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ports. President Anwar al-Sadat then turned toward Peking as well as Washington. Syria defied Moscow by intervening in the Lebanese Civil War to counter the pretensions of radical Palestinians. The fragile truce and disengagement in the Sinai that Kissinger had maneuvered between Egypt and Israel in 1975 was holding under strain, and United States influence was still crucial. What might prove a turning point in the Middle East was the shifting alignment resulting from the war in Lebanon. The complexity of these shifts defied simplistic analysis. So far, conservative Arabs had prevailed over radicals, and the bloody strife was a sobering experience that made explicit or tacit understandings with Israel at least conceivable. The United States, as the Arabs could see, was pressing the Israelis in that direction. The fear of an oil embargo by the Arab states may have affected the thinking of some Americans, but an evenhanded policy was understandable on its own merits. The Middle East was still the tinderbox, however.

Another enigma was the United States election. It looked as if the new Administration would change the style more than the substance of United States policy, but the world watched nervously. Kissinger may not have been praised abroad, but he would be missed. He had sought to make the United States a stabilizing rather than a crusading nation, and it seemed more reliable than it had been as the frantic power of the 1960s. Nevertheless, a Democratic Administration was expected to be more liberal on economic matters and perhaps better able to check the quarrelsome role of Congress in foreign policy, a trend popular with neither friends nor adversaries abroad.

Détente was a continuing fact of international life. Russian Communist Party General Secretary Leonid I. Brezhnev reaffirmed it at the 25th Party Congress in Moscow. So did the East European leaders who met in Bucharest, Romania. It was hailed even by the dissident European Communists, though it was denounced by Peking as a Russian fraud. Many Westerners questioned whether Soviet and Cuban intervention in Angola was compatible with détente, and they were alarmed by the rapid expansion of Soviet armed might. Others pointed out that Russia had never pretended it would suspend the ideological conflict or cease to support "wars of liberation." They saw the armed thrust as the predictable fulfillment of the Soviet determination some years back to "close the gap" and establish Russia's position as a world military and naval power equal in status to the United States. Russian arms were coming off the production line at a pace not likely to cool tensions or the arms race. Still, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and the efforts by NATO and the Warsaw Pact to achieve mutual and balanced force reductions, though stalled, were not renounced as goals by either side.

Skepticism about détente was encouraged by what were seen as the meager results of the Helsinki agreements of 1975, which had promised more freedom of movement, commerce, and ideas. Neither the Russians nor the East Germans showed much will to let people out or ideas in. The West Germans, however, made a deal by which trade

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Middle East tinderbox