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Necessary Illusions: Misperception, Cooperation, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

ERIC GRYNAVISKI

A significant and growing body of literature related to security regimes focuses on the importance of either common knowledge or common norms to the success of efforts to limit military competition. This paper challenges this central pillar of the arms control literature. Security regimes, in particular arms control regimes, are not necessarily the product of common knowledge, norms, or shared identities. Rather, actors can and sometimes do cooperate because they do not fully understand one another and lack information. In these cases, examples of what I will refer to as “imagined intersubjectivity”—the mistaken belief that two actors share information, norms, and identities when in fact each has an idiosyncratic understanding—the lack of information is crucial for international cooperation. I analyze the record of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty negotiations. Through process-tracing, I will argue that three crucial moments in the negotiation process were premised on a misunderstanding of the position of the other party. The implications for cooperation without intersubjectivity are then explored.

To be sure, the international order had been founded on a misunderstanding and a misconception

—Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored*.

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Uncertainty and misperception—these words, perhaps more than any others, have come to characterize international politics. Many of our most robust theories of International Relations (IR) emphasize the importance of increased information and increased shared understanding in generating international cooperation. Liberal institutionalism and constructivism highlight the importance of information, shared meanings, and mutual understanding for cooperation. Institutions provide information to reduce uncertainty, facilitate efficient bargaining, and create norms to develop dependable behavioral expectations.¹ Misperception, on the other hand, is seen as a cause of conflict, leading to security dilemmas, overconfidence in capabilities, and misinterpretations of the importance of offensive and defensive weapons.² The intuition that guides these theories is that, similar to domestic economies and political systems, problems of information are surmountable. Political institutions, rules, and norms enhance information and establish shared meanings; communication overcomes misperceptions that stand as roadblocks to cooperation.

However, there are reasons to be suspicious of the claim that informational handicaps are often overcome. Despite the existence of international cooperation, it is likely that there is less information, fewer shared meanings and norms, and more misperception in the international system than in domestic systems. Agents usually communicate more within their own society than between societies, come from different cultural backgrounds, making mutual understanding difficult, and interact in a particularly noisy and messy system that makes the transmission of information hard. Thus, common knowledge or intersubjectivity (shared beliefs) appears to be less likely in an international system that contains a high level of pluralism (groups with fundamentally different views of the world).

Common knowledge, rather than pluralism, has been taken as the starting point for many theories of international cooperation because pluralism appears incapable of explaining cooperation. Hans Morgenthau argues that the division of the world into national communities prevents the development of a shared international culture and thus hinders international cooperation because leaders have more in common with their own peoples than with each other.³ Similarly, economic theory often predicts that inadequate information leads to a breakdown in cooperation because efficient bargaining depends on the ability of actors to predict the behavior of

¹ Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

² Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1973); and Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

³ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948), chaps. 16 and 17.

others.⁴ Further, constructivist social theorists often argue that intersubjectivity can promote cooperation by establishing patterns of interactions between states that constitute the basis of cooperation.⁵ Since the major traditions in IR maintain that misperception is a handicap to international cooperation, and because there is a high level of cooperation, this means that information obstacles must frequently be overcome.

The central contention of this paper is that, while in some cases misperception causes conflict and information leads to cooperation, in others, the inverse may be true. Complete information may lead to war, and misperception may lead to agreement. Misperception might not always be a roadblock that should be minimized; at times, it could be a necessary condition for gentler patterns of international conduct to take hold. As Robert Jervis, a prominent proponent of the role of misperception in war, notes: a “difficulty is that historians and political scientists are drawn to the study of conflict more often than to the analysis of peaceful interactions. As a result, we know little about the degree to which harmonious relationships are characterized by accurate perceptions.”⁶ In other words, IR theory amply demonstrates that misperception may cause conflict, but this means neither that cooperation is free from misperception nor that reducing misperception necessarily leads to cooperation. A pluralist world may permit cooperation in cases in which common knowledge may prevent deals from being reached.

This paper takes a first step toward theorizing pluralism by examining the hard case for a pluralist theory to explain—explicit cooperation between states. Does misperception, in some cases, enhance rather than diminish chances for cooperation? In brief, I argue yes, it is possible to form what French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing called “a superb agreement based on complete misunderstanding.”⁷ If actors are convinced they understand one another, cooperation can occur in cases where it might fail if they knew the interests, identities, and beliefs of others. The inaccurate belief that common knowledge, norms, or identities are shared, which I term *putative intersubjective beliefs* (PIBs), may be more productive in certain circumstances than more information, shared meaning, or shared international cultures. PIBs are illusions and, in certain cases, are necessary illusions for successful cooperation.

⁴ Keohane, *After Hegemony*.

⁵ Wendt, *Social Theory*.

⁶ Robert Jervis, “War and Misperception,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 68.

⁷ In Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press), 118.

This is a step beyond the familiar notion that states may overestimate the resolve or capabilities of others, reinforcing deterrence.⁸ Cooperation, understood as the explicit coordination of policies, usually taking the form of an international agreement, is often considered the product of an information-rich or meaning-rich environment. Cooperation, on this definition, is not the avoidance of war through concessions, as in the example of deterrence games or some bargaining models of war, but the explicit formulation of policies that intend to generate outcomes that improve the condition of both partners.⁹

Through a study of the negotiation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, this paper shows that PIBS enhance cooperation. I first detail the ways in which common knowledge (CK) and intersubjectivity are used in IR and how it conditions cooperation. Then, I outline a theory of PIBS and show that it was crucial to the negotiation of the 1972 ABM Treaty.¹⁰ The origins of PIBS are not discussed: many researchers, especially political psychologists, already highlight the origins of misperceptions. This argument instead traces the process through which misperceptions lead to cooperation.

I focus on the ABM Treaty because arms control agreements, especially the ABM Treaty, are taken to be paradigmatic of the important role of CK, increased information, or shared understandings for international cooperation. First, many rational choice scholars suggest that the ABM debate was an example of a Prisoner's Dilemma (PD). Both parties preferred mutual cooperation to mutual defection, and they created strategies designed to create common knowledge of a shadow of the future, enabling cooperation.¹¹ I argue, in contrast, that the superpowers understood the ABM differently. While Leonid Brezhnev believed the ABM was a PD, Henry Kissinger believed the superpowers both preferred mutual defection (no agreement) over mutual cooperation. Cooperation was possible only because of these different interpretations. Similarly, another standard interpretation of the ABM Treaty is that it was the product of mutual understanding of the link between offense and

⁸ Woosang Kim and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "How Perceptions Influence the Risk of War," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (March 1995): 51–65; and Janice Gross Stein, "Calculation, Miscalculation, and Conventional Deterrence I: The View from Cairo," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, eds., Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1985), 48–49.

⁹ Cf. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, *War and Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 102. This definition implies that cooperating in the Prisoner's Dilemma is not cooperating; the prisoners in separate cells do not have the ability to explicitly coordinate their actions.

¹⁰ This paper focuses primarily on rational choice treatments of CK at the expense of constructivist treatments of intersubjectivity, not because intersubjectivity is different in kind as the phrase putative intersubjective belief suggests, but only to focus the discussion.

¹¹ Andrew Guzman, *How International Law Works: A Rational Choice Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31–32; and Steven Weber, *Cooperation and Discord in U.S.-Soviet Arms Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

defense.¹² In contrast, I argue that political and strategic misperceptions, not an underlying strategic consensus, led each party to make critical concessions that were necessary to reach an agreement. Finally, the conventional interpretation of cooperation during détente maintains that superpower misperception existed but was counterproductive because it eventually poisoned the U.S.-Soviet relationship in the late 1970s.¹³ In contrast, I demonstrate that without misperceptions at the beginning of détente, cooperation may have never begun.

This is a hard case for a theory of PIBS to explain. If misperceptions played a necessary role in reaching the ABM Treaty, then it should lead us to question whether other episodes of cooperation often studied in international politics and presumed to be the result of shared information or intersubjectivity—from the European Monetary Union to the new U.S.-Russian arms control agreements—are the product of careful and patient diplomatic dialogue or are, as Kissinger described the decision to negotiate the ABM Treaty, a “first class blunder.”¹⁴ In the conclusion, I briefly explore the implications for negotiations and regime design that would follow if the latter were true.

COMMON KNOWLEDGE, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND COOPERATION

Common Knowledge (CK) is often, if not always, treated as a necessary condition for cooperation to occur in accounts of international politics that rely on rational choice theory. What is CK for rationalists, and how does it lead to cooperation?¹⁵

¹² Condoleezza Rice, “SALT and the Search for a Security Regime,” in *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation*, eds., Alexander George, Philip Farley and Alexander Dallin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 297–79; Anne de Tinguy, *U.S.-Soviet Relations During Détente* (East European Monographs: Boulder, 1999), 36–37; and Vladimir Semenov, “The Treaty’s Basic Provisions,” in *The ABM Treaty: To Defend or Not to Defend*, eds., Walther Stutzle, Bhupendra Jasani, and Regina Cowen (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987), 62–63.

¹³ See, for example, Coit Blacker, “The Kremlin and Détente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations,” in *Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention*, ed. Alexander George. (Boulder: Westview Press, 119–37); and Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington: Brookings, 1994).

¹⁴ Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 321.

¹⁵ This is distinct from the problem of CK in economics, which relates to cases in which actors are unsure of the state of the world and how they develop CK as a consequence. The discussion below focuses on cases in which actors believe they know the state of the world, believe that this is CK, and are incorrect. Cf. Robert Aumann, “Agreeing to Disagree,” *Annals of Statistics* 4, no. 6 (November 1976): 1,236–39; and John Geanakoplos, “Common Knowledge,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 6, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 53–82.

TABLE 1 Forms of Common Knowledge

Forms of Common Knowledge	Uses
Strategic	Number of Players Preference Relations Rationality of Players Possible Actions
Linguistic	Language Meaning of Signals and Indices
Situation Specific	Labels Focal Points Cause and Effect Beliefs Institutional Rules

CK is often defined as “any information that all players know, that all players know that all players know, and so on.”¹⁶ CK plays significant but varied roles in every application of game theory in IR and is often treated as a necessary condition for cooperation. David Hume, an early advocate of this idea, reasoned that humans require CK—conventions—because it provides them with dependable expectations of the behavior of others. In explaining the origins of property, he writes, “I observe, that it will be for my interest to leave another in the possession of his goods, *provided* he will act in the same manner with regard to me. He is sensible in a like interest in the regulation of his conduct. When this common sense of interest is mutually express'd [sic], and is known to both, it produces a suitable resolution and behavior.” He then compares conventions to “two men who pull the oars of a boat, do it by agreement or convention, tho' [sic] they have never given promises to one another.” CK enables people engaging in an activity that requires the coordination of individual plans of action to orient their activities toward others because they believe that others will engage in similar behavior.¹⁷

Rational choice theorists dramatically expanded Humean conventions to include a number of species of CK; in so doing, they rely on different elements to explain international cooperation. These are summarized in Table 1.

First, most applications of game theory in IR require *strategic common knowledge*. Strategic CK is mathematical: it includes the elements necessary for orthodox game theory. The strategic form of a game, introduced by

¹⁶ James Morrow, *Game Theory for Political Scientists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 55. Also see David Lewis, *Convention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Aumann “Agreeing to Disagree.”

¹⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 3.2.2 [emphasis in original]. On conventions in IR, see Friederich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, includes, at minimum, a set of players and a set of actions available to and a preference relation for each player.¹⁸ More recent treatments also emphasize the importance of the CK of rationality, “each player knows the details of the game and the fact that all the players are ‘rational.’”¹⁹ These elements of strategic CK enable actors to develop dependable expectations of the reactions of others to actions an actor might undertake through the mathematical form of the game alone. Virtually every model of cooperation in IR includes strategic CK.²⁰

Second, *linguistic common knowledge* is crucial for most approaches to international politics. Actors cannot negotiate cooperative arrangements unless key elements of language are CK. Linguistic CK provides the basic set of tools for actors to understand the language used by others such as syntax and semantics; words must have common meanings in addition to a common set of rules for linking words together. Furthermore, if actors rely on signals to communicate, the signals must be CK. Without CK of the meaning of a signal, an intended communication might be misunderstood or taken for noise.²¹

Third, *situation specific common knowledge* is a basket of types of CK that are required for cooperation but vary depending on the specific situation being modeled. The phrase “situation specific” is intended to highlight the elements that are relied upon by actors to select equilibria or make sense of others’ strategies. As such, no list of situation specific CK can pretend to be exhaustive as different scholars focus on different elements of CK. For example, Thomas Schelling relies on several pieces of CK to solve bargaining problems, including focal points, precedents, prior arrangements, identifications, delegations, and mediations.²² Situation specific CK draws on the rich details of diplomatic histories that are a continuing surprise and wealth of insights for rationalists and others.²³

¹⁸ John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1944).

¹⁹ Martin Osborne and Ariel Rubinstein, *A Course in Game Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 13.

²⁰ For example, see James Fearon, “Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation,” *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 269–305; Miles Kahler, “Rationality in International Relations,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (August 1998): 919–41; and Barry Weingast, “A Rational Choice Perspective on the Role of Ideas,” *Politics & Society* 23 (December 1995): 449–64.

²¹ Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

²² Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). Also see Abram Chayes and Antonia Handler Chayes, “On Compliance,” *International Organization* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 175–205; James Morrow, “The Laws of War, Common Conjectures, and Legal Systems in International Politics,” *Journal of Legal Studies* 31 (January 2002): 41–60; and Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, ed. *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3–30.

²³ Wendt highlights a similar role for intersubjectivity: “the concept of common knowledge is equivalent to that of ‘intersubjective understandings’ favored by constructivists,” and his definition of CK is nearly identical to the rationalist definition of CK. See Wendt, *Social Theory*, 159–60.

PUTATIVE INTERSUBJECTIVE BELIEFS

Liberal institutionalist and rationalist scholars often employ *CK* to explain cooperation. In contrast, I argue that in certain cases, misperceptions, not shared understandings, encourage cooperation. Believing that *CK* exists encourages policy coordination, even if this belief is erroneous and there is little *CK*. The difficulty in developing a theory of cooperation through misperceptions is that standard categories of misperceptions (for example, intentions and capabilities) are designed to explain conflict and not cooperation.

In this section, I develop a different categorization of misperceptions, premised on an account of putative intersubjective beliefs (*PIBS*), that leads to varying levels of cooperation in different types of cases. To do so, I (a) define *PIBS*; (b) describe two ways of misperceiving other actors; and (c) create a typology of misperceptions (*PIBS*) along the dimensions of those two methods of misperception, showing the conditions under which they lead to cooperation.

Defining Putative Intersubjective Beliefs

A putative intersubjective belief is a specific type of misperception: an erroneous belief that a belief is shared. This is different from other forms of misperception such as misperceptions of capabilities where one can underestimate an opponent without believing that the misperception is shared. This section explains this definition of *PIBS*; draws contrasts between *PIBS* and more often treated beliefs such as common knowledge (*CK*), private knowledge, and mutual knowledge, and gives the intuition concerning how *PIBS* lead to cooperation.

All beliefs have at least two elements: a proposition and a subject. The proposition of a belief is its content. For example, if I believe that God exists, the predicate “God exists” is the propositional content of the belief. When IR scholars investigate beliefs—whether cause-and-effect beliefs, norms, or identities—they typically focus on the effect of the propositional content.²⁴ For example, do actors behave differently when they adopt new beliefs?

Less attention is paid to the subject—the believer—of a belief. The subject denotes the group of actors who believe a belief is shared. For example, “we believe that God exists” includes a claim that a plural subject (“we”) exists that shares a belief. If a belief invokes a plural subject, I refer to it as a *public belief*. A belief not shared among members of a public, such as “only I know the intentions of China,” is a *private belief*.

²⁴ Examples include Goldstein and Keohane, “Ideas and Foreign Policy”; Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*; Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); and Robert Jervis, “Understanding Beliefs,” *Political Psychology* 27, no. 5 (October 2006): 641–63.

TABLE 2 Typology of Beliefs

		Subject of Belief	
		Plural	Singular
Propositional Property	Identical	Common Knowledge	Mutual Knowledge
	Different	Putative Intersubjective Belief	Private Knowledge

Plural subjects can have effects that are not conveyed by the propositional content alone. A plural subject might lead actors to believe they are part of a public, which could affect their behavior. Michael Chwe, for example, asserts that the public nature of a variety of beliefs has rational implications for society.²⁵ He argues that royal progressions, in which a monarch travels through the countryside to assert domination, depend less on the specific information communicated from the monarch (the propositional content), than on subjects meeting in large crowds (the plural subject): subjects see everyone else seeing the monarch and seeing them see the monarch, and so on. The public nature of the spectacle may have effects independent of the meaning communicated by the procession.

Table 2 summarizes the interaction of the propositional property and subject of a belief.

This table represents the differences between PIBS and other forms of knowledge. Unlike mutual and private knowledge, where the subject is singular (“I know” or “Only I know”), PIBS and CK have plural subjects (“We know”) and therefore are public. Further, whereas CK requires that a belief is public and that its propositional content is identical among members of that public, a putative intersubjective belief (PIB) inverts the propositional requirement. I explain below why I refer to PIBS using the nomenclature of intersubjective rather than CK, but for now, CK and intersubjective might, following Wendt, be considered synonymous. A PIB must be public, but the propositional content must be different. A PIB can be formally defined as *the members of group G wrongly believe that there is a shared proposition that all other members of group G believe*.²⁶ Wrongly believe, in this context, means that the propositional content of beliefs differs, while the actors believe that a belief is shared. For example, if I believe that I will be the quarterback for my football team, and every other team member also believes that he or she will be quarterback, and we each believe that every other member agrees with our belief, then the belief is a PIB. We wrongly believe that a public shares our belief.

²⁵ Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁶ Cf. Wendt, *Social Theory*, 62.

The intuition of the arguments that follow is that cooperation might occur because actors believe that a belief is public, actors share something in common with others, and cooperation not only is not hindered, but sometimes is enhanced if the public belief is erroneous. In short, a public belief can have powerful effects even if the belief is unfounded. To understand what these effects are, I first discuss two elements included in any belief about action—principles and behavior—so that I can assess the importance of different types of PIBS in the next section.

Elements of Beliefs

In the previous section, I defined PIBS, a special class of misperceptions, as erroneous beliefs that a belief is shared. The next section shows how different types of PIBS are able to explain cooperation under different conditions. Before doing so, a typology of different types of PIBS—different ways that our public beliefs can be wrong—is necessary to create a more robust theory of cooperation. To generate this typology, I argue that there is a difference in kind from a misperception that the principles, or reasons for acting, are shared and a misperception that expectations for the behavior of others are shared.

Many contemporary theories of action propose that every act has two features: an actor and an end.²⁷ Jurgen Habermas explains that a social act is an intentional movement through which an “individual changes something in the world.”²⁸ This implies that every act has two related elements, a movement (and the belief about the effect of that movement) and an intention (a principle or reason that the movement was undertaken).

Behavior and principles are different elements. Behavior is the subcomponent of beliefs related to action that involve movement, that is, beliefs about past movements and expectations of future movements. In everyday life, this means that an actor has a belief that indicates what the effects of a movement will be on the world. In game theoretic terms, it is game play that is observable to others. A behavioral expectation is that you will sign a treaty, fire a rocket, or invade a country.

In contrast, principles are the reasons for an act or, put differently, the value of the future state of affairs for the actor. For Habermas, this is captured by the notion that every action is capable of explanation in relation to the values that are sought after.²⁹ For example, if an action is undertaken because it realizes the values expressed by a community, defends the national interest,

²⁷ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: Free Press, 1937), 44.

²⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 96.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 98. Therefore, movements that are not intentional, such as habits, are not action. Cf. Ted Hopf, “The Logic of Habit,” *European Journal of International Relations* (forthcoming, 2010).

permits material gain, or enables a political elite to maintain power, then the action is capable of reason-giving. This analysis of principles might seem strange to students of rational choice. Preferences are often exogenous and rarely do actors have a “reason” for their preferences. Further, preferences are the reasons, strictly speaking, for strategies. Does that make them identical?

Preferences are not principles, although the two are intimately connected. Following Kenneth Arrow, preferences are social states that are evaluated in terms of their desirability for an actor or, as Jeffrey Frieden observes, ranked outcomes of an interaction.³⁰ For Arrow, preferences are a matter of “taste” and therefore subjective. The result is that there is no language to explain why actors rank outcomes in specific ways and therefore does not capture the subjective reasons for preferring some outcomes to others.

Principles provide the reasons for preferences in two ways. First, a principle that guides an actor is the reason for the transitive ordering of preferences. It is the reason that one preference is preferred to another because of an actor’s values. For example, one might evaluate the relative values of a set of outcomes by a formula that ranks them in terms of their justness, egocentric benefits, or some other criteria. Here, a principle is not a preference because it is not a state of the world. It is a formula used to evaluate social states. A second difference, which is only applicable in certain cases, is that the principle of an action in one interaction can, in certain cases, be a preference over outcomes that cannot be reduced to a strategy in another interaction.³¹ This captures the notion that sometimes actors are geared toward an endgame that is valued in and of itself. The principle of an action is not that the action places the player in a better position for the next round, but rather it places the player in a better position for the end result, the final state of the world that the actor is trying to reach.

The important point is that one can misperceive either dimension of social action. One can misperceive what another actor will do, or consent to do by agreeing to cooperate, or one can also misperceive the principles (reasons) on which another actor will decide to do those things.

Types of Putative Intersubjective Beliefs and Cooperation

Actors might misperceive either the principled or the behavioral aspect of a belief, generating cooperation. By arranging the ways in which public beliefs might be misperceived, four types of public beliefs are distinguishable, as summarized in Table 3:

³⁰ Kenneth Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 17; and Jeffrey Friedan, “Actors and Preferences in International Relations,” In *Strategic Choice in International Relations*, eds., Lake and Powell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³¹ Frieden, “Actors and Preferences,” 45.

TABLE 3 Public Beliefs

	Accurately Perceive Behavior	Misperceive Behavior
Accurately Perceive Principles	Intersubjectivity	Functional Overlapping Principles
Misperceive Principles	Functional Incompletely Theorized Agreements	Imagined Intersubjectivity

In the table of public beliefs, I use the term intersubjectivity rather than *CK*. *CK* can relate to any proposition (for example, the sky is blue); intersubjectivity, as I define it, is a specific form of *CK* that occurs only in social or strategic situations. An intersubjective belief accurately predicts the actions of others, in part because a group of actors understands the principles of action for each other. Intersubjective beliefs may include linguistic *CK* (because actors can communicate), strategic *CK* (because actors know who is in a group and what strategies are available to each person), and situation specific *CK*.

The other three cases specified in the table are *PIBs*, examples of misperceptions that can promote cooperation. In this section, I explain each type of *PIB* and the ways in which each type might lead to cooperation. While the empirical argument that follows traces only the process through which imagined intersubjectivity leads to cooperation (the final form of *PIB* outlined below), it is important to outline all three forms because they lead to cooperation under different conditions.

FUNCTIONAL INCOMPLETELY THEORIZED AGREEMENTS

Functional incompletely theorized agreements are cases in which actors accurately perceive what others will do but misperceive why they will do it.³² For example, during the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union cooperated through lend-lease aid, despite unknown differences between Stalin and the American public concerning the fate of Eastern Europe after the war.³³ Similarly, the United States cooperated with Vietnam during that war against Japan. Ho Chi Minh assumed that the United States and Vietnam, due to shared experiences as colonies, shared a principled understanding of their relationship. This disagreement became apparent after the

³² The term draws on Cass Sunstein's work in the judicial settings: judges often resolve legal controversies incompletely, by reaching a consensus on a decision but not on the larger principles at stake. See Cass Sunstein, "Incompletely Theorized Agreements," *Harvard Law Review* 108 (1994–95): 1,733–72; and Sunstein, *Legal Reasoning and Political Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), chap. 5.

war, as neither Franklin Roosevelt nor Harry Truman supported Vietnamese claims against the French.³⁴ In both cases, concrete cooperation occurred because the parties believed they knew what behavior to expect from others; if the parties had known that principled differences existed, cooperation may have foundered.

In IR, functional incompletely theorized agreements lead to cooperation by enabling actors to reach agreements that prescribe specific types of behavior when principled agreement does not exist. More importantly, they are a necessary condition for cooperation in cases in which an actor believes that the principle is more important than expectations of behavior (especially immediate behavior)—for example, cases in which actors are emotionally connected with a principle or identify potential partners for cooperation based on an identity that is reducible to a community of principle holders. Functional incompletely theorized agreements let actors overlook, unknowingly, deep disagreements over the principles that guide international conduct so they can cooperate.

FUNCTIONAL OVERLAPPING PRINCIPLES

Cases of *functional overlapping principles* (FOPs) occur when actors misperceive what others will do, but accurately perceive why they will act. This might occur in two ways. First, a group of actors might agree on a single principle (for example, human rights) but disagree about what specific policies should be implemented to promote this principle (for example, liberal or deliberative programs). Second, a group might agree on a set of values, such as multilateralism and self-defense, but disagree about which is more important, leading to divergent behaviors. I use the term functional overlapping principles because there is an overlap in the reasons (principles) for action without a corresponding overlap in predictions of other's behavior.³⁵

For example, the United States and Europe believe they hold a large set of common values. These values include, for example, the goal of democratization and human rights. In particular, both believe that security concerns are a valid principle for international action and that multilateralism is often the most appropriate tool. However, Europe and the United States, or at least the Bush administration, prioritize these principles differently. The United States places a higher premium on security than it does on multilateralism. Therefore, during the run-up to the Iraq War, the Bush administration frequently

³⁴ Ronald Spector, "Allied Intelligence and Indochina, 1943–1945," *The Pacific Historical Review* 51, no. 1 (February 1982): 23–50; and Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and Vietnam 1945–96: Part I: 1945–54," *International Affairs* 48, no. 3 (July 1972): 379–94.

³⁵ This term draws on the notion of the overlapping consensus in John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

distinguished between multilateralism, which is empty institutional rhetoric, and effective multilateralism, which is building coalitions to resolve outstanding problems.³⁶ As a result, multilateralism was considered an instrument to achieve objectives and not a good in itself. By contrast, Europeans appear to place a higher value on multilateralism, such that for Europe, unilateral action appears to lead to a value trade-off. Unilateral actions conflict with the inherent value of global rule of law in Europe, whereas in the United States this trade-off is not acutely perceived. Thus, even though the West is a community that holds common values, the means of executing policy may lead to disagreement.

FOPS enable cooperation in cases in which actors make agreements in light of knowingly shared principles but actors are unaware that each party has different beliefs about the expectations of behavior that stem from that action. FOPS are necessary conditions for cooperation if the discovery of the differences in expectations of behavior would undermine the agreement. Actors subjectively believe that they are creating agreements to enable policy coordination, and achieve a mutual gain, only to discover later that the FOP was a flop.

IMAGINED INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Finally, *imagined intersubjectivity* occurs when actors unknowingly rely on different principles and unknowingly expect different patterns of behavior to stem from an action. In this case, all actors subjectively wrongly believe that they understand others, and that others understand them. Of the PIBS, imagined intersubjectivity is the most distinguishable from intersubjectivity because while it requires every actor to hold a public belief, every aspect of that belief is unfounded.

The term “imagined intersubjectivity” refers to the title of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Within the state, Anderson argues, individuals come to believe in the existence of a nation because they are members of the same reading public. When reading a newspaper, “each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”³⁷ The public constituted by the shared act of reading a newspaper need not have anything in common: it does not matter what they read but merely that they observe one another reading. For Anderson, this imagined sense of belonging is so strong that

³⁶ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 48; and Kim Holmes, “The United Nations and American Multilateral Diplomacy,” *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 8, no. 1 (August 2003): 8–11.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 53.

“what the eye is to the love—that particular, ordinary eye he or she is born with—language—whatever language history has made his or her mother-tongue—is to the patriot. Through the language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed.”³⁸

In Anderson’s account, language is shared, but the details about what it means to share that common language are not necessarily shared. He further argues that people are willing to fight and die for a community that is only imagined and in which there is no necessary intersubjective agreement about what that community means. The public property convinces us that something is held in common, but only this public element is shared, not the principled or behavioral component.

Imagined intersubjectivity enables cooperation by allowing actors to coordinate their behavior with one another through a process of policy adjustments to meet the demands of an imagined other. Each actor subjectively orients itself toward a set of reasons and expectations of behavior that do not exist. Imagined intersubjectivity is necessary for cooperation in cases in which the discovery of either the true principle or the true expectations of others’ behavior would disrupt the process of policy coordination. It is perhaps the rarest PIB because it is twice as easy to disrupt as FITAS or FOPS: revealing others’ actual principles or their actual expectations of behavior is a constant threat. I argue that this *rara avis* of international politics played a role in the ABM Treaty.

ABM TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

In order to demonstrate the role of imagined intersubjectivity in cooperation, I use a structured focused, comparison over time to show that the negotiation of the ABM Treaty was premised on a PIB.³⁹ I first set the stage for the ABM negotiations, briefly rehearsing the history of the ABM debate in the United States and the Soviet Union before the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). I then recount the beliefs the actors had at three key moments—April 1970, May 1971, and May 1972—and show how these beliefs conditioned cooperation. In so doing, I explain why the beliefs that led to cooperation are examples of imagined intersubjectivity. Then I will assess the role of CK in the negotiating process.

Following Robert Keohane, by cooperation I mean instances of explicit policy coordination of which formal agreements, such as the ABM Treaty, are one important type.⁴⁰ I treat cooperation as distinct from compliance

³⁸ Ibid., 154.

³⁹ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 51–52.

by which I mean the honoring of the terms of cooperation. The reason for selecting the ABM from the universe of cooperative agreements, as discussed earlier, is that arms control is often considered a paradigmatic case for theories of information, and studies of reciprocity during the Cold War highlight the 1970s as the period in which these dynamics effective.⁴¹

To establish the beliefs of decision makers, I rely primarily on American and Soviet documents, secondary accounts, and memoirs. In particular, Henry Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin recently released their respective records of their negotiations between 1969 and 1972. This enabled me to read the conversations side-by-side and determine whether they reached a joint understanding at critical points in the negotiations (common knowledge) or had two different understandings (imagined intersubjectivity). Further, these accounts are confirmed through first-hand accounts from American and Soviet sources, along with Kissinger's telephone and Oval Office conversations with Richard Nixon and others. The emphasis on U.S. sources is appropriate given the negotiating action in the ABM case. The movement in the negotiations stemmed largely from shifts in Kissinger's negotiating position and understanding these shifts—whether they were premised on common knowledge or imagined intersubjectivity—is critical to understanding the sources of cooperation during détente.

This analysis has certain limitations. Ideally, a counterfactual analysis would help to show that accurate information would have ended the negotiations over the ABM negotiation or a set of comparative cases where negotiations began in the presence of incomplete information and broke down as more CK was realized. Due to space constraints, these issues are only partly discussed here in favor of detailed process-tracing.⁴² Process-tracing provides substantial evidence for the claim that imagined intersubjectivity played a crucial if not a necessary role; by tracing the decision-making process, I show that misunderstandings were crucial to the shift from deadlock to cooperation at three stages of the negotiations. Further, process tracing enables limited counterfactual claims that are briefly considered.⁴³

⁴¹ Kenneth Abbott, "Trust But Verify: The Production of Information in Arms Control Treaties and Other International Agreements," *Cornell International Law Journal* 26 (1993): 1–58; George Downs and David Rocke, *Tacit Bargaining, Arms Races, and Arms Control* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); and Guzman, *How International Law*; Schelling, *Strategy*; and Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). For reciprocity during the 1970s, see Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*; and Michael Ward and Sheen Rajmaira, "Reciprocity and Norms in U.S.-Soviet Foreign Policy," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36, no. 2 (1992): 342–468. In the context of the ABM Treaty, see Rice, "SALT and the Search for a Security Regime"; and Weber, *Cooperation and Discord*.

⁴² A more rigorous counterfactual testing strategy is pursued in Eric Grynaviski, *Necessary Illusions* (Ohio State University: Unpublished Dissertation, 2009), chap. 4.

⁴³ See George and Bennett, *Case Studies*, 205–32.

American and Soviet ABM Programs

Upon entering office, Nixon quickly entered into one of the most divisive political debates in U.S. politics: the debate over whether to build an ABM system. While strange in retrospect, the ABM debate was more divisive than Vietnam in the halls of the Capitol in 1969.⁴⁴ The August vote to approve Nixon's Safeguard ABM system was harrowingly close for the new administration, won in a narrow 51–50 vote with Vice President Spiro Agnew breaking the tie.⁴⁵

The program approved by the Senate was to be deployed in two phases. First, Safeguard would be deployed around Minuteman missile fields to reduce the chance of a Soviet first-strike.⁴⁶ This enabled Nixon to argue that the ABM would be relatively inexpensive and not destabilizing, since defending Minuteman does ensure the survivability of population centers. The second phase met the needs of hawks and satisfied Kissinger and Nixon's preference for defense. It expanded Safeguard to provide a thin national defense against China or even a thick defense against a future Soviet threat.⁴⁷ The arguments for a phased deployment, which met several challenges from both Republican and Democratic critics, managed to eke out a slim majority in the Senate.

While the United States was considering developing an ABM system, the Soviet Union had already produced a partial one. In 1967, the Soviet Union announced it would deploy an ABM system (called Galosh) around Moscow "and boasted of the ease with which incoming American missiles would be knocked down."⁴⁸ As the Soviet Union built Galosh, public statements signaled their intent to complete a defense buildup. Premier Aleksei Kosygin, who did not favor limiting ABMs in the late 1960s, suggested that defensive systems were less destabilizing than offensive systems.⁴⁹ Perhaps more influentially for Western analysts, Talensky argued that "it would hardly be in the interests of any peace-loving state to forgo the creation of its own effective systems of defense against nuclear-rocket aggression and make its security

⁴⁴ John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey, 1989), 154.

⁴⁵ Spencer Rich, "ABM Wins Crucial Senate Test," *Washington Post*, 7 August 1969, 1; and Warren Waever "Nixon Missile Plan Wins in Senate by a 51–50 Vote; House Approval Likely," *New York Times*, 7 August 1969, 1.

⁴⁶ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 150.

⁴⁷ Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁹ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Kosygin is Cool to Missiles Curb," *New York Times*, 10 February 1967, 1; and "Kosygin Sees Way Open to Peace Talks," *Washington Post*, 10 February 1967, A1. The following week, the Soviet Union shifted dramatically away from this statement. See "Soviet Hunts New Stand for U.S. Missile Talks," *Washington Post*, 16 February 1967, A11.

dependent only on deterrence, that is, on whether the other side will refrain from attacking.”⁵⁰

However, the Soviet ABM debate pursued a different trajectory. While the Nixon administration pushed for ABM development in the early 1970s, the Soviet military and other decision makers began to delay and eventually cancel their program.⁵¹ The reason was in part financial and technical. In an important meeting before the Politburo commission tasked with deciding the Soviet SALT policy, a consensus was reached that an effective ABM force was technologically impossible.⁵² This meeting, which may have been the final nail in the Soviet ABM coffin, was held while Nixon was planning the expansion of the ABM system in the United States, moving beyond the first phase of Minuteman defense toward requesting funding for additional sites for area defense.

National Command Authorities Only

The negotiation of the ABM Treaty officially began in Helsinki in 1969, but it did not become substantively interesting until April 1970 when the United States tabled specific proposals in Vienna. In the first few days of the Vienna round, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s National Security Advisor, authorized Gerald Smith, head of the SALT delegation, to make a comprehensive offer to the Soviet Union limiting offensive and defensive weapons.⁵³ The defensive component required that both states limit ABM systems to the defense of capitals and was designated National Command Authorities Only (NCA-only). Kissinger later referred to this offer as “a first class blunder.”⁵⁴ He did not predict that Moscow would accept it.⁵⁵ The offer was a blunder because it was based on a misunderstanding of the Soviet position and was intended to be an offer the Soviets would surely reject. I intend to show that this mistake, which led to the negotiation of the treaty, was premised on imagined intersubjectivity.

⁵⁰ Nicolai Talensky, “Anti-Missile Systems and Disarmament,” *International Affairs (Moscow)* 10 (October 1964): 19. See also Aleksandr Savel’yev and Nikolay N. Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 4.

⁵¹ Christoph Bluth, *Soviet Strategic Arms Policy Before SALT* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 213.

⁵² Savel’yev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 22; and Pavel Podvig, ed. *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces* (MIT Press, 2004), 414–45.

⁵³ Focusing on Kissinger’s beliefs is important because he was the crucial decision maker. On Kissinger’s centralization of the security bureaucracy, see Seymour Hersch, *The Price of Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 25–45; Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 151–56 and 183–211; and Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), 38–48. On his control of SALT, see Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 222–25.

⁵⁴ Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 321.

⁵⁵ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 162–63; and Smith, *Doubletalk*, 131.

Soviet decision makers welcomed the surprise. They had already decided that ABM programs were financially and technically infeasible. They were thus willing to bargain away their existing ABM programs for other gains.⁵⁶ Even though the Soviet leadership was unanimously suspicious of the SALT process, there was a consensus that the arms race must be curbed and relations with the United States must improve.⁵⁷ Further, the Soviets had already developed an ABM system around Moscow (Galosh), while the United States had no plans to develop a similar system around Washington. Kissinger's offer would therefore hand the Soviet Union an asymmetric advantage.⁵⁸

The offer made by Nixon and Kissinger to limit defense to NCA-only is a puzzle. In their memoirs, Nixon and Kissinger argue that the entire ABM effort—pushing Congress to build it and then negotiating over it with the Soviets—was an effort to enhance their bargaining position at SALT.⁵⁹ This explanation is confused and the evidence against it decisive. If the ABM were a bargaining chip and was not intended to be built, then Kissinger would have offered to ban ABM systems altogether, not limit them. When the U.S. negotiator, Gerard Smith, raised the issue of banning ABMs, he was told not to push the subject, and when the Soviets raised the possibility of an ABM-ban, it was rejected by the Nixon administration.⁶⁰ The claim that NCA-only was a bargaining move vis-à-vis the Soviet Union was a post hoc justification for a mistake. It was instead intended as a bargaining chip with the Senate.

Kissinger and Nixon believed that ABM development was important for strategic and political reasons.⁶¹ First, it would defend Minuteman fields from the growing threat of the large Soviet SS-9 and could intercept accidental or third-party strikes.⁶² These concerns were underscored by the selection of Kissinger as National Security Adviser, which was in part due to his emphasis

⁵⁶ Savelyev and Detinov, *The Big Five*, 10, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 34–35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22; and Garthoff, *Détente*, 163.

⁵⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 204–10; and Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 414–18.

⁶⁰ See “Verification Panel Meeting,” Digital National Security Archive [hereafter DNSA], 16 January 1971, (KT00226). Documents listed as DNSA are available through the Digital National Security Archive through the identifier listed in parentheses.

⁶¹ Further, Kissinger sought to sell the ABM as non-threatening to the Soviet Ambassador and was pleased that he understood that the ABM was not destabilizing. This is not the behavior of bargainers. AVPRF (Russian Foreign Ministry Archives), MEMCON, 10 March 1969, *Soviet-American Relations: Détente Years*, 134–38; and TELCON, DNSA, 15 March 1969 (KA00312).

⁶² See Richard Nixon, “Statement on Deployment of the Antibalistic Missile System,” *Public Papers of Richard Nixon* [hereafter PPRN], Government Printing Office, 16 March 1969, 109. This argument was repeated often; see “The President's News Conference,” PPRN, 14 March 1969, 108; “The President's News Conference,” PPRN, 18 April 1969, 156; and “The President's News Conference,” PPRN, 19 June 1969, 248). For Kissinger's views, see Kissinger, *White House Years*, 208–9; and Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 165.

on defense.⁶³ The ABM was also politically important. As the debate over whether to build the ABM heated up, Nixon came to consider it a decisive test of his political leadership. As Robert Dallek explains, “Nixon saw the battle for congressional approval as more a test of his political strength and prospects for reelection than of the country’s future safety against attack. Senator Edward Kennedy’s opposition to ABM was seen as a first confrontation in a likely contest with Nixon for the presidency in 1972.”⁶⁴ The Nixon administration never intended to give up the ABM.

Kissinger was only willing to offer the NCA-only position because he was convinced that the Soviets would reject it. Raymond Garthoff explains that “Kissinger and probably the president (although he displayed a remarkable indifference), expected that the Soviet side would take the lead in proposing an ABM level higher than NCA.”⁶⁵ This mistaken assumption was based on an inaccurate reading of Soviet statements that implied they intended to continue to develop Galosh.⁶⁶ Neither Nixon nor Kissinger paid sufficient attention to later signals that showed the Soviets were reducing their ABM commitments and were willing to trade. Instead, they reasoned that if the Soviet Union took the lead in rejecting the NCA-only offer, “that move would place the onus on the Soviet Union and could then be used against congressional opponents of Safeguard.”⁶⁷ That is, the anticipated Soviet rejection of the ABM offer would force Congress to either approve funding the ABM or unilaterally dismantle a program in an area of U.S. strength.⁶⁸

This “first-class blunder” had enormous consequences. At Vienna, the Soviets were passive and did not table any offers. This meant Kissinger could pick the issues on the table, and the NCA-only offer placed ABMS at the center. This committed the United States, in principle, to a future ABM agreement.

⁶³ In Kissinger’s first book, which led to his prestige and which Nixon praised, he argued for defense. See Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1957). See also Hersch *Price of Power*, 11–13; and Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 134–35.

⁶⁴ Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 135–37.

⁶⁵ Garthoff, *Détente*, 163. On Kissinger’s belief that the Soviet military would block attempts to negotiate ABMS, see National Archives (NA), “Memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger: Memorandum to the President on Soviet Developments—Comments on our Policy (Tab A),” 22 May 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*]: *Soviet Union, January 1969–October 1970*, vol. 12, 165.

⁶⁶ See Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 416.

⁶⁷ Garthoff, *Détente*, 163. On the bargaining chip in persuading the Senate, see George Bunn, *Arms Control by Committee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 125; and Robert Schulzinger, “The Senate, Detente, and SALT I,” in *Congress and United States Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Barnhart (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 91.

⁶⁸ Raymond Garthoff, “Negotiating with the Russians: Some Lessons from SALT,” *International Security* 1, no. 4 (Spring 1977): 20. Smith suggested the reverse bargaining chip, and Nitze agreed. Smith, *Doubletalk*, 118; Strobe Talbott, *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 125. On reverse bargaining, see also Robert Bresler and Robert Gray, “The Bargaining Chip and SALT,” *Political Science Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 65–88.

While this did not make the ABM Treaty inevitable, it did place the burden on the United States to make the most of it or find an uncomfortable way to recant the offer.

This misjudgment was the result of imagined intersubjectivity. The principles understood by each side differed. Kissinger thought the Soviet Union would reject an NCA-only ABM offer because he believed the Soviet Union had a defensive military culture.⁶⁹ Believing that ABM defenses were strategically and politically important for the Nixon administration, Kissinger thought the Soviets shared his belief that arms policy was important for defense. The Soviets, unaware of Kissinger's mistake, thought the U.S. offer to reduce ABMs was sincere. By following the debate within the U.S. public, key Soviet decision makers thought the U.S. attempt to reduce defensive systems was in accord with public strategic and technical arguments. This led to further mistakes in anticipating behavior. Kissinger did not predict that the Soviet Union would accept the NCA-only offer, especially in only one week, and the Soviet Union did not predict that once the offer was accepted, the Americans would make four additional offers to move off the NCA-only position later in the process. If Kissinger had not offered a defensive agreement, there is no evidence that the Soviets would have proposed one, preventing an ABM deal from ever being negotiated.

Limited Agreement

The NCA-only offer, while committing the parties in principle to an ABM deal, did not easily lead to an arms control agreement. First, the steadfast U.S. position was that any defensive agreement must be accompanied by an agreement limiting offensive weapons.⁷⁰ The critical problem with offensive limitations, however, was that the Soviet position required that U.S. forward-based-systems (FBS) (forward deployed tactical nuclear systems) be included in any offensive deal.⁷¹ U.S. negotiators consistently refused to include FBS, stalling not only offensive but also defensive agreements.⁷² Second, the NCA-only offer was a problem. The Senate had approved the development of ABM sites around Minuteman fields, yet at SALT the United States proposed a system near Washington.⁷³ Kissinger and Nixon believed that shifting ABM

⁶⁹ For mirror-imaging of strategic culture, see Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); and Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND Corp, 1977).

⁷⁰ See Smith, *Doubletalk*, 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 90–93; and AVP RF, MEMCON, *Soviet-American Relations*, 10 June 1970, 159–65.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 179–98.

⁷³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 804.

construction toward Washington was politically impossible, and they needed to find a way to abandon their NCA-only position at SALT.⁷⁴

After the first round, SALT was stalemated. Unknown to the public and the SALT teams, Kissinger was secretly negotiating an agreement with Ambassador Dobrynin—the May 20th Agreement. On 20 May 1970, Nixon and Kosygin publicly and simultaneously read the agreement that was to end the deadlock:

The Governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, after reviewing the course of their talks on the limitation of strategic armaments, have agreed to concentrate this year on working out an agreement for the limitation of the deployment of ABMs. They have also agreed that, together with conclusion of an agreement to limit ABMs, they will agree on certain measures with respect to the limitation of offensive strategic weapons.⁷⁵

This created the general form that the ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement would take. It separated the ABM from an interim freeze on new silo construction, disentangling the ABM from the difficult work on offensive weapons.

This was a significant breakthrough. In exchange for the May 20th Agreement, the Soviets dropped their requirement that FBS be included and that ABMs be limited to NCA-only, and Kissinger dropped the demand for a comprehensive offensive treaty.⁷⁶ Perhaps even more importantly, the May 20th Agreement publicly committed Brezhnev and Nixon to a workable SALT agreement as part of their respective peace agendas. Since a close vote in 1969, support for the development of ABM systems was waning in the Senate, especially in early 1971.⁷⁷ The agreement temporarily disarmed Nixon's critics and was praised by arms control supporters.⁷⁸ As Kissinger told Nixon, the

⁷⁴ "NSC Meeting on SALT," DNSA, 8 March 1971, (KT00244). To make the issue more confusing, upon recognizing his error in making the NCA-only offer, Kissinger attempted to rectify it by offering an ABM-ban, which he was also sure the Soviets would reject. The presentation of this second alternative was not a sincere offer but was intended to move the United States off its NCA-only position and toward the position it maintained in the Senate. As noted earlier, when the Soviets suggested that accepting an ABM-ban was a possibility, Kissinger told Smith to drop the suggestion. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 173; Smith, *Doubletalk*, 256–63; and Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 229–30. Also see "Verification Panel Meeting," DNSA, 16 January 1971, (KT00226).

⁷⁵ PPRN, "Remarks Announcing an Agreement on Strategic Arms Limitation Talks," 20 May 1970, 175.

⁷⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 820–21; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 179–80; and Smith, *Double Talk*, 246.

⁷⁷ Marilyn Berger, "Democrats Urge U.S.-Soviet Agreement on ABMs," *Washington Post*, 27 February 1971, A12; "Muskie Asks Negotiations on ABM Ban," *Washington Post*, 8 April 1971, A19; and "Soviets ABM Bid Attracts Symington," *Washington Post*, 30 March 1971, A5. The reason for the increased pressure was that the Soviet offer to limit ABM systems became public knowledge by January 1971. Chalmers Roberts, "Soviets Propose ABM Limit," *Washington Post*, 9 January 1971, A1; and "Soviet ABM Plan Confirmed at Vienna," *New York Times*, 1 May 1971, 3.

⁷⁸ "Summit Accord on SALT," *New York Times*, 21 May 1971, 38; Joseph Kraft, "Flexibility Gets Results," *Washington Post*, 23 May 1971, 35; and John Finney, "Harvard-M.I.T. Arms experts Pleased by Nixon's

agreement would “break the back of this generation of Democratic leaders,” to which Nixon replied, “That’s right. We’ve got to break—we’ve got to destroy the confidence of the people in the American establishment.”⁷⁹ After the May 20th Agreement, it would have been enormously difficult for Nixon and Kissinger to not conclude an ABM Treaty, especially because they were on record in support of it.⁸⁰ The same was true of Brezhnev, who publicly committed himself to the agreement.⁸¹ As Melvyn Leffler explains, “Brezhnev put the full imprimatur of the party leadership behind the policy of relaxing tensions with the West and negotiating arms-reduction treaties with Washington and NATO.”⁸² By issuing the statement that the parties were prepared to negotiate an agreement, Brezhnev invested the process with a sense of purpose that had hitherto been lacking.⁸³

Was this breakthrough the result of more information being shared between Kissinger and Dobrynin? Did the development of *ck* assist them in designing the first significant arms control treaty of the Cold War? In short, no.

One problem with the agreement was its ambiguity. The critical issue was what was meant by “together with.” The guidance Kissinger gave the U.S. delegation was that “together with” meant simultaneous. As Smith interpreted that instruction, it meant spending a few weeks on ABMs, and then a few weeks on offensive limitations, and back and forth.⁸⁴ Vladimir Semenov, the chief Soviet negotiator, held a different view. The Russian translation used the term “*pri*,” which is much weaker than “together with.” He concluded that the agreement implied that an ABM deal and the freeze should accompany one another in the final version but that the ABM would come first in the negotiations.⁸⁵ I contend that it was this ambiguity that led each side to publicly back the May 20th Agreement.

Move on Talks,” *New York Times*, 27 May 1971, 2. On Nixon’s reaction, see Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 289–90.

⁷⁹ In Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 280.

⁸⁰ This is similar to audience costs. James Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92. On going public, see Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1993), 157–88.

⁸¹ Leonid Brezhnev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1971), 8–38; and Peter Volten, *Brezhnev’s Peace Program: A Study of Soviet Domestic Political Process and Power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 58–65.

⁸² Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 241.

⁸³ On the implications of Brezhnev’s going public, see Richard Anderson, *Public Politics in an Authoritarian State: Making Foreign Policy During the Brezhnev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). On Brezhnev’s power and its connection to SALT, see Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 117; and Harry Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 129–30, 156–60.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 250.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; and Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 219.

The ambiguity of the public announcement was developed by Kissinger and Dobrynin unintentionally after months of diplomacy. The backchannel discussions of a limited agreement began in the spring of 1970, when Kissinger floated the idea of letting the SALT negotiators attempt to reach a comprehensive agreement while he and Dobrynin secretly worked on a limited agreement.⁸⁶ After the Soviet Union accepted the principle of NCA-only that April, Dobrynin asked whether a limited agreement might quickly be reached over ABMS.⁸⁷

On 9 January 1971, Kissinger agreed to begin work on an ABM-only agreement, but only if the Soviets agreed to a freeze on new starts on missiles.⁸⁸ This agreement—the Interim Agreement—was a concession by Kissinger. He was dropping the demand that any ABM agreement be accompanied by a comprehensive offensive agreement. On 13 March, Dobrynin said that the Politburo would accept his offer and was willing to negotiate the ABM first, followed by the freeze. Kissinger balked. He believed this was an effort by the Soviets to secure an ABM-only agreement; once the ABM treaty was in place, the Soviets would have no incentive to finish the freeze.⁸⁹ As Kissinger told Nixon, “They are asking us to dismantle our ABM while they keep theirs and build like crazy while they do nothing.”⁹⁰

The problem was sequence. Kissinger wanted ABM plus freeze, whereas Dobrynin wanted ABM followed by freeze. As the negotiations moved along, both became convinced that the other had accepted their position. The minutia is important because it shows the source of confusion. On 26 March, when Dobrynin offered to allow Kissinger to move off of the NCA-only offer, Kissinger suggested that Nixon would quickly agree, as long as the freeze was discussed “simultaneously” with the ABM Treaty. Dobrynin, trying to interpret Kissinger’s meaning, replied, “simultaneously concluded on separate agreement and freezing at the same time,” after which Kissinger said, “exactly.” Dobrynin refined this as, “Discussion of the details will be discussed simultaneously with the conclusion of the agreement,” to which Kissinger exclaimed, “That would be fine. See how easy I am to get along with.”⁹¹ They both hung up the phone convinced they had come to a mutually acceptable agreement.

However, Dobrynin’s interpretation did not mean “exactly” what Kissinger meant. Dobrynin’s wording implied that discussions of the freeze would come with the conclusion of the agreement, not its inception. This

⁸⁶ NA, MEMCON, 9 April 1970, *Soviet-American Relations*, 144–45; and AVP RF, MEMCON, 10 June 1970, *Soviet-American Relations*, 159–65.

⁸⁷ AVP RF, MEMCON, 10 June 1970, *Soviet-American Relations*, 159–65.

⁸⁸ AVP RF, MEMCON, 9 January 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 258–63.

⁸⁹ AVP RF, MEMCON, 12 March 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 306–8.

⁹⁰ NA, TELCON (Kissinger and Nixon), 15 March 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 308.

⁹¹ NA, TELCON, 26 March 1971 (8:20 pm), *Soviet-American Relations*, 323–25.

meant there would be an ABM-only agreement, on the table and almost complete, before the negotiation of the freeze. The Soviets wanted this because it would prevent links between specific elements of the ABM Treaty and specific elements of the freeze. In return, the Soviets were willing to change their NCA-only position and to not include FBS.⁹² In contrast, when Kissinger suggested simultaneity, he meant that the two agreements would be worked on “side-by-side.”⁹³ This would allow the U.S. delegation to link the elements to one another, increasing U.S. negotiating leverage over Russian offensive missiles by enabling ABM trades for missiles. Yet, there is no evidence that they understood one another, and to complicate matters, Dobrynin left for Moscow the next morning.

Dobrynin returned from Moscow in April with a draft copy of the Soviet response agreeing in principle to a freeze, and this “could be discussed before the work on the separate ABM agreement is complete.”⁹⁴ The ABM negotiations would come first, but before the treaty was signed and finalized, the freeze negotiations would begin. Despite last minute discussions on the language, Kissinger believed that Dobrynin had folded on the sequence. He told Nixon “we got everything we asked for.”⁹⁵ In contrast, Dobrynin believed Kissinger was conceding that the ABM would be negotiated before offensive weapons limitations. On 20 May, when Nixon and Kosygin read the public announcements, neither was aware of the fundamental differences in their interpretations of the text.

The ambiguity of “simultaneous” and “together with” was built into the backchannel diplomacy. When the diplomatic record and negotiating instructions were forwarded to the SALT negotiators, the difficulties became apparent and the process stalled. As Smith recalls, the sequence issue was not resolved until late that September, only a few months before the summit. In the meantime, Smith and Semenov read and reread the joint announcement and the letters, rehearsing the instructions provided by Andrei Gromyko and Kissinger that they stand fast to their positions. Smith wrote, “Our discussions of the sequence issue became more or less a dialogue of the deaf. . . . I had the impression that we were just repeating what Dobrynin and Kissinger had said to each other months ago.”⁹⁶ Yet, each had invested political capital in the misunderstood agreement.

The May 20th Agreement, despite the tortuous path leading to it, was a critical date in the process of reaching an ABM agreement. Similar to the NCA-only offer, the agreement was the product of imagined intersubjectivity.

⁹² NA, TELCON, 26 March 1971 (4:23 pm), *Soviet-American Relations*, 322; and AVP RF, TELCON, 26 March 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 323.

⁹³ NA, TELCON, 26 March 1971 (8:20 pm), *Soviet-American Relations*, 323–25.

⁹⁴ In NA, MEMCON, 23 April 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 327.

⁹⁵ NA, TELCON (Nixon to Kissinger), 12 May 1971, *Soviet-American Relations*, 352.

⁹⁶ Smith, *Doubletalk*, 250–55. Also see NA, “Letter from President Nixon to Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev,” 19 October 1971, *FRUS October 1971-May 1972*, vol. 14, 18–20.

Kissinger and Nixon thought that the Soviet Union shared their interpretation of the agreement and that the concessions were sufficient to ensure compliance. For Kissinger, the Soviets had dropped their demands over FBS and allowed the United States to move off its NCA-only position because Kissinger had separated the two agreements. Kissinger presumed that his concessions were sufficient; he did not imagine that sequence was also considered a key concession. Kissinger neither understood the meaning of the May 20th Agreement for the Soviet Union nor predicted the resulting deadlock later in 1971 over the text of the agreement. For Dobrynin and the Soviet leadership, Kissinger had agreed to drop his demands for a comprehensive agreement because the Soviet Union had agreed to a freeze, which was sufficient for Nixon to show a limit on offensive weapons. There is no evidence that the Soviet leadership predicted the dispute over the sequence issue, nor that they understood the reasons for Kissinger's concessions. The agreement was premised on imagined intersubjectivity because neither actor understood the behavior of the other or the reasons for that behavior. If imagined intersubjectivity did not exist, neither Nixon nor Brezhnev would have publicly committed himself to a separate ABM Treaty and possibly not have made the concessions necessary to reach one.

Moscow Summit

The May 20th Agreement did not resolve any of the technical details that surrounded SALT, those took an additional year of negotiations to hammer out. Both delegations worked quickly once the United States and Soviet Union decided to sign the agreement at a summit in Moscow on 22 May 1972. As the Moscow Summit approached, most of the details of the ABM Treaty had been resolved. Yet, two weeks before the Summit, the enterprise was at risk. In a dramatic turnaround, Nixon told his National Security Council on 8 May, "There will be no summit."⁹⁷ The cause of the near breakdown of SALT was another misunderstanding.

Earlier that year, North Vietnam began the Easter Offensive, a massive invasion of the South. This invasion gave rise to a severe reaction; at a time when Nixon was announcing troop withdrawals and attempting to negotiate, the North Vietnamese conduct enraged him.⁹⁸ Nixon saw both détente and his reelection at risk. Nixon told Kissinger that "if the ARVN collapses? A lot of other things will collapse around here. . . . We're playing a Russian game, a Chinese game, and an election game," to which Kissinger responded,

⁹⁷ "Memorandum for the President's Files," DNSA, 8 May 1972, (KT00480).

⁹⁸ Hersch, *Price of Power*, 503–8.

“That’s why we’ve got to blast the living bejeezus out of North Vietnam.”⁹⁹ As Seymour Hersch remarks, this was “war by temper tantrum.”¹⁰⁰

Nixon thought it would damage his chances for reelection if he met with Brezhnev at the height of the offensive. As Haldeman explained to his diary, “How can we have a Summit meeting and be drinking toasts to Brezhnev while Soviet tanks are crumbling Huế?”¹⁰¹ Nixon privately ordered Kissinger to cancel the summit on 29 April, an order that Kissinger chose to ignore until Nixon cooled off. At the same time that he was contemplating canceling the summit, Nixon was also suggesting bombing, and perhaps even occupying, Haiphong and Hanoi.¹⁰² For Nixon, SALT was much less important than Vietnam. The previous month, Nixon remarked, “We have got to give up the Summit in order to get a settlement in Vietnam. . . . Vietnam is ten times more important than the Summit. . . . Tell him no discussions of the Summit before they settle Vietnam and that is an order!”¹⁰³

Nixon was convinced that the U.S. escalation would lead Brezhnev to cancel the summit. He and his staff recalled the disastrous Paris Summit of 1960, where Khrushchev, upset at Gary Powers’s U-2 flight over the Soviet Union, disrupted Summit talks intended to resolve Berlin.¹⁰⁴ This analogy was too perfect. The Berlin negotiations were to be signed only days before SALT, and a failure to reach an agreement there would likely cause a collapse of the SALT process.¹⁰⁵ Thus, after the bombing began, Nixon decided to cancel to preempt a Soviet cancellation.

Nixon soon changed his mind. Haldeman polled the public on the summit; it was popular despite Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ This created a dilemma: how can Nixon cancel without risking a public backlash? He decided to let Brezhnev cancel, letting him take the blame. Secretary John Connally and Kissinger’s assistant Alexander Haig forcefully argued that this would place the onus

⁹⁹ In Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 372.

¹⁰⁰ Hersch, *Price of Power*, 511.

¹⁰¹ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1994), 452; and LC, TELCON (Nixon and Kissinger),” 15 April 1972, *FRUS October 1971-May 1972*, vol. 14, 341–43.

¹⁰² Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 282–83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹⁰⁴ On Kissinger and Nixon’s appreciation of 1960, see Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 465; and Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 378. On the Paris Summit, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and his Era* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), 442–72; and Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 263–91.

¹⁰⁵ On analogies, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992).

¹⁰⁶ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 453. On Nixon’s obsession with public opinion before the 1972 election, see Dominic Sandbrook, “Salesmanship and Substance: The Influence of Domestic Policy and Watergate,” in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969–1977*, eds., Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Thomas Alan Schwartz, “‘Henry, . . . Winning an Election Is Terribly Important’: Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 2009): 173–90.

on the Soviets to disrupt détente and, if they did cancel, would prevent a domestic and international fallout.¹⁰⁷ In a sense, Haig and Connally argued that Nixon should play a game of chicken; he should unswervingly move head-on toward a summit because whichever leader veered first would pay a political cost. Nixon finally agreed and chose not to cancel so as to force the Soviets to do so.¹⁰⁸ After the commencement of the bombings, the Nixon administration waited for the inevitable cancellation. It would wait several days for word, and in the meantime, the administration and the public scoured the Soviet press, diplomatic exchanges, and public statements for clues about the Soviet response.¹⁰⁹

In contrast to Nixon's conviction the summit would not occur, Brezhnev never seriously considered canceling. When the Soviet leadership met, Brezhnev resisted pressure to cancel.¹¹⁰ North Vietnam had launched the Easter Offensive without Soviet knowledge, refused Soviet offers to mediate, and the leadership would not allow North Vietnam a veto over Soviet foreign policy.¹¹¹ Brezhnev was still nervous about the reaction of the public and other Central Committee members and convened a secret Central Committee plenum in the following days, but he had no reason to fear as several important members vocally supported the summit.¹¹²

Nixon thus agreed to go to the summit, in part, because he believed the Soviet Union would cancel. Brezhnev, having no intention of cancelling, did not consider it likely the United States would cancel. Nixon thought the Soviets shared the principles of his actions, that the political reality of meeting while bombs were falling was untenable for both parties. He thus expected Brezhnev to exhibit the same behavior he would: Brezhnev would undertake the action that Nixon could not because of public opinion. Brezhnev, however, did not know that Nixon would cancel the summit, believing that Nixon shared his belief in the domestic and international importance of the summit and thus would not seriously contemplate canceling. The meeting

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Alexander Haig and Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How American Changed the World: A Memoir* (New York: Warner Books, 1992), 287–88.

¹⁰⁸ White House Telephone, "The President Talked with Charles G. ("Bebe") Rebozo," conversation no. 24–38, 9 May 1972, 11:07 am–11:12 am, tape 24a; and White House Telephone, "The President Talked with John N. Mitchell, conversation no. 24–45, 9 May 1972, 11:35 am–11:39 am, tape 24a. These tapes are available at www.NixonTapes.org. There are many examples of Nixon and Kissinger attempting to play politics with the summit. See, NA, Memo from Nixon to Kissinger, *FRUS October 1971-May 1972*, vol. 14, 199–200.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Kaiser, "Tass Assails Nixon Steps; No Official Soviet Comment," *Washington Post*, 10 May 1972, A12; Robert Kaiser, "No Word on Visit," *Washington Post*, 12 May 1972, A1; and Carroll Kirkpatrick, "Soviet Aides, Nixon Hold Affable Talk," *Washington Post*, 12 May 1972; and Haig, *Inner Circles*, 287.

¹¹⁰ Georgi Arbatov, *The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics* (New York: Random House, 1992), 183.

¹¹¹ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 248.

¹¹² Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 220–21.

happened because of imagined intersubjectivity, not *ck*. If Nixon had chosen to cancel, it likely would have enraged hardliners in the Politburo, making future summits difficult, and removed Nixon's chief incentive to meet—the coming 1972 elections. The history of failed Cold War summits does not leave one optimistic.

The relationship was rooted in a *PIB* at all three moments of the negotiations. All three are examples of imagined intersubjectivity; neither set of elites knew the reasons for the behavior of the other, nor could they accurately predict what the other would do in the future. At each of these three critical junctures, as the parties stumbled one step closer to the *ABM* Treaty, policy makers in both countries learned about the other. These cases of imagined intersubjectivity were extinguished quickly, as the behavior of the other quickly revealed that decisions were made on the basis of inadequate information or a lack of shared meaning. But this series of *PIBs* moved the parties closer, step by step or stumble by stumble, until the signing of the *ABM* Treaty. The role of *PIBs* in this process shows that tripping can move someone forward in the same way that stepping does, as long as one is willing to trip again and again.

The Role of Common Knowledge

The argument advanced so far, that imagined intersubjectivity played a role in the *ABM* Treaty process, does not deny that *ck* also played a role. It might be necessary that actors understand some things in identical ways even if imagined intersubjectivity exists in regard to one fundamental belief. The findings that emerge from the study of the *ABM* negotiations show mixed results for *ck*.

First, strategic *ck* was in some respects crucial for the *ABM* Treaty. The United States and the Soviet Union understood who their primary partners were in the *SALT* process. However, there were also central misunderstandings related to the identification of players. The Soviet Union never grasped the relationship between Vietnam and the *SALT* process, and there was frequent disagreement over the role of *NATO* allies in the issue of *FBS* in Europe. Further, neither the Soviet nor the *U.S.* negotiators successfully understood the pay-offs of their interlocutors, no matter how certain they were that their guesses were right.

Linguistic *ck* also has mixed results. On the one hand, it was crucial that each actor was able to communicate clearly at times. For example, the Soviets needed to understand what “*NCA-only*” meant and that Kissinger was dropping the demand for a comprehensive agreement in 1971. Yet, as the *May 20th Agreement* shows, there are cases in which linguistic *ck* is an impediment to cooperation. If the United States and the Soviet Union knew the meaning imparted to the agreement by the other, neither party may have dropped sets of demands that stood in the way of the *ABM* Treaty. There are

cases where linguistic CK is not necessary to, but rather stands in the way of, international cooperation.

Situation specific CK may also have played a role. First, a significant amount of technical know-how was common knowledge. Neither party disputed how specific types of missiles, submarines, radars, and other weapons work. Furthermore, each party understood specific negotiating rules, such as the importance of site alternation, protocol, and other diplomatic procedures that may have stood in the way of the negotiation process.

RETHINKING THE ORIGINS OF COOPERATION

This paper has sought to show that misperception may not only be a cause of war, but also a cause of cooperation. In certain cases, such as the ABM Treaty, certain elements of information must not be CK if cooperation is to occur. Imagined intersubjectivity might enhance the prospects for cooperation in situations in which intractable problems would end cooperation had they become apparent. If Kissinger knew that the Soviet Union would accept a NCA-only offer, he would not have made it. If Kissinger and Dobrynin knew each other's interpretation of the May 20th Agreement, they may not have made concessions to reach it, and if Nixon knew that Brezhnev would not cancel the summit, he may have cancelled it.

The analysis of this paper is in many ways limited. I argued that there are three types of putative intersubjective beliefs (PIBs) that can lead to cooperation in different sorts of cases. The ABM Treaty discussion only assesses the strength of imagined intersubjectivity. Subsequent empirical work is required to demonstrate that functional incompletely theorized agreements (FITAS) and functional overlapping principles (FOPS) also play a role in specific cases of cooperation. In addition, the role of imagined intersubjectivity cannot easily be generalized from a single case. However, there is reason to believe that the ABM Treaty is a paradigmatic case: its importance meant that the key actors focused their attention on the case, which presumably should mean that more information was present, and institutional variables thought to enhance CK were also present.

The consequences of this paper should also make three points manifest. Methodologically, IR scholars need to carefully attend to claims that intersubjectivity or CK exists. The existence of CK or intersubjectivity must be an object of investigation, not an assumption, and that investigation needs to be detailed and cross-national.

Theoretically, this paper adds additional hypotheses to the rational design literature. The functional emergence of institutions may be due not to the need for information, but to the need for the asymmetric provision of certain stocks of knowledge at the expense of others.¹¹³ For example, the

¹¹³ Cf. Keohane, *After Hegemony*.

SALT process enabled actors to understand the technical details of weapons inventories in a richer way than before, but without providing information on preferences, principles, or expected negotiating behavior. The SALT process served two functions: the providing of some information, and leading actors to believe that other information was shared when in fact it was not. This unintentional byproduct of SALT served a function in promoting international cooperation, but this is not the function suggested by the rational design literature to date.

Further, a theory of PIBS might provide another route toward the evolution of cooperation. One perennial problem in explaining how actors reach cooperative outcomes is explaining why a state will make the first concession if it does not expect the other to reciprocate. However, if one actor engages in a behavior that another wrongly interprets as a concession, such as Kissinger's offer to delink offense from defense. The second actor, believing that a concession has been made, might make a counter concession, such as the dropping of FBS as a demand. The first actor, believing that the second actor's concession was the first, responds in kind. Therefore, PIBS might jumpstart a cycle of reciprocity that will evolve toward cooperation.¹¹⁴

If true, this has a number of important consequences for the rational design literature. First, more information is not necessarily the function of institutions, and in fact, institutions might serve the function of making actors believe they are smarter than they really are. Second, this should make us suspicious of issue-spillover. An institution, like the ABM, may only be durable as long as nothing disrupts the delicate equilibrium upon which it is founded. Increasing the number of issues that are dealt with in an institution might change the beliefs of actors, disrupting cooperation.

Politically, in a new "era of negotiations," perhaps not that dissimilar from the era that confronted Nixon and Kissinger as they chose to negotiate with long-standing enemies and reluctant allies, we should learn from them. Nixon and Kissinger, because of either ego or fate, never understood the Soviet Union's position, and thus were able to cooperate with them. We, who perhaps cannot rely on chance mistakes, must learn that cooperation toward solving mutual problems is more important than mutual understanding, and the two do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. If a pressing global problem is on the agenda, understanding the future aspirations or long-term plans of others may be less important than cooperating on the problem at hand, and understanding may be in tension with cooperation. If global warming, war, and global poverty are eliminated because we do not understand one another, so be it.

¹¹⁴ See Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Robert Keohane, "Reciprocity in International Relations," *International Organization* 40, no. 1 (Winter 1986), 1–28. Also see Downs and Rocke, *Tacit Bargaining* for a similar but more limited argument.