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Intersubjectivity and Regimes:
A Case Study of Détente

Grant Littke

The period between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the 1970s is commonly referred to as the Cold War era in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. While there is much disagreement as to what the term 'Cold War' signifies, and to whether it is accurately used to describe the entire 1945–1970 period, there is general consensus that Soviet-American relations throughout this period were characterized by intense rivalry and conflict on both ideological and geopolitical planes. Incidents like the Berlin crises and the Cuban missile crisis brought the two nations close to nuclear war, and the relationship outside of specific crisis periods was marked by high tension, mutual suspicion and entrenched hostility.

During the first term of U.S. President Richard Nixon, the relationship began to change. Efforts were intensified by both sides to search out bases for a new relationship of relaxed tensions amid ongoing rivalry and conflict. This era, commonly referred to as that of 'détente,' was marked by very frequent contacts between the two states at all bureaucratic levels, a series of consultations and agreements in previously under- (or un-) explored issue areas like trade and the environment, and an unprecedented set of negotiations and agreements (like SALT I and the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War) that sought to define a new, less hostile and more collaborative relationship on issues of geopolitics and military strategy.

Détente was not seen as a condition of harmony and friendship between the United States and the Soviet Union, but instead as one in which each state recognized that its own foreign policy and security interests were best served by a less confrontational bilateral relationship. Détente was not seen as ending Soviet-American conflict and rivalry, but instead as

providing a framework of norms and rules that would serve to restrain the foreign policy behaviour of each so as to minimize the risks of crisis escalation and nuclear confrontation. Restraint in the pursuit of one's own interests, and a recognition of the scope and validity of the interests of the other, were seen to be the benchmarks for the success of détente.

The era of détente was shortlived. By the late 1970s, and certainly by the beginning of the first administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1981, the American-Soviet relationship had been altered to one resembling that of the Cold War. Tensions were again high, mutual suspicion of the intentions of the other had vastly increased, and it was widely perceived in the United States that the Soviet Union had taken advantage of decreased American vigilance during the détente era to advance Soviet (at the expense of American) interests, particularly in the Third World.

At the level of an examination of the rise and fall of détente, the ambitions of this article are not novel. Détente has been studied extensively in the academic literature, and its policy implications have been carefully scrutinized. While this article draws considerably upon the existing literature, its originality lies in the particular theoretical questions examined. These are derived from the growing literature on security regimes, with particular reference to the work of Stephen Krasner, Oran Young and Robert Jervis. These authors (and many others) have begun to conceive of international relationships as being shaped by shared understandings of principles, norms and rules appropriate to that set of relations. Not all relationships rest on these kinds of shared understandings, and those relationships that do (characterized here as "regimes") differ widely in the scope and resilience of the principles, norms and rules in question. What the regime concept does is to highlight the extent to which (and the means by which) understandings of principles, norms and rules come to be shared in international politics, and the ways in which these shared understandings shape international relationships, in a way not captured by most of the extant literature on international organization and governance. Regime analysis thus helps to explicate the patterned and relatively stable nature of these relationships, in the absence of formalized organizations and mechanisms of governance. If, as this article argues, détente can be characterized as a regime (albeit a fatally flawed one), attention will be focussed on aspects of détente previously underexamined (i.e., the principles, norms and rules that constituted détente), and to the lessons of the failure of détente for the creation of other regimes concerned with security issues.

Conceived in these terms, the salient features of détente become the

principles, norms and rules that constitute it, and the primary questions that emerge from an historical examination of détente are: "To what degree were understandings of these principles, norms and rules shared by the relevant parties?"; "What were the ramifications of adherence to them for the foreign policy behaviour of the states involved?"; "To what extent were they adhered to?"; and "Are the sources of regime decay to be found in the deficiencies of the principles, norms and rules themselves, in the record of adherence to them, or elsewhere in the regime?"[1] The conclusions of such an examination of 'détente as regime' are relevant to an understanding of the history of détente, to a discussion of the potential for its reconstitution, and to a theoretical understanding of regimes.[2] The path followed by this article to those conclusions is that of an examination of the existing theory of security regimes, a historical overview of the détente era, and a final section that draws the analysis together so as to highlight the relevant conclusions.

Regimes

What is a regime, and how does it come to be?

The starting point of any discussion of regime theory is Stephen Krasner's classic definition. In his words, regimes are composed of "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area."[3] While this stands as the most commonly used definition in the literature, other authors have offered modified versions that highlight other features. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, writing in *Power and Interdependence*, referred to "sets of governing arrangements," rooted in "networks of rules, norms and procedures that regularize behavior and control its effects."[4] Oran Young, in "Regime dynamics," suggests that

Regimes are social institutions governing the actions of those interested in specifiable activities (or meaningful sets of activities). As such they are recognized patterns of practice around which actor expectations converge.[5]

Taken together, these definitions highlight a number of the features of regimes. First, they are governing arrangements that are either implicitly or explicitly constituted. The traditional study of governance in international relations has focussed on formal international organizations, their features, merits, demerits, and records of success or failure in bringing order and stability to international relationships. The concept of a regime broadens this focus. While many international organizations would fit the Krasner definition as explicit regimes, numerous other international

relationships exhibit regularized behaviour in the absence of international organizations. Moreover, these relationships can be seen to be guided by shared understandings of a set of principles, norms and rules. And finally, these understandings are shared frequently on only an implicit level. The concept of regime captures the essential similarities of these seemingly disparate kinds of relationships, and highlights the extent to which governance (the control and regularization of behaviour) can be seen to be an element of relationships far beyond the purview of international organizations.

Similarly, regime theory differs from traditional realist theory and the realist's exclusive focus on the exercise of power as the arbiter of relations between states. Regime theory suggests that there are shared understandings of principles, norms and rules to which actors adhere, and according to which they constrain their behaviour, in ways that a power-centric analysis would be hard pressed to explain. The concept of power is not discarded by regime theorists, nor is the germinal role played by the exercise of power in some international relationships ignored. But it is claimed that actors party to regimes will restrain and direct their exercise of power in conformity with the norms and rules of the relevant regime.

The second feature of the regime definitions to be examined is the focus on "principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures." Regimes embody ideologically-rooted, common understandings of accepted conduct in relation to particular issues. These understandings have normative, regulatory and procedural dimensions. Adherence to a regime implies that an actor will be constrained and guided in its behaviour by the principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures that constitute that regime.

Most theorists would distinguish between the four components of regimes (principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures) according to their degree of specifity (with principles seen as the most general and decision-making procedures the most specific). Stephen Krasner adds some qualitative distinctions when he defines principles as "beliefs of fact, causation and rectitude," norms as "standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations," rules as "specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action" and decision-making procedures as "prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice."[6] Krasner further distinguishes principles and norms from rules and decision-making procedures by arguing that the first two constitute the goals of the regime, and the latter group, the means to be employed. In his words, "[c]hanges in rules and decision-making procedures are changes within regimes," while "[c]hanges in principles and norms are changes of the regime itself."[7]

This latter quote from Krasner, while reinforcing the means/ends distinction described, also points to the centrality of principles and norms in regime analysis. In Krasner's words, principles and norms "are the critical defining characteristics of any given regime."[8] A regime does not exist in the absence of shared understandings of appropriate principles and norms in relation to the issue-area in question. An understanding of a regime needs to begin with an examination of the principles and norms that underpin it.

It is on this basis that regime analysis begins to depart from the behaviouralist and positivist methodologies of structural realism. Donald Puchala and Raymond Hopkins describe regimes as 'attitudinal phenomena,' thus placing the focus squarely on the subjective understandings of actors of the regimes of which they are a part.[9] Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie identify the failure of most regime analysts to grasp the implications of the subjectivity of regime principles and norms as one of the most central deficiencies of the existing regime literature.[10] Schooled in structural realism, most regime analysts examine regimes as reified structures — divorced from an analysis of the subjective interpretations of those regimes to which their members adhere. An understanding of the principles and norms constitutive of a regime rests on an analysis of the web of intersubjective meanings of that regime for its members. Attention is turned from an analysis of 'regime as structure' to the actors which make up that regime, their intentions, understandings and expectations, and the degree to which meanings of that regime are intersubjectively shared.[11]

The third feature of regime definitions is that of the convergence of actor expectations.[12] This convergence (or, in other words, the process of regime creation) can occur in a variety of ways. Two of these are of direct relevance to an examination of Soviet-American détente. The first, labelled by Krasner as 'emergence' and by Young as 'spontaneous,' occurs when regimes are the product of patterns of interaction between actors that have given rise to expectations of continued adherence to the same patterns. Such regimes emerge out of past patterns and practices, and embody the norms and rules that are expected to continue to guide that relationship. In Young's words, spontaneously created regimes "do not involve conscious coordination among participants, do not require explicit consent on the part of subjects or potential subjects, and are highly resistant to efforts at social engineering."[13] An emergent, or spontaneous, regime is thus an organic product of a particular pattern of actoral interaction.

The second route to regime creation is labelled by Young as "nego-

tiated orders." In Young's words, "[t]hese are regimes characterized by conscious efforts to agree on their major provisions, explicit consent on the part of individual participants, and formal expression of the results."[14] They are the product of a deliberate strategy of regime creation on the part of the actors directly involved.

Young does not distinguish between 'principles and norms' and 'rules and decision-making procedures' in his discussion of negotiated orders. Yet, it does not seem plausible that regime participants could negotiate shared understandings of beliefs and of rights and obligations. It is entirely plausible that the specific rules and decision-making procedures of a regime could be arrived at through bargaining, but it is more likely that the principles and norms of a regime will emerge in a manner resembling Young's "spontaneous" path to regime creation.

Understood as applying only to the development of consensus as to rules and decision-making procedures, Young's concept of a negotiated regime is very powerful. One need only contemplate the major examples of contemporary regimes (e.g., the Convention on the Law of the Sea, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) to observe the creation of negotiated regimes. Yet, the regimes so created have been the product of very different kinds of historical processes. In coming to conceptual terms with this diversity, Young distinguishes two types of negotiated regimes that are of interest here: comprehensive regimes and piecemeal regimes. The first is fairly self-explanatory—the parties to the regime set about negotiating the rules of a regime governing all aspects of their interaction in a given issue-area.

Piecemeal regimes, on the other hand, serve to govern only a small segment of interaction within the relevant issue-area. Any given issue-area may exhibit several piecemeal regimes, and these regimes may eventually be aggregated into a comprehensive regime. Yet there are likely to remain large areas of interaction outside of the piecemeal regime framework, "leaving many problems to be worked out on the basis of practice and precedent."[15] Young suggests that piecemeal regimes, while potentially less intellectually satisfying to those concerned with regime formation (because of their fragmented and seemingly incomplete nature), are more likely to be successfully created than comprehensive regimes because of the problems of building consensus on a comprehensive basis. It is much more difficult to reach agreement across an issue-area than within smaller segments of it.[16]

The final element of the regime definitions to be examined is that of regimes being confined to "given issue-areas." Regimes can arise in re-

lation to issues across the spectrum of international relations. While it is conceivable that a single regime might serve to govern behaviour in more than one issue-area, it is more plausible that a single cluster of principles, rules, norms and decision-making procedures will develop in relation to a single issue-area.

Security Regimes

Most of the theoretical literature on regimes to date has dealt explicitly with regimes as components of the international political economy. Trade regimes, monetary regimes, resource exploitation regimes and the like have been of primary interest, both as case studies and as areas for policy prescription. A key question is the extent to which this theory is transferable to the realm of security issues.

The first issue to be addressed is what is meant by 'security.' In conventional terms, 'security' issues are understood to be issues of war, peace and diplomacy. While a distinction between these kinds of issues and those of a more economic, social or environmental hue is commonly made in contemporary international relations, a cursory examination of the history of conflict and war reveals the frequent linkage between many wars and contemporaneous economic and social issues.

Barry Buzan helps to sharpen the understanding of the concept of security when he defines it as the state of absence of fear, threat and vulnerability.[17] Viewed in these terms, it is evident that the most acute source of fear and vulnerability for actors in international politics is military threat, and that the most commonly used means of redressing these fears and vulnerabilities is military strategy and diplomacy. Moreover, these issues are generally treated separately from economic and social issues by policy-makers. Security regimes will thus be confined to issue-areas of military and diplomatic significance for the actors involved. They may coexist with economic, environmental, social and other types of regimes involving the same members, but they will remain analytically and empirically distinct.[18]

Yet, this distinction between security and other kinds of regimes does not shed much light on the question of the transferability of regime theorizing from economic to security issues. A partial answer to the transferability question begins with an understanding that inherent in the concept of regimes is an assumption that actors party to them will retrain their behaviour in a reciprocal fashion. It is assumed that all parties will be guided by the agreed norms and rules such that the ends of the regime are served. An actor so guided becomes vulnerable, in that in the interest

of securing the benefits of the regime it has curbed its capacity to make independent decisions and to pursue short term interests at the expense of other regime members. If other parties to the regime do not behave as expected, and act in violation of the norms and rules of the regime, those that continue to respect the regime will be left vulnerable.

When the issues at stake are primarily economic, defection from a regime may result in serious damage to those who continue to cooperate. When it is security issues that are at stake, defection might result in the devastation of those injured, if not in outright annihilation. The degree of vulnerability involved in curbing one's independence of decision-making in relation to security concerns is much greater than in relation to economic issues. In the absence of a supernational authority with enforcement capabilities, states are likely to be much more concerned with minimizing their vulnerability before entering a security regime than before entering economic regimes. In this context, Charles Lipson suggests that "prudent states are reluctant to cooperate with adversaries unless they can monitor with confidence, prepare in time to meet a prospective defection, and circumscribe the arrangements to minimize vulnerability."[19]

In relation to the problem of vulnerability, there is thus a quantitative difference between economic and security regimes centering on the degree of confidence states would require before agreeing to constrain their behaviour in accordance with the demands of a regime. The threshold level of confidence could be expected to be much higher in the case of security regimes. From this two propositions can be derived. In order for a security regime to emerge between conflictual adversaries, confidence-building measures need be in place to bring the mutual level of confidence up to the threshold point.[20] A complementary proposition is that stable security regimes will incorporate more extensive verification and information-gathering mechanisms than will economic regimes.

A crucial issue in the examination of security regimes is highlighted by Robert Jervis in his discussion of the 'security dilemma.' According to Jervis, "many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others."[21] An actor that seeks to increase its security through an enhancement of its military capabilities risks being perceived as a threat to the security of its rivals. This is especially true if it is difficult to distinguish between offensive and defensive postures, in that rival actors will feel threatened if they perceive those enhanced capabilities as having offensive potential. This problem is exacerbated by pre-existing tension and hostility in a given relationship, in that rivals are more likely to assume the worst of the intentions of the other if the level

of hostility and suspicion is already high. The dilemma, then, arises when defensive measures taken to enhance security are perceived by others as threatening.

While the existence of the security dilemma adds another quantitative (if not qualitative) distinction to be made between economic and security regimes,[22] it also points to a crucial issue in determining which security relationships are amenable to regime creation. The security dilemma will be near-unavoidable in a relationship of zero-sum conflict, in which the enhancement of the interests of one party necessarily comes at the expense of its adversary or adversaries. In such cases, there is no ground for a shared understanding of principles and norms that will serve as the basis for rules designed to restrain and regularize the behaviour of the adversaries. Regimes cannot exist when a conflict is seen as zero-sum by the participants in it, and when the security dilemma is at its most acute.

Clearly, however, there are degrees of security dilemmas, and there are non-zero sum (or positive-sum) conflicts. In such cases, not only are regimes conceivable, but their coming into existence may serve to lessen the security dilemma by more clearly defining acceptable behaviour in that relationship, by improving channels of communication so as to reduce misperception, and by creating a standard against which conduct can be measured and intentions judged. If the latter leads to the conclusion that members of a regime are respecting their commitments and restraining their behaviour in a manner consistent with the regime, mutual confidence and the potential for enhanced cooperation will increase. In this manner, the security dilemma might continue to relax, confidence continue to rise, and a conflictual relationship continue to transform to one marked by low hostility and high degrees of cooperation.

It is with this discussion of regimes in mind that I now turn to a case-study of Soviet-American détente. The theory is used to illuminate certain aspects of the détente relationship, and the case-study is used to test, validate and/or modify the theory.

Détente

While relations between the United States and the Soviet Union waxed and waned in terms of the level of hostility and overt conflict between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the 1970s, the overarching pattern of that relationship remained one of enduring suspicion and enmity on the planes of both ideology and geopolitics. The dating of the beginning of the era of détente is a necessarily inexact activity, as détente represented a culmination of a number of trends that had been

emerging, and a number of events that were occurring in the years immediately before and after the change of decade. Moreover, there is no consensus among analysts as to which specific trends and events were even relevant, let alone central. The broad consensus, however, is that the *Ostpolitik* policies of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, the beginnings of progress in the U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (motivated in part by a mutual desire to limit or decrease military spending for reasons of domestic economics), Soviet relaxation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, the U.S. opening to China, and American desire to extricate itself from the Vietnam War, collectively created and reflected an environment in which mutual hostility was lessening, and bases for a new relationship were being sought.[23] Henry Kissinger adds one crucial element to an understanding of U.S. interest in détente. In reporting that in April 1970 President Nixon told Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobryin "that he was prepared to let bygones be bygones; the time had come to put U.S.-Soviet relations on a new basis,"[24] Kissinger suggests that Nixon was, in part, motivated by a desire to limit the expansion of Soviet influence through giving the Soviets a stake in the preservation of the international status quo.

Regardless of the dating of its origins (although there does seem to be consensus that détente came into being prior to 1972), détente was codified and proclaimed at the May 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit in Moscow. At that summit, after the signing of a myriad of other agreements (including, most significantly, SALT I), the two leaders signed the 'Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States and the U.S.S.R.' Otherwise known as the Basic Principles Agreement (or B.P.A.), this document enunciated a set of principles to guide the behaviour of the two states in their mutual relations and in relations with third parties. In the words of a 1973 *Pravda* editorial, "the signing of the [B.P.A.] marked a veritable breakthrough in the relationship of the two states and set the foundation for the development of their cooperation for the mutual benefit of both sides."[25] According to Adam Ulam, "the declaration could . . . be taken as a harbinger of more efficacious communication and a more civilized dialogue between the two superpowers than had ever existed since their joint struggle and victory over Germany and Japan."[26] In a press conference held immediately after the summit, then-National Security Adviser Kissinger suggested that the signing of the B.P.A. marked "the transformation from a period of rather rigid hostility to one in which, without any illusions about the differences in social systems, we . . . would try to behave with restraint and with a maximum of creativity in bringing about a greater degree of stability and

peace."[27]

An examination of the wording of the agreement reveals the bases of these considerable expectations. The preamble to the agreement outlined the Soviet and American "desire to strengthen peaceful relations with each other and to place these relations on the firmest possible basis," and suggested that they were "aware of the need to make every effort to remove the threat of war and to create conditions which promote the reduction of tensions in the world." In the first operative paragraph, it was agreed that they

will proceed from the common determination that in the nuclear age there is no alternative to conducting their mutual relations on the basis of peaceful coexistence. Differences in ideology and in the social systems of the USA and the USSR are not obstacles to the bilateral development of normal relations based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual advantage.

The second operative paragraph made clear that

the USA and the USSR attach major importance to preventing the development of situations capable of causing a dangerous exacerbation of their relations. Therefore, they will do their utmost to avoid military confrontations and to prevent the outbreak of nuclear war. They will always exercise restraint in their mutual relations, and will be prepared to negotiate and settle differences by peaceful means . . . Both sides recognize that efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, are inconsistent with these objectives.

The third operative paragraph suggested that "they will seek to promote conditions in which all countries will live in peace and security and will not be subject to interference in their internal affairs."[28]

Did the Basic Principles Agreement contain the kinds of principles and norms that would constitute the basis of a Soviet-American security regime? A cursory examination would suggest a positive answer. At the level of principles ("belief of fact, causation and rectitude," to use Krasner's formulation), the B.P.A. referred to removing the threat of war, peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty, equality, and non-interference in internal affairs. At the level of norms ("standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations"), the agreement speaks of preventing the development of situations capable of exacerbating their mutual relations, avoiding military confrontations, preventing nuclear war, exercising restraint in bilateral dealings, and promoting global conditions of peace, security and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. More specific rules and decision-making procedures were not spelled out in the B.P.A., but as it was labelled an agreement of principles, this is not

necessarily a flaw. The signing of the B.P.A. accompanied the signing of the first SALT agreement, and predated the signing of the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War (A.P.N.W.) and the renewal of SALT negotiations leading to SALT II. It is in the body of these other agreements that the codified rules of the emerging Soviet-American security regime are likely to be found. Specific rules regarding conduct in security issue-areas beyond the SALT agreements and the A.P.N.W. (e.g., Third World political crises) were never spelled out. Yet, calls to respect the sovereignty and independence of third states were not seen to require specific rules to be operationalized. While the implications of this lack of agreed rules are more fully examined forthwith, suffice it here to note that the principles and norms were seen to be sufficiently specific so as to, in Kissinger's words, "establish a standard of conduct by which to judge whether real progress was being made and in the name of which we could resist their violation."[29] The principles and norms enunciated in the B.P.A. seemed to indicate that a consensus had been achieved on the bases of a new kind of relationship between the two states: one that departed radically from that of the Cold War era.

An invocation of Kratochwil and Ruggie's concept of subjective understandings and intersubjective meanings, however, reveals a very different story. In the words of Richard Stevenson, "the main Soviet interpretation of détente is summarized in the concept of 'peaceful coexistence,' where states of differing social systems can compete without resort to war."[30] According to Coit Blacker,

the Soviets went to considerable lengths from 1972 to 1974 to emphasize that the détente relationship with the United States would "powerfully and materially" assist the cause of national liberation [in the Third World], precisely because it should serve to restrain U.S. power in pursuit of "counterrevolutionary aims" . . . Soviet spokesmen repeatedly stressed that the "international class struggle," the historically determined conflict between the forces of socialism and imperialism, would continue unabated, regardless of the status of the bilateral relationship between Moscow and Washington at any given time.[31]

Caldwell argues that the Soviets specifically defined détente so as not to entail restraint in ideological competition. He cites a speech of Soviet Communist Party Secretary M.A. Suslov in July 1972 in which Suslov warns:

A long and persistent struggle still lies ahead . . . in all our ideological work we must permit no weakening of any sort in the struggle against reactionary bourgeois ideology . . . the struggle becomes particularly acute in the area of ideology, an

area in which there is not and cannot be peaceful co-existence between socialism and capitalism.[32]

In sum, the essence of détente for the Soviet Union was peaceful coexistence, defined as a state of on-going competition for influence and ideological leadership, conditioned by mutual restraint in bilateral relations so as to avoid military confrontation. According to Blacker, "the Kremlin did not seek to mislead U.S. policymakers on this issue; in fact, it attempted to persuade Washington to accept and adjust to Moscow's view of the realities."[33]

The American understanding of détente was very different. According to Caldwell,

The whole discussion of détente in the United States, and perhaps in every industrialized, non-socialist nation, has centred on a simple, unfortunate question: can the Soviet Union be trusted? . . . But these questions share a fallacy of composition. They share an understandable but unfortunate expectation that détente somehow means the end of Soviet-American competition, or possibly even of rivalries.[34]

Kissinger, as National Security Advisor and the American most responsible for the negotiation of the Basic Principles Agreement, records in his memoirs that

the principles signed in Moscow affirmed the importance of avoiding confrontation; the need for mutual restraint; the rejection of attempts to exploit tensions in other areas to gain unilateral advantages; the renunciation of claims to special privileges by either country in any region (which we interpreted as a denial of the Brezhnev Doctrine); the willingness, on this basis, to coexist peacefully and to strive for a more constructive long-term relationship.[35]

While Kissinger's understanding of détente was considerably more nuanced than the view examined by Caldwell (Kissinger repeatedly describes détente as involving the relaxation of tensions in a relationship of on-going competition), he does indicate an interpretation of peaceful coexistence very different from that of the Soviet leadership.[36] When he speaks of "mutual restraint" and "the rejection of attempts to exploit tensions in other areas to gain unilateral advantages," Kissinger puts an interpretation on détente and peaceful coexistence that excludes the kind of ideological competition and support for national liberation struggles of which Blacker and Suslov speak. As George Breslauer describes it,

the Basic Principles Agreement contained the seeds of disillusionment. For unless both sides proceeded to explore, separately and collaboratively, the operational meaning of these abstractions and their applicability to concrete situations, those

principles would create either cynicism or false expectations of harmony.[37]

The post-1972 history of American-Soviet relations brought to fruition these seeds of disillusionment. The first major incident was the October 1973 war involving Egypt, Syria and Israel. After accepting the ceasefire called by the United Nations at the end of that war, Israeli forces continued to advance in an attempt to encircle the beleaguered Egyptian Third Army. Egypt called for aid in stopping the Israelis, the Soviets proposed a joint Soviet-American force to intervene and save the Third Army, and the United States refused. When the Soviets then indicated a willingness to intervene unilaterally, the United States vigorously denounced the suggestion, and indicated the depths of its displeasure by placing American forces on a full, global alert. Military confrontation between the superpowers suddenly became very likely if the Soviets carried out their intention of sending forces to Egypt. At that point, Egypt declined the offer of Soviet aid, and instead requested a United Nations peacekeeping force for the same purpose. The U.N. force was dispatched, Israel stopped its advance, and the crisis was defused.

According to Coral Bell, "during the crucial confrontation phase the vital interests of the United States and Israel evoked a clear indication that Washington would if necessary break the détente: that was the meaning of the strategic alert."[38] Ulam suggests that American indecisiveness prior to the alert, and discord among allies of the United States throughout the war and in its aftermath, demonstrated the essential weakness of the United States and of the Western alliance. In Ulam's words, "détente survived the October war, but from now on it would be in the Kremlin's view a different kind of détente, one requiring fewer constraints on its part."[39] While Bell and Ulam differ in their analyses of the specific impact of the October war on détente, both indicate that the war had fundamentally weakened the commitment to restraint on the part of the Soviet Union.

Breslauer points to Kissinger's post-war shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Syria as having the same effect. In May 1974, Kissinger successfully negotiated a disengagement agreement between the two states. Syria had been (particularly since President Sadat's expulsion of Soviet advisers from Egypt in 1972) the principal Soviet ally in the region. The Soviets, according to Breslauer, perceived Kissinger's diplomacy as an attempt to disrupt that relationship, and to bring Syria more within the Western orbit.[40] Breslauer argues that,

in Soviet eyes, this escalation of the competition was not a violation of the rules of détente, nor was it a cause for confrontation. It did suggest to them, however,

that Kissinger (1) was not interested in U.S.-Soviet Third World collaboration and (2) embraced a definition of restraint that did not preclude U.S. efforts to expel Soviet influence from countries in which the U.S.S.R. had invested heavily.[41]

It is significant that the Soviets did not see Kissinger's diplomacy as a violation of the rules of détente, but instead as consistent with its conception of peaceful coexistence. The natural conclusion was that the United States had come to share its understanding of the relevant rules. Thus the Soviet Union could, without fear of American accusations of violating those rules, practice a similar kind of diplomacy elsewhere in the Third World.

That this was not the American understanding of the meaning of détente was most decisively demonstrated in the events of the next several years. In debate on the Trade Reform Act that came before the U.S. Congress in 1974, Senator Henry Jackson introduced an amendment that denied 'Most Favoured Nation' status to any non-market economy state that restricted emigration. Clearly targetted at the Soviet Union and its emigration policy vis-à-vis Jews, the amendment was denounced by the Soviets as undue interference in their internal affairs and, as such, a violation of the first operative paragraph of the B.P.A. When the amendment was adopted, the Soviets announced that they would not abide by the terms of the U.S.-Soviet trade liberalization agreement signed at the 1972 Moscow Summit. At the same time as the debate on the Jackson amendment, Senator Adlai Stevenson introduced an amendment to the Export-Import Bank bill that seriously restricted the amount of credit available from the Export-Import Bank to the Soviet Union, on the same criteria as outlined in the Jackson amendment. The Stevenson amendment too was adopted, to cries of outrage from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet understanding of the kind of restraint entailed by détente was most decisively demonstrated in Angola. Following the 1974 revolution in Portugal, all Portuguese colonies in Africa were granted independence. There was no consensus within Angola as to indigenous political control of the country at the time of independence, and civil war between three major factions quickly followed. The Soviet Union provided material assistance, and authorized the dispatch of Cuban troops, to support the faction to which it was closest. In Soviet eyes, this support for a national liberation struggle was consistent with the interpretation of peaceful coexistence that they had been enunciating since the signing of the B.P.A. The United States (which was providing diplomatic and moral support, but not official assistance, to its allies in the struggle) greeted the Soviet action with vehement denunciations of Soviet intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and with the accusation that détente was being ridiculed in

the process.

Angola seriously shook Congressional and public support for détente within the United States. According to Bell, "of all the diplomatic crises of the détente period it was the one that provided most ammunition against the concept."[42] Soviet support for Marxist forces in the Ethiopian civil war of 1976 reinforced growing American hostility to détente. It was increasingly perceived that the United States was practicing restraint in its response to crises like those of Angola and Ethiopia, and that the Soviet Union was taking advantage of that restraint to advance its interests at the expense of the United States. On the Soviet side, Breslauer argues that

it seems quite plausible that the Soviets' escalation of competition was justified in their minds by the events of 1974 (i.e., the Middle East shuttles, and the Jackson and Stevenson amendments). Little economic incentive for restraint remained. And if Kissinger would make every effort to mobilize his political and economic leverage to exclude the Soviets from the Middle East, why could they not use their primary assets (Cuban forces and military supply) to exclude the United States from Angola and Ethiopia? The point is not that they were looking for revenge, but rather that they did not necessarily view their behavior as a violation of the spirit of détente.[43]

It is of little surprise, given these conflicting interpretations of détente and the resulting American disillusionment, that détente was effectively discredited in American eyes by the beginning of the administration of President Jimmy Carter in 1977. It is as difficult to date the end of détente (if not more so) than to date its origins (not least because neither side has ever disavowed the Basic Principles Agreement), but 'détente' had disappeared from the official American vocabulary used to describe the U.S.-Soviet relationship by the latter part of the Ford, and early part of the Carter, administrations. Despite the successful negotiation of the SALT II agreement in 1975, the refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the treaty dealt a serious blow to the relationship with the Soviet Union. The Soviet dispatch of troops to Afghanistan in 1979–1980 prompted such a virulent reaction in the United States (leading to the provision of aid by the United States to Afghan rebels) that détente was clearly dead.

While détente could not survive an American refusal to be bound by the terms of the B.P.A., it is significant that the Soviets never experienced a comparable process of disillusionment. As Breslauer and others have argued, the Soviets saw U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East and their own activity in Angola and Ethiopia as consistent with détente. They saw as a violation of détente the Jackson and Stevenson amendments, but the Soviet reaction to those amendments (the denunciation of the trade agreement)

did not reflect a changed understanding of the principles underlying the U.S.-Soviet security relationship. The Soviets saw as distressing American attacks on their behaviour in Angola and Ethiopia, but there is no evidence that Soviet understandings of détente principles, or of the rectitude of their own behaviour, changed in the process. Soviet spokespersons still describe détente as the necessary basis for superpower relations, and place all of the blame for the demise of détente as an operationalized concept on American unwillingness to abide by its principles.

Conclusions

The purpose of this analysis is not to point fingers or assign blame for the failure of détente, but instead to demonstrate that the subjective inter-pretations of the principles and norms of détente by American and Soviet policy-makers were widely divergent. In the words of George,

the Basic Principles document was only a pseudo-agreement. It gave an erroneous impression that the United States and the Soviet Union were in substantial agree-ment on the rules of the game and the restraints to be observed in their competition in third areas.[44]

The crucial difference between the two states was in their interpretation of peaceful coexistence and of non-interference in the affairs of other states.

In regime terms, détente did not emerge from a convergence of expec-tations around the key principles. The principles and norms of détente were not the "product of patterns of interaction between actors that have given rise to expectations of continued adherence to the same patterns." The Basic Principles Agreement enshrined the Soviet concept of peaceful coexistence, without any attempt to define it concretely. This lack of con-crete definition allowed the Americans to interpret the concept as being in accordance with their own understanding of mutual restraint in rela-tions with third states. No deception was involved: Blacker, Breslauer, George and others argue that the Soviets articulated their understanding of peaceful coexistence on numerous occasions prior to, and following, the signing of the B.P.A. The Americans seemed to seek to change the Soviet understanding (or at least Soviet practice) by invoking its understanding of restraint in relation to crises in third states and regions. The historical record of détente shows that there was no post-facto convergence around either the Soviet or the American understanding of the principles involved. Instead, there was mutual recrimination and disillusionment when the other side behaved in accordance with its own interpretation of those principles.

Was this a failure of the drafters of the B.P.A.? Could more concrete

definitions have been negotiated so as to avoid these differences? I would argue not. In Krasner's formulation, principles are beliefs of fact, causation and rectitude. The process of the attainment of the status of a belief by a concept is beyond the purview of this article to analyze. But it would seem both self-evident, and evident from the history of détente, that it is not a process of across-the-table negotiation. A regime emerges from a convergence of expectations (of the parties involved) around a set of principles commonly understood. To go back to the earlier discussions of emergent regimes, it is likely that these principles will come to be recognized from past patterns of interactions, and will underpin expectations of future adherence to those same patterns. Young suggests that this kind of convergence (labelled "spontaneous" by him) is "highly resistant to efforts at social engineering." In other words, such principles cannot be negotiated out of thin air as part of a conscious process of regime creation. They can only emerge as beliefs change and converge. Détente was doomed by the lack of commonly-understood principles upon which a regime could be built.[45]

It is significant to note that détente failed primarily over issues of relations with third states. The principles defining the U.S.-Soviet bilateral relationship proved less contentious and more enduring. The record of successful arms control negotiations during the détente era, and the signing of the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War, suggests that the bilateral security relationship had moved from one of zero-sum competition to one in which each recognized that its security was inextricably bound up with that of the other. Yet even this principled, common understanding was limited. Both states indicated during the October 1973 alert crisis that the risks of confrontation were potentially endurable in the interests of other issues of power, prestige, and bilateral relationships with third states. Bell argues that the U.S.-Israel relationship emerged (at least temporarily) as more important than the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Others would argue that the Soviet attempt to rebuild its relationship with Egypt (as evidenced by its offer to send troops to Egypt's aid even after the U.S. refusal to participate alongside) indicated a deeper Soviet commitment to its goals in the Middle East than to its relationship with the United States. Moreover, the Jackson and Stevenson amendments, while not tied directly to security issues, indicated that some American policymakers were prepared to inhibit the development of a closer bilateral relationship in the interests of internal Soviet human rights issues.[46] Despite these exceptions, there did seem to be a working Soviet-American security regime on bilateral issues.

One of the differences between this bilateral regime and the attempt to create a regime governing relations with third parties becomes evident in a discussion of the zero- and/or positive-sum nature of the conflicts between them. While the 1973 "alert crisis" was a prominent exception, there seemed to be a shared understanding of the necessity of avoiding military confrontation and nuclear war. This common normative understanding defined the bases of a positive-sum bilateral security relationship, and paved the way to the SALT agreements and the *A.P.N.W.* As long, however, as the Soviets continued to provide material support to national liberation movements, and as long as the Americans saw such support as detrimental to their own interests, the conflict over influence in the Third World remained zero-sum. Security for each on these issues was not bound up with the security of the other; it came at the expense of the other. Neither side, moreover, saw its policies as a violation of the Basic Principles Agreement. As long as these conflicts remained zero-sum, the potential for the establishment of a working security regime in relation to this type of conflict was nil.

It is perhaps ironic that the security dilemma, and the perceptions of threat from and vulnerability to the other side are most acute in relation to zero-sum conflict. The irony derives from the claim that, through regimes, security can be effectively enhanced and the security dilemma reduced. The rules and procedures of a regime, derived from the principles and norms on which that regime rests, will constitute the kind of standard of behaviour that Kissinger sought through détente. The enhanced ability to monitor, measure and predict behaviour produced by a regime will serve to reduce fear and a sense of vulnerability, and will permit more convincing distinctions to be made between threatening and non-threatening behaviour. Yet such a regime can only rest on a basis of shared understandings of principles and norms. In other words, the transformation of a conflict from zero-sum to positive-sum must occur prior to the creation of a regime. Conflicts that remain zero-sum are not amenable to amelioration by a regime. Thus, regime creation is not a useful tool for policymakers concerned with the initial stages of managing and lessening the most acute, threatening and dangerous conflicts with which they are faced.

The case of détente demonstrates the centrality of principles and norms as the defining characteristics of a regime (as suggested by Krasner), and of the necessity of understanding those principles and norms as being rooted in the web of intersubjective meanings shared by the relevant actors. Kratochwil and Ruggie are correct in their argument that regime analysis is of little utility if its methodology cannot penetrate this web, and come to

grips with the subjectivity of meanings. Yet, successful regime analyses—analyses that methodologically and conceptually (as well as empirically) capture the essential subjectivity of the principles and norms underpinning regime relationships—offer powerful insights into the actual and potential existence of governance in international relations.

ADDENDUM

This article is dedicated to the memory of Professor Rod Byers, in whose course the ideas and arguments herein originally took form.

ENDNOTES

1 This is intended as a representative, but not necessarily comprehensive list of the historical questions that are of relevance to this article.

2 One of the premises of this paper is that there is constant iteration between theory and history. History provides the testing ground on which we conceptualize, validate and reformulate theory, and a theoretical examination of historical events helps to deepen and provide nuance to an understanding of that history.

3 Stephen Krasner, "Structural causes and regime consequences: regimes as intervening variables," in *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 185.

4 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, in *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), p. 19.

5 Oran Young, "Regime dynamics: the rise and fall of international regimes," in *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 277.

6 Krasner, p. 186.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 187 and p. 188.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

9 Donald Puchala and Raymond Hopkins, "International regimes: lessons from inductive analysis," in *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982, p. 246.

10 See Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, "International organization: a state of the art on an art of the state," in *International Organization*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Autumn 1986, p. 764.

11 Kratochwil and Ruggie's shift of focus to subjective interpretations and shared understandings helps to address some of the most potent critiques levelled by Susan Strange at regime theory. Strange argues that "regime theory" (by which she means that kind of regime theory characterized here as structural realist") obscures the power relations and value biases of those relationships labelled as "regimes." Scrutiny of shared understandings of regime principles and norms helps to make transparent those biases and power relations, as attention will in-

evitably shift to the process of generating (or manufacturing) consensus around particular interpretations and understandings. See Susan Strange, "*Cave! hic dragones*: a critique of regime analysis," in *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1982.

12 'Expectations' is a deliberately vague term, as it can incorporate everything ranging from tacit understandings to explicit agreements. Agreements can be more or less formalized, and more or less institutionalized. The very vagueness of the term introduces a flexibility that provides much of the richness of the regime concept.

13 Young, p. 282.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 283.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Young does argue that these differing paths to regime creation are not exclusive. Any single regime may be the product of several different kinds of interaction and processes. For example, the gaps within an issue-area in the case of negotiated piecemeal regimes may be filled with a series of spontaneous regimes, which may in turn result in a comprehensive regime for the entire issue-area. The attempt to negotiate a comprehensive regime may prove too ambitious and end in failure, but in the course of the negotiations consensus may build on specific issues, resulting in a series of piecemeal regimes. Or participants in spontaneously created regime may, as they become conscious of that regime, enter into negotiations to clarify the terms, or expand the scope, of that regime.

17 Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 73. Buzan indicates that to speak of the absence of fear, threat and vulnerability is to indicate the realm of security. He rejects any attempt to impose a more precise or rigid definition on the concept, except in relation to specific cases. He instead finds richness and flexibility in the ambiguity of the term. See page 6 for Buzan's discussion of security as an 'essentially contested' concept.

18 This does not preclude the analyst from examining the essential similarities and mutually-reinforcing nature of distinct regimes, nor from commenting on the security ramifications of economic and social issues (and vice-versa). But it is also the responsibility of the analyst to penetrate the subjective meanings of regimes for their members, and to understand the kinds of distinctions drawn by policy-makers at that level.

19 Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," in *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 1, October 1984, p. 14.

20 By 'threshold' is meant the level of confidence at which actors will overcome their fear of vulnerability and enter into a regime relationship. Where such a point will be found is dependent on the actors and issues involved, the exigencies of the contemporaneous international environment, and subjective perceptions of the elements of risk. While it is therefore beyond the realm

of the theorist to specify the location and particulars of threshold levels of
confidence, the concept allows the theorist to point to a variable in regimes
that becomes crucial when speaking of the process and prospects of regime
creation.

21 Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," in *World Politics*,
Vol. 30, No. 2, January 1978, p. 169.

22 Whether this is a quantitative or qualitative distinction is unclear. The same
potential for confusion as to offensive or defensive intentions might prevail
in economic or other non-security relationships, but the lower costs of being
wrong, and the greater transparency of intentions in these other relationships
make the dilemma less acute.

23 This list was synthesized from factors cited by: Lawrence T. Caldwell, *Soviet-
American Relations: One-Half Decade of Détente Problems and Issues* (Paris:
Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1976), pp. 22–23; Helmut Sonnen-
feldt and William G. Hyland, "Soviet Perspectives on Security" in *Soviet For-
eign Policy in a Changing World*, edited by Robbin F. Laird and Erik P. Hoff-
man (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986), p. 242; and Harry Gelman, "The
Rise and fall of Détente: Causes and Consequences" in *U.S.-Soviet Relations:
The Next Decade*, edited by Arnold L. Lorelick (Ithaca and London: Cornell
University Press, 1986), pp. 56–58.

24 Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown
and Company, 1979), p. 554.

25 The August 30, 1973 editorial, entitled "Peaceful Coexistence and the Class
War," is quoted in Adam B. Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in
World Politics, 1970–1982* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press,
1983), p. 87.

26 Ulam, p. 82.

27 Quoted by Alexander George in "The Basic Principles Agreement of 1972:
Origins and Expectations," in *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis
Prevention*, edited by Alexander L. George (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983),
p. 113.

28 The complete text of the "Basic Principles of Relations Between the United
States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" can be found in
Détente: A Documentary Record, edited by Charles E. Timberlake (New York
and London: Praeger Publishers, 1978), pp. 28–29.

29 Kissinger, p. 1250.

30 Richard W. Stevenson, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in
U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1953–84* (London: MacMillan, 1985), p. 3.

31 Coit D. Blacker, "The Kremlin and Détente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes and
Expectations," in George, p. 127.

32 Quoted in Caldwell, p. 16.

33 Blacker, p. 127.

34 Caldwell, p. 55.

35 Kissinger, p. 1250.

36 Kissinger does not disavow ideological competition. He writes: "we were not
abandoning the ideological struggle, but simply trying . . . to discipline it by
precepts of national interest." (See *Years of Upheaval* [Boston and Toronto:
Little, Brown and Company, 1982], p. 237.) Yet when he speaks of "the
rejection of attempts to exploit tensions in other areas," he diverges sharply
from the Soviet understanding of détente as compatible with support for national
liberation struggles.

37 George W. Breslauer, "Why Detente Failed: An Interpretation," in George,
p. 322.

38 Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Détente: The Kissinger Era* (New York: St.
Martin's Press, 1977), p. 97.

39 Ulam, p. 112. Watergate figures prominently in Ulam's analysis of Soviet
perceptions of American weakness. As long as the Nixon administration was
pre-occupied by the events of Watergate, and as long as the administration was
inhibited from taking decisive action in response to Soviet moves because of
domestic discord and distrust resulting from Watergate, the Soviets felt free of
restraints in pursuing their foreign policy objectives.

40 A perusal of Kissinger's memoirs does little to disabuse this perception.

41 Breslauer, pp. 327–328.

42 Bell, p. 175.

43 Breslauer, pp. 328–329.

44 George, p. 110.

45 This also reinforces the suggestion made during the earlier discussion of Young
that his distinction between spontaneous and negotiated orders might not only
be a distinction between paths to the creation of discrete regimes, but also
serves as a basis for distinguishing between the creation of consensus around
principles and norms on one hand, and rules and decision-making procedures
on the other. As argued here, it is difficult to conceive of the negotiations
of principles and norms. It is more plausible that they will be the product of
emergence. It is also conceivable that rules and decision-making procedures
could spontaneously emerge. The most likely models, using Young's cate-
gories, are thus emergent principles and norms coupled with negotiated rules
and decision-making procedures (as with détente), and emergent regimes, in
which all elements are the products of spontaneous emergence.

46 This was a classic case of the interaction of security and non-security issues.
The direct linkage of human rights to trade issues, and the more amorphous
linkage of these issues to the broader bilateral security relationship became
evident as the debates (both within and without Congress) came to encompass
the entire basis of the détente relationship and its desirability.