view in the early 1960s while in the formative years of the cold war the two communist powers had seemed to follow parallel and indeed concerted policies.

This kind of argument cannot be advanced so easily in the case of Vietnam, particularly after 1963 when not only was the administration fully aware of the depth of Sino-Soviet differences, but elsewhere in the third world United States policy had been modified to accommodate both neutrality in the cold war and, within limits, anti-Western nationalism. But although in 1960 President Kennedy had broken, at least so far as his public utterances were concerned, with the moral fundamentalism of the Dulles era, in Vietnam his administration both accepted the anachronistic legacy of Dulles’ ‘undifferentiated globalism’ and fatally escalated American involvement. In doing so they not only committed the country to a long and debilitating war, which as it turned out the United States could not win, but also seriously limited their capacity to pursue any wider East–West disengagement, including any normalisation of relations with Peking. Originally, therefore, Presi-

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dent Nixon's proposed 'structure of peace' was not so much a structure of mutually dependent parts, as he claimed, as an umbrella hastily erected in order to rationalise and make coherent what had previously been incoherent and misconceived policies.

It became a genuine structure, however, as the administration pursued two separate but related goals. The first involved ending 'with honour' the war in Vietnam, a goal which was dictated both by an increasingly insistent domestic opposition and by the virtually complete absence of any support from the United States' European allies. Its purpose was to free American policy from the quagmire of subtle dependencies into which an unjustifiable war had thrust it, and so allow the United States a freedom of movement on a global scale which secure borders in Europe were to provide across the European divide. The second, a continuation of the first, lay in reviving America's 'Chinese connection'.

Ending the war in Vietnam appeared to American policy-makers to require a normalisation of Sino-American relations, initially with the limited aim of persuading Peking to put pressure on Hanoi. In this it singularly failed. But by the time it became clear that this limited objective would not be achieved, the admission of the People's Republic into the respectable comity of nations had achieved an importance far outweighing the specific issue of Vietnam. In the new post-cold-war context the Nixon administration conceived a role for China, in which Chinese policy would constitute an opposite pillar to America along the Pacific basin, thus supporting the 'structure of peace' in a parallel manner to the constructive opposition of Soviet and American policies 'over' Europe. In the event, the outcome of Nixon's Chinese diplomacy was considerably more modest than suggested by this somewhat grandiose conception or the disproportionate effort that the American administration expended on its relations with Peking. Indeed, from one point of view, the initiative by the United States could be said to have backfired; little more was accomplished than to place its ally, Japan, in a difficult position *vis-à-vis* detente (see II.B(c)).

But on one point at least, the Chinese action probably did have a bearing on the super-power detente. Ironically, the People's Republic was converted into the foremost supporter of the NATO alliance, the opening to the West reflecting the continued deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the East.

Although in retrospect it may seem that the conclusions which the Chinese leaders drew from the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia marked a turning-point in the development of Chinese foreign policy, from the public record it is not clear that any fundamental change occurred in the structure of Sino-Soviet relations between 1968 and 1975, and for this reason the exchanges between two states have not been documented in this volume. On the other hand there is no doubt that the gulf between them was further deepened, and Chinese fears confirmed, by the border fighting along the River Ussuri in March 1969. In this case the two sides eventually agreed to hold ministerial negotiations on the boundary; but these were inconclusive and the issue remained unresolved since the Chinese continued to insist that the boundary with the Soviet Union had been imposed on China by Tsarist Russia

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in a series of unequal treaties during the nineteenth century, and therefore required wholesale negotiation, and more generally that the Soviet leadership had embarked upon expansionist policies in Asia as well as Europe.¹

Against this background the American initiatives were bound to be viewed with suspicion by the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1972 it was rumoured that the Soviet government came close to cancelling the summit meeting planned for June in protest against the American mining of Haiphong Harbour the previous month.² It may reasonably be inferred that their eventual decision to go ahead with the meeting was influenced by the prospect of the United States and China elaborating a special relationship on the basis of the communiqué issued at the end of President Nixon's visit to China in February (39), before the basis of an understanding between the super-powers themselves had been achieved. Within this limited context, then, there appeared to be a genuine dependency between the various elements of the American policy. The United States played off its Far East policy, more by luck than by design, against its relations with the Soviet Union, to assure that the modalities of ending the 'phoney war' did not in fact impede the super-power dialogue. With the ending of the American involvement in the Vietnam war (37) the last vestige of the extended cold war was disposed of. Whether, in the more fluid diplomatic setting that now existed, the emerging detente between all the major powers could be made to yield a new international order – the declared aim of the American design – remained to be seen.

The diplomacy of detente

If the German settlement, the American withdrawal from Vietnam, and a new United States relationship with China underpinned, in varying degrees, the opportunities for super-power engagement, the preparatory debates leading to this engagement were in turn to set the stage for the process of European detente which was to follow it. Although the ending of the cold war freed the super-powers from the need to channel their own bilateral relations through Europe, it neither divested them of European interests nor provided the European powers with a similar freedom in East–West relations. In other words, a new concept of purely European security did not follow automatically from the stabilisation of the *status quo* in the centre of Europe. Not only might the European dialogue never have occurred, but the fact that it did occur owed more to specific concerns of the super-powers in their relationship to one another, than to any new freedom of action in Europe.

1 On the development of the Sino-Soviet dispute, see John Gittings (ed.) *The Sino-Soviet Dispute 1956–63* (London, 1964), and *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute: a commentary and extracts from the recent polemics* (London, 1968). For the exchanges on the Ussuri border incident, see statements by the Soviet government, 29 March, 13 June 1969 (*Soviet News* 1 April, 17 June 1969), and statements by the Government of the People's Republic of China, 24 May, 7, 8, October 1969 (*Peking Review* 30 May, 10 October 1969).

2 For the text of President Nixon's address on American radio and television on 8 May 1972 in which he announced this decision, see *DSB*, 29 May 1972 pp. 747–50.

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It was super-power concerns which not only made a dialogue including the Europeans necessary but which determined the framework and ultimately the outcome of that dialogue.

In a fundamental sense this interweaving of the two detente exercises reflected the fact that unlike the United States, the Soviet Union was, after all, a European as well as a super-power. The Soviet Union and its allies had renewed and indeed intensified pressure for a generalised European security conference (91) aimed both at legitimising the existence of an Eastern bloc and at achieving an agreed set of guidelines on relations between the blocs. These proposals were rejected by the NATO alliance which put forward a counter-proposal aimed at silencing them (95). The Western proposal was for specific security guarantees which would result from negotiations between the two blocs on force reductions, a proposal which in turn the Soviet Union would not accept (96). The two levels of negotiations (i.e. those on Mutual Balanced Force Reductions – MBFR – and the proposed European Security Conference – ESC) into which the issue of European security was to be channelled at the end of 1972, were initially counter-proposals, contrary and mutually exclusive. It became clear that any specifically European detente was likely to be checked by a dispute between the Soviet Union and the Western powers concerning the precise subject-matter of any negotiations which might take place between them.

The break in the ensuing deadlock was foreshadowed in the winter of 1970–1 during the preliminary manoeuvring over the question of talks between the two super-powers on strategic arms limitation (SALT). Since the United States had first proposed some form of limitation talks in the late 1960s, negotiations had been impeded – indeed the negotiations scarcely got off the ground – by the Soviet refusal to consider anything less than the total strategic deployment against it, and in particular the existence of forward-based missiles in Europe. Then, in late March 1971, without any apparent warning, the Soviet Union changed its policy on MBFR (99) and the United States responded by announcing, in two statements on 17 and 20 May, what amounted to a compromise (100 and 49). It now appeared that the Soviet Union would agree to some form of MBFR negotiations, and by implication treatment of forward-based missile systems within that context, while SALT would concentrate on anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) systems and some form of strategic arms limitation. In other words, the Soviet Union committed itself to discussing force reductions in Europe as the means of achieving what it could not achieve in SALT, while the United States, if it had not been entirely serious up to that point in proposing the MBFR talks, now accepted their necessity as the means of ensuring that SALT might proceed without sacrifice to the interests of Alliance defence. The results of this compromise were SALT I, the first-stage strategic arms limitation agreements, which were signed at the Moscow summit in May 1972 (55) and a long-term and less specific understanding that the two sides would enter into negotiations for some form of mutual force reductions in Europe (58).

If the dialogue with the United States had forced the Soviet government to a

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commitment to negotiate on force reductions in Europe, the contrary commitment by NATO to a security conference was slower to evolve. Having implicitly abandoned force reductions as a precondition of their participation in a security conference (since these talks were now to occur anyway) the alliance insisted on a successful conclusion to the Berlin negotiations as a further and explicit precondition, thus again postponing their final decision. The Western powers also pressed the Soviet government for an early start to the force reduction talks by announcing their intention to appoint a NATO ambassador to them and making it clear that they wished to see them under way before they committed themselves finally on the ESC (101). But the grounds on which the postponement was justified also implied that once the Berlin agreements had been concluded, the alliance would have to adopt a more positive attitude towards the conference, as was recognised, for example, by United States Secretary of State Rogers in his speech to the Overseas Writers' Conference at the beginning of December 1971.¹ The final NATO agreement appeared in a ministerial meeting communiqué the following May (102).

Having finally accepted that the question of European security should be handled in two separate sets of negotiations, the Western allies appeared anxious to establish a direct link between them, the tactic they had already employed successfully over Germany. On the same day that the American government accepted the Finnish invitation to participate in the ESC,² the alliance issued an invitation to the Warsaw Pact countries to begin the MBFR talks (103). By implication it made the beginning of each set of negotiations, and subsequently perhaps their progress, dependent on the other. But although, in December 1972, the NATO Council 'reaffirmed their view that progress in each set of the different negotiations would have a favourable effect on the other',³ and it was rumoured that a link would be made explicit, none appeared. Indeed a Security Conference document was to be completed and implemented before any substantive progress was recorded in the MBFR talks (cf. 104 and 107).

The first reason for this lay in the implication of the super-power detente for the European balance of forces. As the prospect of nuclear war in Europe receded, the European balance came increasingly to depend on conventional armaments and the number of troops deployed by each side.⁴ Secondly, during 1973, i.e. even before the changed status of the European balance had been generally acknowledged, a subtle reversal of positions occurred. This reversal cannot be directly documented but it was reflected in the increasing attention which the NATO allies paid to the ESC and the Soviet Union to the MBFR talks. On the one hand NATO came to regard the ESC, rather than force reductions, about the prospects of which they were increasingly dubious, as the best mode for overcoming the rigidity of inter-bloc relations. On the other, the Soviet government increasingly came to regard

1 For text, see *DSB*, 20 December 1971, pp. 694–5.

2 For the text of the American note to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 16 November 1972, see *DSB*, 4 December 1972, p. 660.

3 Communiqué of the NATO Council, Brussels, 8 December 1972. For text, see *DSB*, 1 January 1973, pp. 1–4.

4 See below, pp. 12–14.