

**Some Initial Problems and  
Possible Solutions in  
Measuring Détente Processes:  
Perspective of an American  
Social Scientist**

*Charles F. Hermann*

**INTRODUCTION**

In his account of the negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States over SALT II, Talbott (1979) relates an interesting example of an informal effort to measure the path of détente. Marshall Shulman, the secretary of state's advisor on Soviet affairs, developed what he called a "tabular account of related events."

It was a device he had often used as a teaching aid in his course on Soviet foreign policy at Columbia—a diagram showing the coincidence of developments in different areas. It was a handwritten, foldout, chronological chart illustrating that the Kremlin's mounting complaints over the new administration's emerging arms control policy had closely paralleled the escalation of tensions on other issues, particularly human rights. [Talbott 1979; p. 80]

It appears that Shulman has continued to maintain his chart and that it has been used as a basis for his counsel to Secretary of State Vance and other policy makers. The Shulman device is a variant on a practice that, perhaps in a less systematic manner, has been used by policy makers in many countries. They gauge the overall direction of friendship or hostility between their country and another, as well as the appropriate action in a specific situ-

ation, by evaluating the trends of past actions and reactions in various areas.

Policy makers who engage in such activities are engaging in measurement and evaluation of the relations between states—even if this is done in a crude fashion. In the case of Shulman's tabular account of related events, the procedure has been somewhat more formalized and is clearly concerned with assessing détente. The point, then, is that policy makers can and do engage in the measurement of détente across time. Can contemporary social sciences contribute to the performance of this task in a way that improves the quality of the undertaking and proves useful to policy makers in different social systems?

The *Military Balance* prepared annually by the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London offers a useful example. The document lists the known weapons systems of all countries and estimates the number of weapons in each category. Great care is devoted to documenting the sources of information used and the basis for necessary estimates. It is widely regarded in the West as an authoritative public source of such information and also has been used in articles prepared by analysts in socialist countries. Could a similar undertaking be done with respect to the activities of various governments concerning détente?

Such a task is fraught with difficulties. Unlike a list of the numbers of weapons in a national inventory, the measurement of activities pertaining to détente entails evaluation. The simple enumeration of governmental actions in various areas of foreign policy would be more equivalent to the listing of weapons systems. To be useful as a measure of détente, however, it would have to go further and judge each action in terms of its positive or negative contribution to improving détente. Even counting governmental foreign policy actions is more difficult than counting weapons. Although the number and types of weapons may be extremely sensitive information, there is presumably broad agreement as to what constitutes a tank, destroyer, or missile and how they differ from one another. The nature of many political and diplomatic actions, however, is less clear.

This chapter attempts to review some of the problems associated with more systematic social science efforts to measure activities pertaining to détente from the perspective of an individual American scholar. In examining four major problem areas—purpose, conceptualization, operationalization, and data acquisition—some possible approaches to coping with these difficulties are proposed. The discussion is necessarily introductory and provisional.

## **PURPOSE OF MEASURING DÉTENTE-RELATED ACTIVITY**

### **Problem**

The immediate problem concerns establishing the reason for engaging in such a measurement exercise and determining for whom such inquiry is intended. At least three broad groups of users of such data can be identified: (1) the relevant governmental parties engaged in détente, (2) scholars of international relations, and (3) propagandists who wish to demonstrate their own side's commitment to peace and the other side's bad faith. This chapter assumes that the first group is the most desirable consumer of such data on détente and the third group the least attractive. In other words, it is argued that the social science measurement of détente-related activity should have a mutual policy purpose. It should encourage policy makers to engage in comparisons and to ask such questions as: Is there reciprocity in the détente process? Should further steps be taken? What actions by all parties endanger détente? These are the kind of questions that one would hope policy makers in all countries could better examine with the aid of a reliable data base.

Immediately, a problem arises. How does one prevent such material from being seized for propaganda purposes? If measurement operations are conducted by scholars in the public domain, the risk of such developments hardly seems trivial. Short of performing the research privately and sharing the results only with the governments concerned with the détente process (both socialist and Western), the procedures for publicly revealing the results deserve careful attention.

### **Possible Approaches**

Some possible decision rules (which would have to be more fully developed) could be designed to minimize the exploitation of results for propaganda purposes. They might include (1) emphasis on impartiality; (2) concern for balanced presentations of the activities of all parties, including both their positive and negative actions; (3) stress on the concern with developing trends over time, and not with the indicator findings at any one time; and (4) avoidance of overall generalizations.

Thus we begin with the assumption that the purpose of such a measurement exercise is to develop an aid to policy makers simul-

taneously in various social systems. This approach rejects the form of an independent, private group that seeks to bring pressure on governments through publicity and lobbying campaigns. The latter format, used by such organizations as Amnesty International, undoubtedly is valuable for some purposes and under certain conditions. In an area involving the estimation of complex political phenomena, however, that practice would almost certainly lead to a corruption of the indicators and to rejection by all or some parties to the détente process.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DÉTENTE

### Problem

The problem of the conceptualization of détente—the basic meaning we attach to the idea and its verbal representation—has been well developed by others, including the Zurich Détente Project and particularly the paper prepared for this conference by Frei and Ruloff (1979). Such phrases as “the development of peaceful co-existence” or “the reduction in international tensions” between the member countries of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), notably the United States and the Soviet Union, are well known and widely accepted. The difficulty is that the requirements for security and peace are not the same for all countries.

The concept of peace—central to the idea of détente—illustrates the difficulty. Many have grown accustomed to defining peace as the absence of war or mass interstate violence. A growing number of scholars and public figures, however, have stressed that peace must contain some idea of social justice as well. Otherwise, the absence of war may be only an empty phrase that fails to recognize the sources of violence that make the actual existence of non-wars an illusion or, at best, a momentary condition.

In addition to their disagreement on the basic concept, different states clearly perceive different requirements for their security. Therefore, they emphasize different dimensions or attach different priorities to the agreed-on dimensions for reducing international tensions. A country that depends on a high volume of international trade for its survival as an industrialized country may be expected to place greater emphasis on the freedom of international transactions than one that does not; a country that shares a long border with a belligerent neighbor outside the CSCE region will be more

concerned that overall military manpower levels reflect this danger than will a country surrounded by friendly states; a country with a tradition of free movement of people and ideas across national boundaries will stress this requirement more than one that lacks such a tradition.

Serious social scientists interested in developing measures for détente can no more sweep these problems aside than can national policy makers charged with the defense of their homeland. Only propagandists and dreamers can assert that we agree at a general level that détente means the promotion of peaceful coexistence and that therefore the matter of definition is settled. There may indeed be enemies of détente in various countries, but we must not so classify all those who press for further conceptual clarification of détente or all those who disagree over which dimensions of détente to emphasize. The agreement on Basic Principles signed at the May 1972 summit meeting in Moscow, the Helsinki Final Act, and the statements of the Belgrade Conference all help to establish and delineate the boundaries and dimensions of détente as viewed by various national governments. They do not resolve the conceptual issue.

### **Possible Approaches**

If détente is to be a meaningful concept useful to policy communities in more than one state, several developments may be desirable: (1) the definition must distinguish détente from other possible means of promoting peace and security, (2) the views of member governments must be incorporated in the definition, and (3) the concept must be multidimensional. Let us consider each of these in somewhat more detail.

There are multiple means by which nations presently and in the past have tried to maintain their security and achieve some degree of international peace and order. At present, the major powers place considerable reliance on strategic deterrence and conventional defense forces. The creation and maintenance of military alliances offers another obvious means. General disarmament has been advanced as a sharply different approach to peace. Historically, as in ancient Rome, one system has sought to achieve peace by military and political predominance over all other contenders. World federalists still propose the idea of a federated world government, which represents the most extreme form of various plans that rely at least in part on international organizations for peace-keeping. Various kinds of agreements among major rival powers to

establish a balance of power, a consortium, or autonomous spheres of influence are still other possible means to security and peace-keeping. It is not necessary to discuss the nature or wisdom of these various alternatives. The point is that if détente is a useful strategy for developing peaceful coexistence, it must be defined and commonly used in a manner that distinguishes it from other methods such as those mentioned.

It would certainly be possible for a single scholar or group of scholars to stipulate a conceptual definition of détente. Similarly, one or several closely associated governments might do so. In the search for greater clarity and fuller consideration of the concept of détente, such efforts should probably be encouraged. However, no major effort to develop observable indicators of détente should be undertaken based on a definition that does not have the concurrence of *all governments* concerned with the détente process. That assertion is based on the assumption that the exercise is intended to assist the governmental policy communities in different countries across social systems. In short, the conceptual definition must be consistent with the usage of all relevant parties.

If the concept of détente must reflect the particular security needs of the participating parties for more peaceful coexistence, then it must be conceptualized to include multiple dimensions. These dimensions should capture the varying requirements of those countries involved for peaceful coexistence. Thus, care should be taken not to define détente exclusively in terms of reduced armaments, respect for human rights, or increased economic transactions, if doing so excludes the high-priority requirements of some participants. It should embrace all the components that the participants regard as central.

In conclusion, a tentative proposal for further discussion is that the concept of détente might incorporate such elements as (1) reciprocal or joint conciliatory actions in different areas of concern, (2) that are recognized by the parties to reduce the tensions among the countries participating in the process, (3) by establishing conditions that enhance the security of the countries separately and collectively, and (4) that promote the establishment and adherence to international rules or norms that foster peaceful interactions and nonviolent modes of conflict resolution and competition. The intent here is not to stipulate a conceptualization but rather to propose a framework for conceptual discussion that highlights certain features that may be both essential and distinctive to détente processes.

## OBSERVABLE INDICATORS OF DÉTENTE PROCESSES

### Problem

Assuming that some degree of conceptual agreement can be established, the next requirement is to develop procedures whereby actual developments in the world can be recognized in a consistent and unbiased fashion as affecting the status of détente. Initially, this appears as the classical problem in scientific inquiry known as operationalization. It is more than that. Détente is the goal condition or, more accurately, the evolving process goal, which can be affected by national actions. Hence the task is not only to operationalize détente, but also to specify categories of activities that contribute to or detract from the movement toward détente. The procedure might be characterized in terms of three questions:

1. What are the categories of government activity that contribute to or detract from détente?
2. What is the relationship between these stipulated activities and the détente process, that is, what is the reasoning behind the assumption that variation in these activities will influence détente?
3. What are the observable indicators that can be constructed to establish when an instance of one of the stipulated categories of behavior has occurred?

Each of these questions creates problems that the researcher must address. It has already been suggested that détente would appear to involve multiple dimensions or areas of activity. Therefore, one must attend to not just one, but multiple categories of activity. Furthermore, what was implied in that earlier observation about multiple dimensions is that not all of them will be valued equally by all governments. Some dimensions may be symmetrical in that they are valued highly by all participants. Reductions in the military force levels in Central Europe might be an example. Other dimensions may be asymmetrical because they are of greater importance to one nation or group of nations than they are to others. An illustration of asymmetrical dimensions might be human rights or most-favored-nation status and other economic benefits. In developing categories of activities related to détente, how does one handle the asymmetrical dimensions?

The second question addresses a frequently neglected area in the

development of social/political indicators. Suppose one proposes as a category of détente international contacts and exchanges. (One can imagine that it might be possible to use various empirical indicators such as the number of tourists; the volume of foreign mail; the numbers of business contacts overseas, student exchanges foreign periodical and magazine circulations; and so on.) The prior question must be: How does such activity relate to the process of détente? The connection cannot be left unexamined. Nor would it be wise to stop with a foreshortened reasoning process, such as that contacts and exchanges reduce feelings of hostility toward the people of the foreign country involved. Some evidence exists that suggests that interaction does not automatically generate positive affect (for example, Bauer, Pool, and Dexter 1963). If cultural exchanges lead to defections and requests for political asylum, has good will been generated? Even if affect increases, among whom are such positive feelings created and how exactly do they participate in shaping national security? Furthermore, relative to other categories for promoting peace and security, how highly valued are exchanges by the governments involved?

The point is not to challenge international exchanges and contacts as a category of activities related to détente, but rather to highlight the need for clear explication of the connection and relative importance of any type of activity to détente. It is perhaps noteworthy that the social-indicators movement, which developed considerable momentum in the social sciences in Western countries in the 1960's, has increasingly come to recognize the need for underlying theory in any area in which indicators are intended to monitor social change. See, for example, the discussion by Sheldon and Park (1975).

The third question concerns the development of observable indicators of specified categories. More can be said about this in the section on data acquisition. One problem, however, that must be adequately addressed in the design stage that proceeds any data collection concerns the corruption of indicators. Donald Campbell (1969), the psychologist who has addressed the task of applying social science to governmental policy conceived in the form of quasi-experiments, has been in the vanguard of those interested in this problem. A measure that is used for evaluative purposes such as the rewarding or withholding of governmental programs will be subjected to manipulation by those that stand to gain or be deprived. Suppose that—as a measure of détente—one performed a content analysis of foreign policy speeches for positive expressions of affect directed toward other parties in the détente



process. Across time there would be an enormous temptation for speech writers and givers to increase deliberately their number of positive references to others—regardless of their true feelings—in order to achieve a higher rating. Not all indicators are as simple to modify as the one in this example, but experience has shown that the human ability to alter or suppress such observable data points is substantial. Moreover, the smaller the number of indicators used to monitor performance in a given category, the greater the probability of corrupting indicators.

### **Possible Approaches**

It would seem that any system designed to monitor activity pertaining to détente should be capable of handling categories with differential importance to various countries. Furthermore, the system should attempt to weight or rank categories in terms of their relative importance to the given recipient country. A government might find a potential adversary's offer to forego a new medium-range ballistic missile a far more conciliatory gesture than a proposal for scientific collaboration on the mutual problem of air pollution. Given such preference orderings, analysts might find it useful to create a ranking or grouping of categories of détente-related activities. This ordering of activities should be conducted for each country, or at least for each bloc of countries. The ordering would necessarily have to be constructed from the public statements of the government in question; in fact, governments might be encouraged as part of the détente process to make their preferences clear. Most importantly, it should be possible to create different preference orderings for different countries or groups of countries. In this way there would be explicit recognition that the requirements for peaceful coexistence are sometimes asymmetrical.

No doubt some policy practitioners and their associates will look with suspicion on the call for introduction of theory into the process of assessing détente. They may view it as an unnecessary obstacle to getting on with the real business at hand. Yet the problems created by the second question—the connection between categories and the evolution of détente—point in this direction. It is necessary to have some shared understanding of how the processes of détente are enhanced or inhibited. This is an area to which both Marxist and non-Marxist social scientists can make important contributions.

How full and elaborate the theoretical development must be is a matter of discussion, as is the specific theory or theories that

might be applied. Potential contributions from Western scholarship can build from several existing efforts, both in the area of international relations and in the social sciences more generally. For example, the works of Osgood (1962) and Shull (1977) advance a theoretical system for the Graduated Reduction of Tensions that according to Etzioni (1967) were applied—perhaps unknowingly—by Premier Nikita Khrushchev and President John F. Kennedy in the summer and autumn of 1963. Another international-relations theoretical effort with potential applications is the neofunctionalist approach to political integration (for example, Haas 1964). More general theories in social science that appear to have some applicability to détente processes include exchange theory (Shaw and Costanzo 1970, esp. pp. 69-116) and the theory of collective goods (Olson 1965). Most of these cannot be used without modification to characterize possible détente processes, but they constitute important points of departure. Undoubtedly, our colleagues from socialist countries can enhance this vein of alternatives to be mined.

With respect to the problem of the corruptibility of indicators, surely part of the solution lies in using multiple indicators for any one category. Similarly, it would seem necessary to use a multiple-method strategy in each category. Thus one might combine one indicator generated through content analysis with another based on social-account data (aggregate data) with still another created through analysis of reported official interactions (event data). Dependence on a single indicator should be strictly avoided. Where feasible, it might be wise to construct a complex index based on multiple indicators.

### **WHO ACQUIRES DATA FOR THE OPERATIONAL INDICATORS?**

#### **Problem**

Anyone familiar with the procedures of scientific inquiry in the social sciences will be able to recite quickly the familiar issues involved in data acquisition. The usual problems of data reliability and of their validity as representatives of the specified categories of détente-related activities must be examined. One also must consider the problems of measurement, scale construction, and data estimation as well as source error and bias. To these must be added the special requirements encountered whenever cross-

national research is involved—namely, that the meanings of data from different cultures are equivalent. To assert that these problems of data acquisition are familiar in no way reduces their significance or the challenge they pose to measuring détente processes. This last section, however, will focus less on the problems associated with the empirical data than with the persons who collect the data. A recent episode in East-West relations offers an illustration.

General Secretary L. I. Brezhnev recently proposed a reduction in the number of Soviet tanks and associated military equipment stationed in Eastern Europe. After some inquiries to officials of the Soviet Union, American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders dismissed the offer as having no real significance. They claimed that the equipment that would be withdrawn was obsolete and that it contributed little to the present strength of the military forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). The gesture and the response are simultaneously germane to examinations of détente and illustrative of the pitfalls that beset systematic inquiry about it.

Suppose that episode was identified as a datum in an ongoing social science project to assess détente. How would it be evaluated? Initially, and perhaps superficially, the matter might be resolved by established coding rules. Is the contribution of an event to be coded from the perspective of the actor (in this case, the USSR) or the recipients (in this case, the United States and NATO)? More basically, the issue centers on the individuals who design the coding procedures and conduct the analysis. The problem is: How do we escape or correct the bias embedded in each of us as an individual within a given social and political system?

### **Possible Approaches**

One can imagine several alternative organizational arrangements for research on measuring détente processes. Individual scholars or groups of scholars from a given country might each pursue the task separately. Indeed, this is the way almost all social science research on East-West issues has been performed to date. The outcome seems fairly predictable. When the results of these hypothetical analysts from different countries are compared, striking differences should be expected. At the stage of completed research, it might prove extremely difficult and costly to uncover and reconstruct the underlying assumptions and procedures on numerous discrete events or aggregate-data manipulations or thematic coding rules that led to systematic discrepancies. It would be difficult for

individual investigators whose work was so examined not to feel that their personal integrity as scientists was being challenged. The likelihood of bridging the differences at that point and thereby contributing an agreed-on product to the policy process in various countries would seem remote.

At the other extreme, one could imagine some form of international research team with equal representation from various countries. Issues would be thrashed out and, presumably, resolved as they arose. Such an organizational arrangement would appear to require the existence of a considerably advanced stage of détente before it could even begin! In addition to practical issues such as finances, there would be dangers of prolonged deadlocks, compromises that settled differences at the expense of the intellectual coherence of the research, and the risk that individual researchers might be charged by their own national colleagues as having lost touch with their own political heritage. Again, the prospects of achieving an acceptable, usable product seem slim.

A third option might be to have the détente research done by social scientists from countries other than those participating in the CSCE. These disinterested investigators might be appointed and advised to some extent by scientists from the various social systems represented in the CSCE, using agreed-on rules of procedure. This alternative might have a certain value as an experiment and learning experience, but it would still appear to run a considerable risk of generating assessments of détente processes that would be acceptable to none of the participating parties.

There is at least a fourth option that, although possibly slow and cumbersome, is perhaps more within our present reach. Essentially, this alternative would entail several separate national projects working simultaneously to assess détente processes. Each project would proceed through the same phase of research at the same time—conceptualization, design, first data-collection phase, and so on. At each stage representatives of the separate projects would meet and critique the procedures and plans advanced by all the other projects. Each project group would then be free to revise or retain its original plans, but would be expected to identify and describe points of difference. The key would be not the achievement of agreement, but the clear specification of the points and reasons for disagreement. The consultative-review process would be repeated at each stage of the research.

As in the first proposed organizational arrangement, the odds of the separate projects reaching different conclusions would appear substantial. But contrast to the earlier proposal, in this

O  
M  
h  
t  
r  
e  
v  
e  
l  
l  
e  
t

option critical points of disagreement could be readily identified. Moreover, it would be possible to examine, through further research, how differences could be reduced by substituting certain assumptions, coding rules, data bases, and so on from one or more other national research groups. Respective policy communities might be able to see where different perspectives on the détente processes were marginal and where they led to quite different expectations and results.

The latter option also has difficulties. Other solutions to the problem may be possible, but the issue must not be skirted. The systematic biases or cultural and political perspectives of the researchers themselves—and not just the procedures to be used—must be addressed in any effort to measure and assess the impact of various national activities on the processes of détente.