



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

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TO : The Secretary  
FROM : PA - William D. Blair, Jr., Acting

Public Attitudes toward Negotiating  
with the Soviet Union

The public's desire to negotiate agreements with the Soviet Union and China has risen in recent months, despite misgivings about the benefits gained from past agreements. About three-fourths of the public (73%) now favor continued efforts to achieve detente, according to a Harris Poll released this month.

In late August, Harris again asked a question comparable to ones posed twice before:

"Do you favor or oppose the U.S. continuing to try to achieve detente -- that is, finding more ways to cooperate with Russia and China and to find areas of common agreement?"

	<u>August 1976</u>	<u>March 1976</u>	<u>December 1975</u>
Favor	73%	59%	62%
Oppose	16%	23%	15%
Not sure	11%	18%	23%

Large majorities of Americans in every major population group support efforts at detente, with relatively small differences among groups. Executives (79%) and professionals (76%) are more supportive than skilled workers (70%). College-educated persons (76%) are more in favor of attempts to reach agreements than people with only grade school education (69%). Liberals (80%) favor detente more than do



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conservatives (68%). But Republicans (74%) are about as supportive as Democrats (70%) and Independents (75%).

Responding to another question in the same Harris Poll, four-fifths of the public expressed support for a new agreement with the Soviet Union on strategic arms reductions. Respondents were asked whether they favored or opposed --

"... Trying to get agreement with Russia on a reduction of strategic nuclear arms and missiles."

	<u>August 1976</u>
Favor	80%
Oppose	10%
Not sure	10%

Increased support of negotiation has been accompanied by hardening of the public's resolve to maintain a strong posture in world affairs. As we recently reported, support of defense spending has risen to its highest level in recent years.

In the same Harris survey, 61 percent of the respondents expressed willingness to bear increased defense costs in order to ensure U.S. military superiority. And 63 percent favored "strengthening military security arrangements with our allies, such as NATO in Western Europe."

In order to understand the public's attitude toward detente, one must also distinguish between how it feels about the idea of seeking new agreements with the communist powers and how it feels about the agreements that have already been reached. Given the deep-seated distrust of the Soviet Union, many are prone to believe the Russians have either cheated or out-traded us on agreements that otherwise may have made good sense.

A Harris Poll in December 1975, for example, found widespread public acceptance of charges that the Soviet Union had not lived up to the terms of SALT I (49% versus 11%, with 40% "not sure"). Nevertheless, the same poll found that a majority (59% versus 14% with 27% "not sure") favored extending the SALT agreement to a new treaty controlling nuclear warheads.

A major problem faced by those negotiating with the Soviet Union, therefore, is that the public wants agreements but is very likely to be dissatisfied with the terms.

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